

From Effeminacy to Revolutionary: A Historical Analysis of the Rise of the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial Bengal

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Abstract: *In India, the origins of the revolutionary movement had a long-term historical process. In the early decade of the twentieth century, the revolutionary movement was mainly confined to Bengal, Maharashtra, and Punjab. This article focuses on the origins of the revolutionary movement in colonial Bengal. In Bengal, the revolutionary movement had a historical root. It was the result of the physical culture movement in Bengal. This paper is trying to argue that the concept of the revolutionary movement was not exported from Maharashtra. However, historians like Peter Heehs, Partha Chatterjee, and Bimanbehari Majumdar have argued that the idea of the Bengali revolutionary movement came from Maharashtra. This article discusses that the Bengali revolutionary movement started against the charge of effeminacy and cowardice of Bengali people. Some Bengali intellectuals, like Rajnarayan Bose, Nabagopal Mitra, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, later Sarala Ghosal, Pramatha Nath Mitra, Aurobindo Ghosh, Sister Nivedita, and Jatindranath Banerjee, played a crucial role in forming a revolutionary organisation in Bengal.*

Keywords: *Revolutionary, Effeminacy, Physical, Culture, Bengal, Movement*

Introduction

The Bengali revolutionary movement is possibly the most significant anti-colonial movement of the 20th century. It had a long-term historical process, which started in the last quarter of the 19th century. During this time, some eminent persons like Rajnarayan Bose, Nabagopal Mitra, and Jatindranath Tagore played a vital role in establishing a revolutionary tradition in Bengal. Later Sarala Devi, Aurobindo Ghosh, Jatindranath Banerjee, Barindra Ghosh, Bhupendranath Dutta, Bipin Chandra Pal, Pramathanath Mitra, Pulin Behari Das, Surendranath Banerjee and Sister Nivedita (disciple of Swami Vivekananda) fulfilled their ancestor's dreams and played a lead role in the setup a new cult or mood of resistance. At first Bengali revolutionary movement started through physical culture. Leaders established gymnasium and physical culture clubs to build muscular physique among Bengalis. The study proves that the idea of a secret society or revolutionary samiti was not imported from Maharashtra. It was historically rooted in the Bengali cultural milieu. Peter Heehs has argued that the idea of Bengali revolutionary tradition was exported from Maharashtra. He also opined that the first revolutionary organisation was established in Maharashtra, and then it came to Bengal (Heehs, 1993, p. 476). Partha Chatterjee argues:

The history of terrorism in British India usually begins with the killing in Poona in 1897 of the British officials W. C. Rand and C.

E. Ayerst by the Maharashtrian brothers Damodar and Balkrishna Chapekar (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 1-2).

Partha Chatterjee also told before the murder of Rand, the plague commissioner and Lt. Ayerst, Maharashtra promoted the formation of clubs of young men, where they practiced gymnastics, wrestling and other kinds of physical exercises. Partha Chatterjee argued that the spotlight shifted to the east of the country (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 2). According to Bimanbehari Majumdar, 'Sri Aurobindo brought the seed of secret society from Maharashtra to Bengal' (Majumdar, 1966, p. 99). However, the article tries to show that the Bengali revolutionary movement was the result of Bengali's rising consciousness about India's socio-political conditions. It was not conceived in Maharashtra. Before Maharashtra, Bengalis were familiar with Western education and philosophies, which later produced intellectual Bengalis. An eminent revolutionary, Arun Chandra Guha, said that the Bengali revolutionary movement was the product of a cultural revolution in Bengal (Guha, 1971, p. 61).

