



## Role of local leaders and nationalist activities in the Freedom Movement of Raiganj Subdivision in Uttar Dinajpur District (1905-1942 AD)

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### Abstract

This paper explores the role of local leaders and nationalist activities in the freedom movement of Raiganj Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district from 1905 to 1942 AD, focusing on a region that has received limited attention in mainstream historiography. Present Raiganj Subdivision was included in undivided Dinajpur district during British period. Beginning with the Swadeshi Movement following the partition of Bengal in 1905 and concluding on the eve of Indian independence, the research highlights how local leaders acted as vital intermediaries between National political organisations and grassroots Society. Many freedom fighters of Raiganj Subdivision were involved with the Anushilan Samiti and struggled for the country's independence. The Anushilan Samiti was a revolutionary organisation that fought against the British rule. Many of the freedom fighters their lives imprisoned in cellular jail. The peasant movement also gained strength in Raiganj Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district. 'Raiganj Coronation High School ' was a Swadeshi School, which initiated the people of Raiganj in Swadeshi mantras. This school became a base for the revolutionaries, where they planned their Anti-British activities.

**Keywords:** Raiganj, dinajpur, nationalist, swadeshi, coronation high school, anushilan samiti, revolutionary, tebhaga etc

### Introduction

The Indian freedom movement was a broad-based struggle that drew its strength not only from national leaders but also from the active participation of local leaders and regional societies. Local leaders comprising lawyers, teachers, students, social reformers, and small town Elites emerged as key agents in mobilizing public opinion against Colonial rule. Through their involvement in major national movements such as the Swadeshi Movement, Non-Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement, these leaders translated national political objectives into local action. Public meetings, boycott campaigns, picketings, nationalist education, and constructive programmes became common forms of political expression within the Subdivision.

Especially the arrival of national leaders helped the people of this Subdivision to get involved in Anti-British activities. The Anti-British Movement spread to every Village in the Subdivision. Many were imprisoned for their involvement in these activities. The activities of the Subdivision's local leaders astonished the British police, as they acted so quickly and organised. Historical records indicate that common people also participated in this looting. Many freedom fighters of this Subdivision used to propagate Anti-British programme through village to village songs. It can be said that - Freedom fighters have sacrificed their lives for the liberation of the country.

**Anti-Partition Movement In Raiganj Subdivision:** This Anti-Partition movement opened a new horizon in the political consciousness of the country. As a result of the movement, the idea of Nationalism became more deeply rooted among the people. The people of Bengal demonstrated their unity and solidarity through this movement. Even, this Anti-Partition movement strengthened the foundation of the nationalist movement in Raiganj Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district. Fearing the unity and political Consciousness of this greater Bengal,

Lord Curzon decided on the partition of Bengal. United Bengal was a powerful political entity. The objective of the partition of Bengal was to weaken the political power of Bengal. Dr Sujit Ghosh mentioned about the proposal of partition of Bengal that -"All the turn of the 20th century, the imperialist Lord Curzon became desperate to cut the root of the nationalist tree, and his chief adviser was Andrew Fraser" <sup>[1]</sup>. When the blueprint for the partition of Bengal was undivided on July 19, 1905 AD, a storm of protest erupted across the whole of Bengal. Even before the partition of Bengal could be implemented, the people of Dinajpur had decided to vehemently oppose it. Jatindra Chandra Sengupta in his gazetteer mentions that -"This move was strongly opposed by the people of the district in meetings held on the 21st July 1905. Lal Mohan Ghosh suggested that all honorary magistrates and all members of district boards, municipal commissioners and Panchayats should resign in a body and national mourning should be observed for twelve months during which the people should not participate in any public rejoicing. This meeting was presided over by the Maharaja of Dinajpur. The partition was, however, proclaimed in September, 1905. The reaction in the district, to the proclamation, was sharp and a number of meetings were held. Maharaja Girija Nath Roy took the leading part in the agitation against the partition" <sup>[2]</sup>. When the partition of Bengal was implemented on October 16, 1905 AD, there were strong protests in the whole of Bengal as well as in Raiganj Subdivision. Kuloda Kanta Ghosh was a pioneering leader of the Anti-partition movement in Dinajpur. He was a famous lawyer and a member of the Congress of undivided Dinajpur district. Dr Sujit Ghosh mentioned that -"He was the sole representative of undivided Dinajpur at the Indian National Congress conference held in Bombay city in 1904 AD" <sup>[3]</sup>. On 16th October 1905 AD, Arandhan Diwas was observed in Raiganj, like other places in Bengal, in protest against the partition of Bengal. Dr Brindaban Ghosh mentioned that -"On that day, Arandhan Diwas was celebrated in Raiganj on

the initiative of Kuloda Kanta Ghosh. Even Arandhan Diwas was celebrated at Kuloda Kanta Ghosh's house" [4]. The people of Raiganj Subdivision were initiated into the Swadeshi mantras and moved forwarding boycotting foreign goods. Not just Anti-British sentiment, the people of Raiganj Subdivision were initiated into the Swadeshi Mantra with the belief that self-reliance would lead the country towards progress. At the time, the people of Bengal became engrossed in the songs of poet Rajinikanta, which touch their hearts.

