



## Response of the People of Burdwan District in the Swadeshi Movement and the Role of the Periodical 'The Mussalman': A Study

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### Abstract

*The 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengal experienced the changes in the socio-economic and political conditions of the period. The British authority was established after the fall of Independent Nawabate of Bengal. The political history of Burdwan district went through a process of change as that of the other districts of Bengal. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Swadeshi Movement was an important part of the Indian National Movement. It played a significant role in the Independence of India. During the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon of India, The Swadeshi Movement was started to oppose the 'Partition of Bengal' and continued up to 1911 A.D. As far as Burdwan district is concerned, it was one of the developed districts of Bengal in terms of socio-economic and cultural conditions. With the establishment of municipality in Burdwan, the anti-British agitation started gaining impetus in Burdwan town. Burdwan district played an important role in the Swadeshi movement. The prominent architects of Swadeshi movement in Burdwan district were- Abul Kashem, Basudev Bhattacharya, Promothonath Mukherjee, Gunindranath Mukherjee, Jitendranath Mitra, Indranath Banerjee, Baikunthanath Sen, Manabendranath Mukherjee. During the period of Swadeshi movement of Bengal, the important periodical 'The Mussalman' played a big role to maintain harmony between Hindus and Muslims and tried to bring the masses into the main stream of the Indian politics. It inspired the people and motivated to buy indigenous product.*

**Keywords:** Bengal, British, Burdwan, Movement, Partition, Periodical, Swadeshi

Independence of India was not the product of the efforts made by a single individual, multiple individuals or by different group of people. It was an organised mass struggle of different groups who fought for a common cause. During colonial period, the political activities of India were operated from Calcutta (in Bengal). Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said that, 'Bengal was the main centre in the wake of political awakening in India'.<sup>1</sup> In such a situation, Viceroy of India Lord Curzon (1899-1905 A.D) planned the 'Partition of Bengal'. Although, the draft of the 'Partition of Bengal' was made by the Indian Home Secretary Risley in 1903 A.D. At that time, Home Secretary of the Indian Government Herbert Risley made a note on 7<sup>th</sup> February in 1904 that, "Bengal united is a power", he also argued, "Bengal divided will pull in several different ways".<sup>2</sup> Mr. Risley approved the 'Partition of Bengal'. Lord Curzon wanted to undermine the increasing reinforcement of the educated majority community.<sup>3</sup> Finally,

on 16<sup>th</sup> October of 1905 the proposed 'Partition of Bengal' of Lord Curzon was officially effected. Although, according to British Government of India, the 'Partition of Bengal' was centred regarding the administrative matter. Reviewing the views of Lord Curzon and his contemporary authorities, it appears that, one of its main objective was to reduce the unity of combined Bengalis.

In the history of Bengal, since 1905 the revolutionary era had begun. The campaign against the 'Partition of Bengal' took place in the whole of Bengal and ended the twenty years of 'beginning policy' of Indian National Congress. There were three issues of anti-partition movement observed-Boycott, Swadeshi and National Education. In front of these three programmes, the majority Bengalis formed a movement against such evil decision. From December 1903 to October 1905, two thousands public meetings were held against the partition.<sup>4</sup> The Muslims also attended these meetings. In this way, the Swadeshi movement created a new tradition in the history of India's freedom struggle. It was the first national mass movement of India before the Gandhian period.<sup>5</sup> The main driving forces of the Swadeshi movement were the national bourgeoisie class, farmers, middle class and intellectual community. The protest voiced everywhere in Bengal. The people of Burdwan district were aware of the politics, economy and the plot of the imperialists from the very beginning. The influence of this Swadeshi movement in Burdwan district was widespread which were led by Abul Kashem. A large number of people of the District were involved in Swadeshi movement of the District.

The District of Burdwan is situated in the western part of Burdwan Division. It contains an area of 2689 square mile. Burdwan is the principle town and administrative headquarter which is situated on the north bank of Banka, some 2 miles from the Damodar river, which is also situated in 23<sup>o</sup>14' North and 87<sup>o</sup>51' East. The district lies between the Ajay, the Bhagirathi or Hooghly and the Damodar rivers. It is bounded on the north by the Santhal Pargana, Birbhum and Murshidabad; on the east by Nadia; on the south by Hooghly, Midnapore and Bankura; and on the west by Manbhum (present Jharkhand state).<sup>6</sup>

There existed harmonious relations between the Hindus and Muslims. This Unity with increasing mass participation provided the Movement a measure of intensity and led the India's Freedom. Regarding the District of Burdwan, Balaideb Sharma said in the preface of his book 'Bardhamaner Itihas' that: 'The history of Bardhaman is actually the tale of the evolution of the society and culture of the entire Rarh-Bengal'. He claimed that patriotic spirit was present in greater Bardhaman from the most ancient times. He also mentioned that modern nationalist spirit was evident before the Swadeshi days in the District. Just after the 'Partition of Bengal', Swadeshi meetings were held at various villages in Burdwan district.