Protest against the Charge of Effeminacy

The concept of effeminacy was embodied during the second half of the nineteenth century. Herbert Risley, a British ethnologist, and physical anthropologist, gave theories behind Bengali's effeminacy. Risley's scientific study of noses found that Bengalis were mainly from a Mongolo-Dravidian racial stock. His further scientific observations established that Bengalis, more than other Indians, were slenderly built, small-boned, and of low and stunted stature (Sinha, 1995, p. 20). Though Risley's primary explanations of Bengali effeminacy was 'the relaxing climate,' the 'enfeebling diet,' and the premature maternity of women that had resulted in the birth of a weak and stunted race in Bengal. Mrinalini Sinha said British officials offered various explanations behind the Bengali effeminacy: the decline of native physical pursuit under the material securing provided by the British rule; the elites' scorn for indigenous pastimes and obsession with everything English; the excessive concentration on studies leading to 'brain fever' and 'feeble development of muscles'; the Bengali diet of rice; the hot and enervating climate; early parenthood, and so on (Sinha, 1995, p. 21). She argues that in the second half of the nineteenth century, middle-class Bengalis made several efforts to combat the problem of the emasculation of the Bengali male. She also said that during this time, Bengalis revived the culture of *akharas* or gymnasiums to cultivate and instil a sense of pride in the physical prowess of Bengalis (Sinha, 1995, p. 21).

Eminent leaders like Rajnarayan Bose and Nabagopal Mitra promoted a spirit of nationalism and strongly protested against the charge of effeminacy and cowardice of Bengali men. They established the first secret society, *Sanjibani Sabha* in Bengal, through an initiative of Jatindranath Tagore, brother of Rabindranath Tagore. Rajnarayan Bose and Nabagopal Mitra were conscious of the importance of physical exercise and tried to promote physical activity through a National gymnasium. With the formation of the gymnasium, they aimed to build up the good

physique of the national worker through rigorous physical exercise. Through the help of the Tagore family, Nabagopal Mitra also organised *Jatiya Mela* in 1867, known as *Hindu Mela*, which played a significant role in spreading *Swadeshi*. He also insisted on using the Bengali language for educational and propaganda purposes. Rabindranath Tagore, a member of this Sabha, wrote:

Joti Dada established a secret society and its assembly was organized in an old house; society program was associated with a book of Rig-Veda, dead man skull and an open sword; Rajnarayan Bose was Brahmin; they had taken the pledge for the salvation of the country (*Rabindra Rachanaboli*, vol.1, 1987, p. 15)¹.

Bipin Chandra Pal mentions society's activities in his autobiography, '*Memoirs of My Life and Times*.' He wrote:

I knew of one such society, though I was not myself a member of it, whose initiatory rites were almost Masonic in some aspect. Every member of this society had to sign the pledge of membership with his own blood drawn at the point of a sword from his breast. They were dreamers of wild dreams, but harmless dreamers so far, whose thought and immigration alone were of a revolutionary character, but who never seriously meant to rise in physical revolt against the British authority in the country, or who hoped to secure the emancipation of their people by a campaign of political associations (Pal, 1932, p. 248).

Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, the author of *Rabindra Jiboni*, stated that the *Sanjiboni Sabha* is the same organisation that Bipin Chandra Pal mentioned in his memoirs (Mukhopadhyay, 1936, p. 59). However, Rajnarayan Bose and Nabagopal Mitra suffered from several shortcomings like their movement in mainly sentimental character, they have little organising ability, they appealed only to Hindu people and they excluded the Muslims of Bengal (Majumdar, 1966, p 7).

However, the organised revolutionary movement started in Bengal during the first half of the twentieth century and grew through different stages. Initially, they concentrated on various physical exercises like drills, gymnastics, riding, boxing, and *lathi-play*. Later, they gradually took to militant activities with firearms and bombs, being influenced by Italy, Russia and Ireland. There was a general feeling among Indians that Bengalis were inoffensive, pacifists and incapable of physical exertion; thus, they were branded as cowards and effeminate. The youth of Bengal were determined to remove this stigma through acts of daring activities and heroic sacrifices. Bhupendranath Dutta wrote in his autobiography that the youths of Bengal joined the revolutionary movement to remove the blame that "*Kapurush Bangali kichu korte pare na*" (Coward Bengalis can do nothing) (Dutta, 1983, p.

¹ Author of this article has translated this passage from *Rabindra Rachanaboli*, vol. 1, p. 15.

9). Another eminent revolutionary, Trailokyanath Chakraborty, agrees with Dutta's view and wrote:

Banglar biplobi ra 'viru Bangali' ei opobad bivido karma anushtan dara dur koriachilo, artachari setango karmachari o police hotta korla abong shastra sangram korla proman korilo, bangali viru noi, banagali lorai korite jane, pran dite jane, tahara prithibir j kono swadhin jatir bir sainikder samokkoho (Chakraborty, 2015, p. 46).