Mayer Deoa Mota Kapor

Mathay Tule Ne Re Bhai... [5]

Historically, the people of Raiganj had set up cloth mills through their own initiatives. With the initiative of Sarojini Guha, Suhasini Goswami, Bimal Sudha Siddhanta and other leaders, looms were installed at Barobasa in Ukilpara [6]. The role of women was especially important in weaving cloth. Yarn used to be spun in Satyadham of Raiganj. Several women used to cut the thread and weave it into clothes themselves and give it to their compatriots [7].

Swadeshi education also had a deep impact in Raiganj Subdivision. In Raiganj, the Swadeshi School 'Raiganj Coronation High School' was established on January 17, 1911 AD. Kuloda Kanta Ghosh played a major role in establishing this school. Dr Brindaban Ghosh mentioned that -"Kuloda Kanta Ghosh, Kul Chandra Guha, Kul Chandra Mitra, some educated people and some rich people of Adi Bandar established 'Raiganj Coronation High School' by discussing and meeting. Kuloda Kanta Ghosh was the founding secretary of Coronation High School." [8] Later, this Swadeshi School became the origin of Swadeshi Mantra on the soil of Raiganj. Many students and teachers of this school were involved in Anushilan Samiti. Saroj Kumar Basu, who was an active member of the Anushilan Samiti, was one of the student of this school.

**Freedom Movement and Local Leaders in Raiganj Subdivision:** Many Nationalist leaders emerged during the Anti-partition of Bengal movement. This movement opened a new horizon of Nationalism in Bengal. The people of Raiganj Subdivision also involved themselves in Anti-British activities from the time of Anti-Partition movement. The contribution of Anushilan samiti to increasing political awareness among the people of Raiganj Subdivision was undeniable. Anushilan Samiti ignited the flame of patriotism among the youth of Raiganj Subdivision. Bankim Chandra's theology and Swami Vivekananda's ideals played a profound role in the formation of Anushilan samiti. Swami Vivekananda's ideals inspired the youth with patriotism and self sacrifice. Jibantara Haldar mentioned that -"Bankim Chandra's last advice on religious philosophy, 'patriotism above all religions, do not forget this,' was the main inspiration for the Samiti" [9]. He also mentioned that -"Swami Vivekananda prayed to mother Earth to humanize the Bengali nation. Satish Chandra took up the task." [10] Satish Chandra's open gymnasium in the Premises of the General Assembly's Institution was later transformed into Anushilan Samiti. The first Anushilan Samiti was established in Kolkata on 24th March 1902 AD 'Dol Purnima' day Monday (1308 BS, 10 Chaitra). Narendra Chandra Bhattacharya, headmaster of new Indian School, named this sangha 'Bharat Anushilan Samiti'. Later, P. Mitra shortened the name to 'Anushilan Samiti' [11]. In 1905 AD, P. Mitra and Bipin Chandra Pal visited Dhaka of

Bangladesh and established a branch of the Anushilan Samiti there. Pulin Das was entrusted with the responsibility of managing that Samiti (Dhaka Anushilan Samiti). Shri Bhabatosh Roy mentioned in his book that -"The Anushilan Samiti of Dhaka was completely different in fact and in practice from the Anushilan Samiti of Kolkata, although P.Mitra was the main leader in both places. Various branches of the Dhaka Anushilan Samiti were established in almost all Hindu villages of east Bengal and even in places like Lahore, Kashi, Jhansi, Surat, and Ahmedabad. With the outbreak of the first world war, branches of the 'Dhaka Anushilan Samiti' were established in various parts of India, including Maharashtra, Madras, Bihar, Odisha, and the United Province (UP)" [12]. Later, the Anushilan Samiti came to mean 'Dhaka Anushilan Samiti'. Around 1908, Pulin Bihari Das's Anushilan Samiti had about 600 branches. Jibantara Haldar mentioned that -"In 1908, when various Samities, including Anushilan Samities, were outlawed in East and North Bengal, there were about 600 branch Samities of Anushilan samiti under the leadership of Pulin Babu in various places" [13]. After, 1905 AD, the 'Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti' was established as a branch of Pulin Das's 'Dhaka Anushilan Samiti'. This 'Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti' had a profound impact on the Raiganj Subdivision, which aroused widespread enthusiasm among local youth. Many students and teachers of Raiganj Coronation High School were in direct and indirect contact with Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti. During the British period, this indigenous school was used as a shelter for freedom fighters. Revolutionaries often gathered in this indigenous School to make secret plans. Dhananjay Ray mentioned in his 'Dinajpur Jelar Itihas' book that -"In 1935 AD, the Bengali provincial Congress conference was held at the Golkuthi field of Dinajpur city as a joint initiative of both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Dr Indra Narayan Sengupta presided over the conference. Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy, Dr Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Jahaluddin Hasemi came to the conference. Arun Ghosh, member of Jugantor Dal, exercise teacher of Raiganj Coronation High School, demonstrated physical training and exercise with the students of his School." [14] The main objective was to build a strong revolutionary through sports and physical exercise. Gymnasiums were established in various parts of Raiganj. An Akhara was built in Mohanbati, Raiganj. Various revolutionaries used to exercise at this place for the country's liberation. Like Rabi Bhowmik, Anil Nag used to practice bodybuilding under Coronation High School teacher Arun Chandra Ghosh. Rabi Bhowmik and Anil Nag used to lead Mohanbati's Akhara. Kalyani Banerjee also used to exercise there [15].