Burdwan is one of the most important districts of the state of West Bengal in terms of size and span. The district has five sub-divisions Asansol, Durgapur, Burdwan, Katwa and Kalna with the Headquarters at places of their respective names.

The nationalist and anti-imperialist political culture of Burdwan district suddenly became astonishing in the anti-partition movement in 1905 A.D. In 1876,

Surenranath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose established 'Indian Association' in Calcutta. The form of nationalist politics started in Burdwan district due to this Association. As a result, the branches of 'Indian Association' were established in the city of Burdwan, Kalna and Purbasthali. Although, Maharaja Bijoychand of Burdwan supports the 'Partition of Bengal'. In Burdwan district, a meeting was called for the boycott of foreign goods in protest of this announcement on 7<sup>th</sup> August in 1905 under the presidentship of Maharaja Manindranath Nandi (Mathrum, Burdwan).

During the Swadeshi movement of Bengal, Satishchandra's '*Dawn Society*' did play a significant role. The Society inspired and motivated the people of Bengal to leave British educational institutions. As a matter of fact, many people of Bengal left schools, colleges and other institutions which were made by the British Government. In this situation nationalist leaders founded many National Schools throughout Bengal. Arvind Prakash Ghosh, prominent intellectual and nationalist leader of Burdwan who promoted national education in the district.<sup>7</sup>

In the beginning of the twentieth century, many people of United Bengal tried to develop the relations between Hindus and Muslims against the partition. During the partition of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore called for Rakhibandhan to both communities as brother. In Barisal, barrister Abdur Rasul adopted the presidential seat in the 'Bengal provincial conference' in 1906 A.D where the presence of the Hindu-Muslim coalition force and developed strong public opinion against the Partition of Bengal. In this way, the people of Bengal in general and Burdwan district in particular fully supported the congress and the anti-partition movement.

Another prominent writer Rajanikanta Sen wrote in Bengali, 'Mayer deya mota kapor mathai tule nere Bhai'. The impact of the movement, The 'Banga-Lakshmi Cotton Mill' was established in Bengal in 1906 by the efforts of middle class Bengali people. At the time, 'The Bengal Hosiery Company' was also established by the initiative of Muslim nationalists. From the beginning of the Swadeshi movement, the people of the Burdwan district played took special part in the movement. In Burdwan district, '*Swadeshi Vandars*' (stock houses) were established for sale of indigenous textiles at Kalna, Baghnapara and Belerghat. The youth people of the district Burdwan took the clothes of Swadeshi on the head and took a thick cloth of their mother in front of the door and started walking around the district. Under the influence of Swadeshi movement, different societies were formed in various places of Burdwan. In the propagation of Swadeshi ideology, the significance of the revolutionary group's spokespersons 'Sandhya' and 'Jugantar' were immense. 'Jugantar group organisation' was formed at Baghnapara and Chandipur of the district. Revolutionary activist Basudeb Bhattacharya of Burdwan district was notable in this context. He was an active member of jugantar group organisation. He was also expelled from the school to join the Swadeshi movement. He was associated with the 'Sandhya' magazine edited by Brahma Bandhav Upadhyay. For this reason, he used to suffer four months of rigorous imprisonment on charges of sedition.<sup>8</sup>

The prominent nationalist leaders of the district were –Nalinaksha Basu, Abul Kashem, Indranal Banerjee, Sriharsa Mukherjee, Upendranath Sen and Debendranath

Sen. Last two leaders belonged to Sen family at Kalna. Another nationalist leader of the district, Pramathanath Mukherjee of Katwa was also contributed in the movement. In the same time, teachers and doctors together took active part in the anti-partition movement of the district. In this context, one teacher Krishna Dhan Roy of Siarshol school and doctor Rakhaldas Banerjee also took active part in the anti-partition Movement and composite swadeshi movement in Raniganj and Asansol areas. The Anti-partition rallies were organised in Katwa, Singerkon, Baidyapur, Akalpous, Deora, Dhatrigram and Anukhal. On the other hand, the 'Swadeshi Bhandar' was also established in Anukhal, Dholarhat, Raigram, Koigram and Baghnapura of the district. The Kalna sub-division had a prominent place in the freedom struggle in Burdwan district.<sup>9</sup> The movement against the partition of Bengal became intense in Kalna town. In 1905, a protest meeting was held at Mahismordinitala of Kalna town with the initiative of Upendranath Hazra, Debendranath Sen and Upendranath Sen. The renowned nationalist leader Surendranath Banerjee delivered his important speech at the meeting. Mr. Abul Kashem was the chief organizer of swadeshi movement at Memari in Burdwan. In the year 1906, the police arrested five boys (Gour Govind Goswami, Nonigopal Mukherjee, Santosh Kumar Banerjee, Brindabon Mukherjee and Bolaichand Ganguli) at Baghnapura of Kalna sub-division on charges of burning foreign clothes. It was considered to be the first 'Political Crime' in Burdwan district.<sup>10</sup> Sir Shyamlal Goswami opened the first indigenous clothing store in Kalna. By the effort of Pramathanath Banerjee, the 'Swadeshi Treasury' was opened at Pathuriaghata in Kalna and later it became a secret centre of revolutionaries. With the initiative of Upendranath Sen of Kalna, the glory of Burdwan in general and Kalna in particular was used to achieve the glory of the Bengalis in the establishing industry through the establishment of 'Bongo Lakshmi Cotton Mill'.