Revolutionary Jibontara Halder wrote in his book that in the early decade of the twentieth century, some noted persons like Sarala Devi Ghosal, Bipin Behari Ganguly, and Pabitra Sarkar established gymnasiums or *akharas* at Calcutta as well as different places in Bengal to provide physical training to the youth (Halder, 2009, p. 3). Later, these physical training centres came under the influence of revolutionaries and transformed into a political organisation whose activities were partly secret or open (Ray, 1909, p. 10).

The physical cultural movement took a significant chapter under the leadership of Sarala Devi Ghosal. She was the daughter of Janakinath Ghosal and Swarna Kumari Devi and granddaughter of *Brahomo* leader Devendranath Tagore. Sarala Devi played a crucial role in removing the stigma of effeminacy. In order to remove this stigma Sarala Devi opened an academy at Ballygunge in Calcutta, where youths practiced *lathi*, swordplay, drill and various physical exercises under a professional instructor, named Murtaza (Chadhurani, 1950, p. 126). To imbue nationalism among the Bengalis she introduced a festival in honor of the memory of Pratapaditya and his son Udayaditya of Jessore.² Sarala Devi also revised an old festival called *Veerastami*, in which young men of Bengal had to perform some arduous physical feats (Chadhurani, 1950, p. 140). Bimanbehari Majumdar argued:

She was the bridge between the thought currents on militant nationalism between Maharashtra and Bengal on the one hand and between Bengal and Punjab on the other (Majumdar, 1966, p. 10).

An intelligence officer J.C. Ker wrote in his report:

The object of Sarala Ghosal was apparently political, as she was known to be a supporter of the nationalist movement; her declared intention was to remove the historical reproach, perpetuated by Macaulay that the Bengalis were a race of cowards, and she was avowedly influenced by the success of the Japanese in the war with Russia (Ker, 1973, p. 7).

He mentioned that by the influence of Sarala Devi, in Calcutta, and throughout the province were established similar *akharas* (gymnasia), where wrestling and *lathi-*

² Home Confidential, 7th August 1911, *Note on the Growth of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal*, File nos. 388/1911, West Bengal State Archive, Kolkata, p. 13.

play were taught (Ker, 1973, p. 7). Mrinalini Sinha argues Sarala Devi was a prominent woman among nineteenth-century Bengali nationalist leaders. She played an essential role in the 1890s in arousing Bengali youth to pursue a militant and nationalistic culture (Sinha, 1995, p. 21). Revolutionary Jibontara Halder wrote in his autobiography that some Bengalis also established circus troops against the charge of effeminacy and cowardice (Halder, 1989, p. 25). During that time, some prominent circus parties were Hippodrome Circus by Krishna Basak, *Baghmara* Circus by Shamakanta, etc. (Halder, 1989, p. 25). These entire circuses became famous around the country and the world. By the turn of the nineteenth century the physical culture movement in Bengal had become a base for terrorist organisations against the British (Sinha, 1995, p. 21). Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta (brother of Swami Vivekananda) mentions an incident in his autobiography (*Bharater Dwitiya Swadhinata Sangram*) that, in 1903 or 1904, he heard from Aurobindo Ghosh that some *sadhus* on the bank of Narmada prophesied that in 1906 a great revolutionary movement would be organised. Maharashtra would be its centre, but the cowardly Bengalis are keeping aloof from it. Bengali youths felt enraged at this and decided to organise a revolutionary movement (Dutta, 1983, pp. 9-10).

Role of Bengali Intellectuals

Some of the great intellectual persons of Bengal, such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda, Surendranath Banerjee, and Aurobindo Ghosh, had a tremendous influence on the rise of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. In the intellectual field of Bengal, the contribution of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was considerable both to constructive nationalism and rationalism. He wrote the great novel *Ananda Math* and was the first man in Bengal who wrote a series of novels to stoke nationalism in Bengal. In the historical novel *Ananda Math*, published in 1882, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee narrates some events of the *Sannyasi* rebellion. He portrayed a band of patriots who described themselves as *santans* (children) of the motherland. At the time of their initiation, they had taken the vow to renounce their hearth and home and devote themselves to the service of the motherland. An intelligence officer J.C. Ker reported:

Many ideas were afterwards borrowed from this novel by the leaders of the Bengali revolutionary societies and the special vow taken by the members of the Anushilan Samiti of Dacca was practically the same as that imposed upon the children (Ker, 1973, p. 30).