The arrival of various Congress leaders in Dinajpur made the people Anti-British and agitated for the liberation of the country. Overtime, many leaders came to Dinajpur and held meetings with local people. From 1924 to 1932 AD, a vigorous movement against the Choukidari tax was organised in various parts of Dinajpur. Raiganj Subdivision was no exception. Dhananjay Roy mentioned that-"As a result, the movement intensified in Itahar, Birol, Gangarampur and Tapan police stations. Santals refused to pay Chaukidari tax in Patiraj area of Itahar police station (1930). The Santals clashed with the police, defying the British rule. Several prominent leaders were arrested and imprisoned Hindi incident." [16] Which the Civil Disobedience Movement was gaining strength in India in

1930 AD, Raiganj Subdivision was no exception. The Civil Disobedience Movement was a mass movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Ashwini Kumar Ghosh of Kaliyaganj police station participated in Civil Disobedience movement in 1930 AD. Inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, he went from village to village and encouraged everyone to spin yarn. He used to spin the thread himself. He joined the Anti-British meeting with many Muslim people at Nakuaat of Pirganj police station. Under his initiative, the slogan of banning foreign products and accepting indigenous products was raised in many Hats-Bazars<sup>[17]</sup>. While Gopibrahma Acharya was studying at 'Dinajpur Girija Nath High School', he developed a close relationship with the revolutionaries. Then Suren Sen was the headmaster of the School. Gopibrahma Acharya secretly exchanged letters with revolutionaries<sup>[18]</sup>. Many people from the tribal community actively participated in the Civil Disobedience movement. Naresh Chandra Basu, accompanied by Barka Tudu, went from Santal village to village and enlisted many Santals from the Durgapur region were present at Raiganj station to felicitate Mahatma Gandhi. Naresh Chandra Basu, Radhika Jiban Basu, Fani Bhushan Mitra, Barka Tudu and others participated in Anti-British meetings, marches, picketings and strikes during the Civil Disobedience movement. Going to the local Hats (market), they would vandalize foreign goods<sup>[19]</sup>. In 1934, Mahatma Gandhi traveled by train from Katihar to Assam via Raiganj-Kaliyaganj-Dinajpur. Then, thousands of people from nearby villages gathered at Kaliaganj railway station to Gandhiji. At that time, Satish Chandra Ghosh also came from Tarangapur (Kaliaganj police station) to Kaliaganj station to see him. He also wore Kaddar and spun yarn on a spinning wheel<sup>[20]</sup>. Subodh Chandra Lahiri of Kaliaganj joined the Anushilan Samiti, when he was in seventh standard. He was directly involved in the Non-Cooperation movement which led to an investigation by the British police to arrest him. Subodh Chandra Lahiri assumed the pseudonym Abdul Karim to save himself<sup>[21]</sup>. Hari Mardi of Samaspur village, under Hemetabad police station, had a good relationship with Ramapada Sengupta of Bhatol. Ramapada Sengupta was the secretary of Dinajpur Congress committee. On August 10, 1923, as a representative of the Dinajpur Congress committee, he participated in the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha movement. Hari Mardi also joined that movement. As they approached Nagpur railway station, carrying National Flags, shouting 'Vandemataram' and 'Gandhiji Ki Jai' slogans among Harrison Road, the British police arrested them. According to section 109 CRPC, they were sentenced to 11 years in jail and sent to Nagpur jail. Later, they were transferred from Nagpur to Amrati jail, and from there, they were released<sup>[22]</sup>. Many revolutionaries from Dinajpur were involved with the Anushilan Samiti. The looting of British government property was a part of the programme of Anushilan Samiti. Their intention was to use the looted property for the country's independence. There was a lot of debate about whether the members of the Anushilan Samiti would loot property. Shri Bhabatosh Roy in his book 'Biplobi Pulin Das' on looting states that -"After Aurobindo Ghosh's speech, a representative from Rangpur proposed that, a proper account will be kept of all places from which money will be brought by robbery, and the money will be returned to all those people after getting freedom. The Nation was seconded by Aurobindo Ghosh, and thus at last the proposal to commit robbery was