The Swadeshi movement took extreme form in the year 1908 A.D. Indranath Banerjee provided fuel in the revolutionary activities among the youths of the district. He wrote in 'Bangabasi' newspaper with the pseudonym *Panchananda*.<sup>11</sup>

Katwa sub-division was another important centre of Swadeshi movement in Burdwan District. In katwa sub-division, Indranath Banerjee, Baikunthanath Sen and nationalist Muslim leaders like Abul Kashem jointly participated in the Freedom struggle of the district. During the partition of Bengal, they spread Swadeshi movement and burning the lamps of nationalism among the people of Burdwan District as well as of Bengal.

Other notable nationalist leaders of Katwa sub-division were Jitendranath Mitra and Gunindranath Mukherjee who brought the tide of nationalist and swadeshi movements in the district. During the contemporary era of the partition of Bengal, the branch of 'Atmonnati Samiti'<sup>12</sup> was established in Katwa sub-division by the efforts of Dr. Gunindranath Mukherjee and Jitendranath Mitra. At the time, through 'Atmonnati Samiti' Prof. Jotishchandra Ghosh influenced youths to join in the Swadeshi Movement. The second phase of the Swadeshi movement started during 1907-08. At that time, revolutionaries played a significant role in the freedom struggle in India. Manabendranath Chatterjee was a notable personality in the revolutionary

phase of the district. He inspired the people of Burdwan to participate in the anti-partition movement.

From the beginning of the Swadeshi movement all the people of Burdwan District actively participated in the anti-partition movement till the dissolution of partition. During the reign of Lord Hardings, the partition was annulled under the pressure of swadeshi and boycott movement in the year 1911. Promothanath Mukherjee was sentenced to one-year imprisonment for his involvement with revolutionaries<sup>13</sup>. The figure of Swadeshi movement became clear in the editorship of the weekly 'Prasun'<sup>14</sup> magazine in the contemporary period of this particular district.

The plan of the 'Partition of Bengal' created a strong movement in the Bengali society. The plan also raised the seeds of communalism among the Hindus and Muslims which had created divisions between two. In the first decade of the twentieth century; the rapid progress of the Muslim middle-class society was possible. The name of Muslim intellectuals such as - Abul Kalam Azad, Abdur Rasul, Abdul Halim Gaznavi, Liyakat Hossain, Majibur Rahaman, Mohammad Akram Khan, Abdul Gofur Siddique, Ismail Hossain Siraji were remarkable in this context.<sup>15</sup>

During the period of anti-partition movement of Bengal, Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam Bampfild Fuller tried to spread communalism to dispense the movement. He declared that, "Between his two wives Hindu and Muslim, Muslim is favourite bride."<sup>16</sup> During this period, 'The Mussalman' periodical tried to maintain harmony among Hinds and Muslims and tried to engage with the main source of Indian politics. It is necessary to mention the efforts of 'The Mussalman' in promoting the rationality of this unity.

'The Mussalman' periodical had significant contribution in the anti-partition movement of Bengal. Because, the periodical came up on 6<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1906 in the uproar political situation of the partition of Bengal. It was published by Majibur Rahaman from 176, Bopubazar Street in Kolkata (Now, Bipin Bihari Ganguly Street). Three congress leaders Abdur Rasul, Abul Kashem and Abdul Halim Gaznavi were its founders. At the beginning Abul Kashem and Majibur Rahaman were the joint editors of the periodical. The periodical was continued for about 30 years. Regarding the role of Majibur Rahaman in editing the periodical, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin commented in his book 'Muslim Banglar Sangbadikota' that--- 'The Mussalman' was first weekly, then thrice a week and lastly got daily stability. .It was born in 1906 A.D. For more than thirty years; this well-educated English newspaper reported the views and paths of the Muslims of Bengal."