He also wrote in his report that:

...the greetings' *Bande Mataram*' became war-cry of the extremist party in Bengal; it was raised at political meetings to welcome political leaders and to express approval of particularly exciting passages in their speeches and also occasionally as a shout of defence of Europeans in the streets (Ker, 1973, p. 30).

There were differences between the *santans* of *Ananda Math* and the revolutionaries of Bengal. The *santans* liberated their motherland from Muslim rule, and the revolutionaries tried to liberate it from British rule. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee targeted the British rulers of India under a thin veil. Therefore, he gave the revolutionaries the mantra of '*Bande Mataram*'. Arun Chandra Guha, a member of Anushilan Samiti, wrote in his autobiography:

His essays on Auguste Comte, on Hinduism, on Sri Krishna, on the Gita, all contributed to the growth of rationalism and the cult of *nishkama karma* of the Gita, as explained and popularised by him, supplied the moral background to the Bengal revolutionaries and immensely helped to the growth of revolutionary ideas (Guha, 1971, p. 63).

Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches had numerous impacts on Bengali revolutionaries. Vivekananda's brother Bhupendranath Dutta played a leading role in the rising of the revolutionary movement in Bengal, and his autobiography reflects the influence of Swami Vivekananda's writings on the revolutionaries. Bhupendranath Dutta wrote:

'It is a truism to say that there is a correlation between Swamiji's appeals to his young countrymen and the intensity of revolutionary urge in the mind of the young men of later generation. Since the foundation of the revolutionary party in Bengal, in which Swamiji's British disciple Sister Nivedita took at first an active part and was a member of the Executive committee, his works, along with the writings and life of Mazzini as well as the life of Garibaldi, in *Bengalee*, were the mainspring of inspiration to the youthful mind of India. In every gymnasium, i.e., exercise-club of the revolutionary party of Bengal, his work entitled '*From Colombo to Almor*' was read.' (Cited in., Majumdar, 1966, p. 62)

Bimanbehari Majumder mentions that wherever the police searched, they invariably got a few works of Swami Vivekananda (Majumdar, 1966, p. 63). Sedition Committee report states that:

For their own initiates the conspirators devised a remarkable series of text-books. The Bhagavad Gita, the writings of Vivekananda, the lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi were part of the course.³

Aurobindo Ghosh and his writings played a significant role in forming a revolutionary movement in Bengal. Dalia Ray said Aurobindo Ghosh played a double role in his political career. On the one hand, he was an explicit leader of the Nationalist Party. On the other way, he was the explicit leader who always inspired

³ *Sedition Committee Report*. (1918). Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta, p. 17.

the revolutionaries whose aims were to ruin the imperial rule (Ray, 1987, p. 40). But an eminent revolutionary, Jadugopal Mukherjee, said in his autobiography that Aurobindo does not believe in violent activities. According to him:

...revolution must be a prolonged effort to regenerate and revitalise the student community or youths and to evoke the sympathy and support of the labourers, farmers and soldiers so that they would actively participate in the movement and thereby make it a success (Mukhopadhyay, 1960, p. 26).

Before liberating the country from the hands of the imperialist government, Aurobindo wanted the country's economic development. He wrote:

We must not talk of faith and hope, or revel in Utopian visions but run to the nearest scene of work, be one of the drudging millions, try to improve their lot and set ourselves to the task of mitigating human sufferings. The old villages are so many pictures of desolation and distress, they are the hot-beds of malaria, the sepulchres of our greatness; so go to them and try to reinstate our tutelary angel in his ancient seat. Or we must erect mills, start small industries, educate the masses, do philanthropic work and not talk of a free or united India until this is done (Ghosh, 2002, p. 879).

Bimanbehari Majumder said Aurobindo openly condemned the violent activities of revolutionaries. On 17th July 1909, Aurobindo delivered a speech where he said:

If we are persecuted, if the plough of repression is passed over us, we shall meet it not by violence, but by suffering, by passive resistance, by lawful means. We have not said to our young men, 'when you are repressed, retaliate.' We have said "suffer" (Majumdar, 1966, p. 114).

Aurobindo emphasized on '*Swaraj*'. '*Swaraj*' was the common goal of the revolutionaries. He said, 'The kingdom of *Swaraj* is within you' (Ghosh, 1997, p. 16). For achieving *Swaraj*, Aurobindo had taken the method of self-help and passive resistance. According to Aurobindo:

The policy of passive resistance was evolved partly as the necessary complement of self-help, partly as a means of putting pressure on the Government. The essence of this policy is the refusal of co-operation so long as we are not admitted to a substantial share and an effective control in legislation, finance and administration (Ghosh, 1997, p. 154).

In an article, Aurobindo mentioned the policy of boycotting to achieve *swaraj*. According to him boycott is 'an ideal, like freedom; it means independence in

industry and commerce, as freedom means independence in administration, legislation and finance' (Ghosh, 1997, p. 396). Aurobindo also said:

...the necessity of boycott to help our own nascent energies in the field of self-help. Boycott of foreign goods is a necessary condition for the encouragement of *Swadeshi* industries, the boycott of Government schools is a necessary condition for the growth of national education, the boycott of British courts is a necessary condition for the spread of arbitration (Ghosh, 1997, p. 154).

But Aurobindo said that the internal conflict of the Congress creates obstacles against his policy (Ghosh, 1997, p. 155). So, he secretly provided support to organise a revolutionary movement in Bengal. Through the statement of Aurobindo, the article states that the political philosophy of Aurobindo greatly impacted young Bengali's minds to form a revolutionary movement in Bengal.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the *Brahmo* leaders of Bengal played a crucial role in the rise of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. Historian Bimanbehari Majumdar said:

The *Brahmo Samaj* and the *Arya Samaj* do not believe in image worship, but some of the great leaders of militant nationalism came from the rank of these two reformist movements (Majumdar, 1966, p. 67).

Aurobindo Ghosh and Barindra Ghosh's father and maternal grandfather were *Brahmo*. Pramatha Nath Mitra and Satish Chandra Basu were the disciples of Bijoy Krishna Gowsami, who was a *Brahmo* (Majumdar, 1966, p. 67). The *Brahmo* leaders like Rajnarayan Bose and Nabagopal Mitra played a crucial role in forming a secret society. Bhupendranath Dutta, an eminent revolutionary, said that the *Brahmo* movement of Bengal had a significant impact on revolutionary society (Dutta, 1983, p. 7). Arun Chandra Guha, another prominent revolutionary, argued that *Brahmo Samaj* was the pioneer of the revolutionary movement in Bengal, as it had a direct and indirect connection with the revolutionary movement in Bengal in its early days (Guha, 1971, p. 64). Arun Chandra Guha identified the *Brahmo* leader Rajnarayan Bose 'the father of the revolutionary movement in Bengal' because he organised two societies with revolutionary ideas (Guha, 1971, p. 66). Jnanendra Nath Bose and Satyen Bose, the nephew of Rajnarayan Bose, took a leading role in forming a revolutionary organisation in Midnapore (Guha, 1971, p. 66). Guha also mentioned, Shib Narayan Sastri, a devout *Brahmo* and a disciple of Ramtanu Lahiri, who came under the influence of revolutionary ideas. Guha also noted that in 1876, a group of young men, including Bipin Chandra Pal, inspired by Shib Narayan Shastri, took a vow known as 'Dedication to the cult of fire' (Guha, 1971, p. 66).

Except that, the writings of Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, the Hindu sacred text such as the *Gita*, the *Chandi*, the *Upanishad*, *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat*, book on

Ramakrishna, Aswini Kumar Datta's *Bhakti yoga* influence the youths of Bengal. All the writings inspired and guided the revolutionaries of Bengal to organise their struggle against the imperial rule.