Barrister Abdur Rasul and Abdul Halim Ghaznavi were notable among the nationalist leaders who worked in the anti-Partition and Swadeshi movement. In their initiative 'The Bengal Mohameddan Association' was formed. On the behalf of the 'Central Mohamedan Association', Amir Hossain intensified the Swadeshi movement.<sup>17</sup> At that time, 'The Mussalman' was strongly supportive for cause of Swadeshi movement. In 1906, during the session of 'Barisal Bengal Provincial Conference', nationalist leader Abdur Rasul was given the proposal of non-cooperation with the British Government for opposition partition and elimination of British products.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, Majibur Rahaman was trying to unify all the communities-irrespective of race, religion and cast of the partition of Bengal by 'The Mussalman'. Going to pay tribute to his, nationalist leader Surendranath Banerjee said that, "As he opposed the partition of Bengal, he became a pariah of the community."<sup>19</sup>

In the first issue of 'The Mussalman' periodical, non-communal character appeared in editorial column. It is said in the editorial of the periodical that: "We shall be no party to the fostering of differences between 'race and race' and 'creed and creed', but shall always lend to the establishment of peace, harmony and goodwill between the different section of our great Indian community."<sup>20</sup>

The periodical called all communities irrespective of race and religion to join the anti-partition movement of Bengal. Majibur Rahaman published one article in 'The Mussalman' that, 'In Faridpur district, One thousands Muslim Zaminders, Talukdars, Jotedars, and Businessman submitted applications against the partition of Bengal.'<sup>21</sup> Thus, 'The Mussalman' raised the questions of fraternity and put forward the appeal an atmosphere of harmony between the Hindus and Muslims. The editors of the periodical had appealed to the people of Burdwan to communalism. They said: "It is our economic and political situation that makes of all of us Indians and so far as we have to live our practical lives, we are Indians first and Mohammedans afterwards."<sup>22</sup>

'The Mussalman' also emphasized on the combined efforts of Hindus and Muslims for the protection of the exploited communities. It had been said in the periodical that -"Our readers naturally expect us to say about the new vigilance committee for professing Mohammedan interests-we have no hesitation in giving it us our emphatic opinion that it was a mistake----- the public meeting of the Mohammedan community gave unequivocal expression to this belief; and it very properly as we think, suggested that a conference of Hindus and Mohammedans should be held to discuss questions affecting both the communities."<sup>23</sup>

The 'Indian Musalman Association' was formed in Calcutta with the formation of 'Muslim League' in Dhaka. It was established by liberal Muslim society. The purpose of the organization was to find out the role of Muslim society in the freedom struggle in India. Nawab Syed Mohammad Bahadur of Madras became the president of the organization and Barrister Abdur Rasul of Kolkata became the editor. The role of this organization had been appreciated for its efforts to connect the Muslim society with the main stream of National Movement in India. 'The Mussalman' had been carried out extensive publicity in order to enforce that effort.

The contribution of 'The Mussalman' was significant influential the message to the common man. It had been said, "Our countrymen must therefore either use their best endeavours to secure self-government or 'Swaraj' or be prepared to have unpleasant duty of carrying on a vigorous boycott of foreign goods for the purpose of protecting and developing their nascent industries if they fail in this duty of theirs, they will deserve to remain forever the hewers of wood and drawers of water of the foreigners."<sup>24</sup>

***Conclusion:***

Swadeshi Movement was the most successful of the pre-Gandhian movement. The politics of Bengal's Swadeshi age first sight appears to present a fairly simple picture of a united movement against the partition. The ideas of Boycott and Swadeshi that developed from this movement became an important weapon that was utilised in the India's freedom struggle. Boycott of schools and colleges led to the development of national schools and colleges. The patriotism, sacrifice and courage of the students earned great respect from the common people in Bengal in general and Burdwan district in particular.

The people of Burdwan district maintained very excellently the harmony during the period of Swadeshi movement. The Swadeshi movement created a new trend in the history of Bengal as well as in Burdwan district. The movement continued in Burdwan district till 1911 when the partition of Bengal was annulled. All sections of the society of Burdwan district took active part in the movement. This movement inspired the people of Burdwan to develop the indigenous products and boycott the foreign goods. The Swadeshi movement spread the swadeshi industries in different parts of the district of Burdwan. It was a combined movement against the British rule and the people from the grass route level actively participated in the Swadeshi movement. National School was opened as a symbol of Swadeshi institution to protest against the anti-partition movement. 'The Mussalman' periodical made a significant contribution to promote the idea of harmony, indigenous public opinion, using rationalism in news planning, expose and establish interests of the masses in the Swadeshi Movement. In considering the political situation of the district, it is appropriate to mention that Burdwan district was affected considerably by the mass national movement. Its chief success lay in giving Indian nationalism a new imaginative direction, and in raising the state of nationalist unrest to the high plane of bitter anti-imperialist struggles.

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