The Immediate Context of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal

A series of contemporary incidents moulded the revolutionaries' intellectual minds. Government exploitation since the last decade of the nineteenth century played a crucial role in forming logical thinking among the revolutionaries of Bengal. Acute economic discontents affect the minds of the middle and lower middle classes in Bengal. There was common talk among the revolutionaries that India's textile, salt, sugar and other industries were ruined because of the British industrial development.⁴ During this time, unemployment, famine, disease, and the growing taxation burden became vital issues. Bengalis had realised their growing impoverishment. Western education, contemporary published literature, pamphlets, and presses all contributed to formulating the intellectual mind, which helped to arouse national consciousness. They realised that the root causes of impoverishment were the colonial rule. But they had no faith in the path of constitutional agitation, which was followed by the moderate leaders of the Congress's. Thus, their thinking made them feel that the only remedy for all kinds of impoverishment lay in ousting colonial rule from India. Some young radical leaders of Bengal secretly started organising themselves under Anushilan Samiti's cover.

Meanwhile, the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave a platform to radical leaders of India. The leaders fully utilised the opportunity to constitute a mass movement against the British Government. An intelligence officer James Campbell Ker wrote, '*Swadeshi* movement and the revolutionary movement of Bengal are interconnected. The Bengali revolutionary movement reached its peak during the *Swadeshi* movement' (Ker, 1973, p. 5). An eminent revolutionary, Sri Pratul Chandra Ganguly, wrote in his autobiography:

When *Swadeshi* agitators were started boycott and picketing then government gave a circular to forbid the students to join the movement. During that time some meritorious students like Binoy Sarkar, Radha Kumodh Mukhopadhyay quit university, and Aurobindo also came from Baroda to quit his job and concentrate on serving the country. All the incidents influenced the students to join the revolutionary *samiti* (Ganguly, 1956, p. 46).

During the *Swadeshi* movement, revolutionaries seized the opportunity and made their presence at the Indian National Congress annual conference in December 1906. They convened the first revolutionary conference of Bengal in the house of Subodh Chandra Mallick, in which Pramathanath Mitra presided (Bhattacharya,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

1979, p. 42). During the conference, Pramatha Nath Mitra asked the delegates to organise their societies with strict military discipline and accept Jugantar as their own paper. In this conference, Aurobindo Ghosh suggested to the delegates the possibility of looting the government treasury to finance revolutionary activities (Bhattacharya, 1979, p. 42). Aurobindo wanted to exploit the opportunity presented by the *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal, and he felt that partition was a great blessing in disguise, for it awakened many Bengalis to political life who had previously been ignorant or uninterested (Gordon, 1979, p. 114). An eminent revolutionary Hemchandra Kanungo, wrote in his autobiography that;

Revolutionaries took the opportunity of *Swadeshi* movement. They organised meetings against the partition of Bengal, where they tried to propagate revolutionary activities and they also tried to get the masses to support against British exploitation. During this movement Calcutta based revolutionary samitis were revived (Kanungo, 1928, p.75).

During that time, Indian National Congress played a significant role in developing aggressive intellectual minds among young Bengalis. Some Congress men like W.C. Bonnerjee, Dadabhai Naoraji, and Badruddin Tayabji believed in constitutional politics. But some radical Bengali youths did not want to follow their way. In 1897, at the Amravati session of the congress, Aswini Kumar Dutta, from Bengal, impatient with how Congress was functioning, blurted out publicly and identified the annual Congress conference was 'a three days *tamasha*' (Bhattacharya, 1979, p. 36). The failure of the prayer and petition policy of Congress inspired to formulation revolutionary movement in Bengal (Dutta, 1983, p. 11).

The Bengal Provincial Conference of April 1906 is regarded as a turning point in radical and revolutionary politics in Bengal. Surendranath Banerjee was the president of this conference. The Conference witnessed the police repression of all participants but also exposed the helplessness of moderate politics (Bhattacharya, 1979, p. 39). Surendranath Banerjee's leadership proved inadequate role to hold the session in the face of unprovoked police atrocity. This incident turns out to be an eye-opener to nationalist leaders. Barin Ghosh and his associates conquer this opportunity for revolutionary activities. Saral Kumar Chatterjee argued that for all practical purposes, the revolutionary action in Bengal started after the provincial conference of 1906 (Bhattacharya, 1979, p. 40). Revolutionaries had the broader historical concept of revolution. The intellectual leaders of the revolutionary movement such as Aurobindo Ghose, Bhupendra Nath Dutta, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, Debabarat Bose and Barin Ghose, came together and made a considerable discussion on the history of revolutionary struggles in Europe, America, and Asia (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 11). They discussed their strategies and tactics of modern warfare, including guerrilla war (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 11). Valentine Chirol wrote:

...of all Indians been the most slavish imitators of the west, as represented, at any rate, by the Irish Fenian and the Russian anarchist" (Chisolm, 1910, p. 24).

But the study tries to argue that Bengali revolutionaries would not blindly imitate the Western concept of the revolutionary movement. Bengali revolutionaries tried mixing indigenous elements with Western revolutionary conceptions in the early phase.

In the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Japan defeated Russia, which had enormously influenced the Bengali revolutionaries. An eminent revolutionary, Arun Chandra Guha, wrote in his autobiography that the Russo-Japanese War greatly inspired them. He wrote:

We came out of our classes; the school closed for the day. Aswini Kumar Dutta and at least one of our teachers addressed us. It was a day of Jubilation – for a victory of Asia over Europe. The defeat and surrender of the Baltic fleet of Russia which was despatched to the Far East was the climax of the episode. And we enjoyed it intensely (Guha, 1971, p. 32).

The Sedition Committee report showed that the Russo-Japanese War significantly impacted the Bengali revolutionaries' minds. Report mentioned:

Neither the religious teaching of Vivekananda nor the exhortations of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* would have afforded so moving a text to preach from had not the whole world, been electrified and amazed by the victories of Japan over Russia at a time when within this country circumstances occasioned by certain Government measures specially favoured the development of Barindra's plan.⁵

The research stated that all the incidents greatly impacted the youth of Bengal and helped them form a revolutionary movement against the oppressive colonial government.

Establishment of Samitis

Hitherto this article discussed the historical process of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. In this section, the study tries to show how the Anushilan Samiti, the first revolutionary organisation in Bengal, and other samiti like Atmonnati Samiti, Chhatra Bhandar, etc., were established.

At the initial stage, under the initiative of Satish Chandra Basu, a student of the General Assembly's Institution (now Scottish Church College) at Calcutta, the Anushilan Samiti was established. He and his friends were closely associated with Vivekananda's order. They established a club at Madan Mitra Lane in Calcutta

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

(Dutta, 1983, p. 180). Youths of the college practiced *lathi* play, drill and physical exercises. Satish Chandra wanted this club to be given a name. So he requests Narendra Chandra Bhattacharya, the headmaster of the new Indian Institute, Calcutta. Narendra Chandra Bhattacharya was inspired by Bankim Chandra's idea of *Anusilan* and christened the club Bharat Anushilan Samiti (Dutta, 1983, p. 180). However, Satish Chandra also looks for someone who can guide and lead them. He approached Sashi Bhusan Chaudhuri of Tegharia for this purpose (Dutta, 1983, p. 180). Sashi Bhusan takes Satish and his friends away to Asutosh Chaudhuri, a young barrister of Tegharia. But Asutosh Chaudhuri sent them with a letter to Pramatha Nath Mitra. Pramatha Nath Mitra, popularly known as P. Mitra, was a barrister-at-law practicing in the High Court of Calcutta. While studying in England, Pramatha Nath Mitra came under the influence of the history of Italian, Russian, and Irish secret societies and their revolutionary movements. Through this influence, he came to believe that:

India's freedom was to build up slowly and steadily a band of young men, healthy in body and mind, fearless, dedicated and disciplined as soldiers and bound by oath, but he was against any premature action or uprising (Bhattacharya, 1979, pp. 19-20).

At Satish Chandra's and his friends' request, P. Mitra agreed to be their samiti's leader and become the samiti's commander-in-chief (Dutta, 1983, p. 181). However, P. Mitra shortened the name of the samiti from Bharat Anushilan Samiti to Anushilan Samiti.

Aurobindo Ghosh was then living at Baroda, posted there as the vice principal of Gaekwad's college and an important official in the Gaekwad's administration but spent most of his time dreaming about the country's freedom and the means of achieving it (Bhattacharya, 1979, p. 22). At the point of time Jatindranath Banerjee, the personal bodyguard of the *Gaekwad*, came in touch with Aurobindo and both of them frequently discussed various political issues of the country. In 1902, Sister Nivedita went to Baroda on an invitation from *Gaekwad*. There she met with Aurobindo and gave up-to-date information regarding the activities of the secret clubs and societies in Bengal and she requested him to go to Bengal to bring these scattered and separate groups into one well-knit organisation. According to Jatindranath Banerjee and Barindra Ghosh, Sister Nivedita has donated some two hundred books from her collection of revolutionary literature to the Anushilan Samiti's Library (Majumdar, 1966, p. 101). These books helped the revolutionaries know Mazzini's life story and the methods of guerrilla warfare. Jatindranath Banerjee resigned from his job and came to Bengal to organise a revolutionary movement. He met with Sarala Devi and Pramatha Nath Mitra and joined P. Mitra's club at Madan Mitra Lane, Calcutta. Later, Under Jatindra Nath's guidance, a new branch of the Anushilan Samiti opened at Upper Circular Road, Calcutta (Dutta, 1983, p. 181). The office of the samiti was transferred to Upper Circular Road. Towards the end of 1905, Pramatha Nath Mitra and Bipin Chandra Pal went to

Dacca and founded a branch of the Anushilan Samiti. Pulin Behari Das, a National school teacher, was this branch's commander-in-chief.

Another revolutionary samiti, Atmonnati Samiti, was established in 1897 in Calcutta by Raghunath Bandhopadhyay, and his collaborators were Harish Chandra Sikdar, Nibaran Chandra Bhattacharya, and Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay. Later, Indranath Nandi and Bipinbehari Ganguly joined Atmonnati Samiti (Goutam, 2002, p. 597). The early years of Atmonnati Samiti were mainly spent organising physical training and a centre for discussion and debates. However, things took a revolutionary turn with the onset of Bipinbehari Ganguly (Guha, 1971, p. 88). After 1902, the samiti gradually merged with Aurobindo's revolutionary group (Goutam, 2002, p. 597). In August 1905, in a house on College Street, Calcutta, Pabitra Sarkar established an organization named Chhatra Bhandar. The organization played a significant role in the functioning of Jugantar as a secret revolutionary organization, and it was a meeting place for young revolutionaries (Guha, 1971, p. 88). Another important society was Dawn Society, established in 1902 by Satish Chandra Mukherjee. Its principal object was to impart better education to young men so that they could be soldiers of freedom. Though revolutionary, Arun Chandra Guha wrote:

The Dawn Society was not a secret society or an avowedly revolutionary organization. But it was a certainly an organization which nurtured the revolutionary spirit and the urge for independence (Guha, 1971, p. 89).

The study argues that there was an inter-communication between all these organizations. Revolutionaries used to visit all these organizations frequently. The principal object of all these organizations was to uproot British rule. Samitis tried to awaken the masses about British exploitation. The youths of Bengal thought that the British government was only responsible for all kinds of miseries. So they decided that liberation from the imperial rule was the only way to escape all miseries. Thus, with the establishment of various samiti, the revolutionary movement began in Bengal.

Conclusion

The article argues that there was a direct link between the evolution of physical culture and the dawn of a revolutionary tradition in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Bengal. The Bengali revolutionary movement was a product of a distinctive cultural milieu indigenous to Bengal. It would be erroneous to ascribe the roots of the Bengali revolutionary movement to a marked influence of the Maharashtrian revolutionary tradition.

There were also distinct differences between the two revolutionary trends. Religiosity was a distinctive feature of the Maharashtrian revolutionary trend, while it was less marked in the cause of the Bengali revolutionary tradition. Besides, one

will not emphasize the vague rumours that Aurobindo was initiated into revolutionary thought by a Maharashtrian called Thakur Saheb. The British intelligence reports have failed to establish the true identity of Thakur Saheb. The Bengali revolutionary movement resulted from Bengali's rising consciousness of British exploitation.

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