unanimously accepted."<sup>[23]</sup> Also, Dhananjay Roy in his book 'Dinajpur Jelar Itihas' described the looting of the members of the Anushilan Samiti that-"For the revolutionary party to conduct its activities and implement various plans, a huge amount of money is needed. For financial needs, the revolutionaries of Dinajpur district had to plan multiple robberies to collect money. Prafulla Narayan Sanyal was the director of Anushilan Samiti of Dinajpur district and Saroj Kumar Basu was in charge of Dinajpur City at that time (1933 AD). Prankrishna Chakraborty, Satyabrata Chakraborty, Hrishikesh Bhattacharya, Haripada Basu, Kalipada Sarkar, Ashok Ranjan Ghosh, Sasadhar Sarkar, Lalu Pandey and many others were among the active workers in this group and that time"<sup>[24]</sup>. On October 28, 1933 AD, members of the Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti carried out a daring robbery at Hili railway station. Jatindra Chandra Sengupta described in his gazetteer that-"On the 28th October, 1933, the railway station of Hili was raided by a group of young men dressed in military uniform. The station staff offered strong resistance, and there was an exchange of fire as a result of which the night guard of the railway station sustained serious injury and died in the hospital. The raiders who belonged to the Anushilan Samiti hoisted the National Flag on the station building and decamped with a large amount of money. Subsequently, all the young men who raided the railway station were arrested and brought to trial, and most of them were sentenced to undergo imprisonment for various terms including transportation for life."<sup>[25]</sup> A total of 15 revolutionaries were involved in this Hili Darjeeling Mail loot out of which 13 were arrested and two managed to escape. Dhananjay Roy discussed about it-"Among 15 revolutionaries, 13 were arrested. Police could not apprehend Bijoykrishna Chakraborty and Subodh Dutta among the accused"<sup>[26]</sup>. The case of these revolutionaries were initiated in the special tribunal court. Saroj Kumar Basu and Satya Chakraborty had to spend 10 years in Andaman Jail on appeal by the High court.

The Quit India Movement is a significant milestone in India's struggle for independence. This movement of 1942 was a mass struggle against British rule. This movement was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's 'Do or Die' slogan. The whole of North Bengal was inundated with the tide of this movement. In this movement, every person put themselves forward as a leader and led in their own areas. This movement in Dinajpur took the form of a complete mass rebellion and spread rapidly. The present Raiganj Subdivision was part of the undivided Dinajpur district during the British period. Ashwini Kumar Ghosh of Kaliaganj went to Dinajpur City In 1942 AD along with several youths and cut telegraph wires and roads<sup>[27]</sup>. Although this movement was centered in Balurghat, its influence spread to Raiganj as well. On September 14, 1942 AD, under the leadership of Saroj Ranjan Chatterjee, Balurghat town was liberated from British rule. The wave of that movement also hit Raiganj. As a result, one day Sukumar Guha, Anil Chandra Nag, Rabi Bhowmik and Kamal Bhowmik took up a plan to uproot the railway line at Sonadangi near Raiganj. Upon learning the news, Dinajpur's I.B. inspector Baneshwar Burman began searching for them to apprehend them. Police arrested Kamal Bhowmik on that very charge<sup>[28]</sup>. On August 15, 1947, India gained independence from British rule. As a result of the sacrifices and strenuous struggles of many

people, the country achieved independence. The attainment of independence through the partition of the country was a historical event. After independence, the Pakistani flag was hoisted in Raiganj Subdivision and Balurghat, which created intense resentment among the locals. Dr Brindaban Ghosh mentioned in his book that -"On August 15, 1947, India became independent after partition. Some areas including Balurghat, Malda, and Raiganj were declared to belong to Pakistan. Muslims hoisted Pakistani flags at police stations and Courts in those areas. On 17th August those areas including Raiganj were acceded to India. On August 18, Anil Chandra Nag, Rabindra Kumar Bhowmik, Sukumar Guha, Kamal Bhowmik, along with several other leaders, took out a large procession to Raiganj court, where they lowered the Pakistani flag and hoisted the Indian flag"<sup>[29]</sup>. The Tebhaga Movement of 1946 was a huge struggle for the rights of Peasants in Bengal. This peasant movement United farmers against landlords and demanded their rightful share. The main demand of the agitator's vastu two-thirds of the crop-produced. Sharecroppers must be given occupancy rights on the land. And instead of landowners, sharecroppers should be allowed to harvest paddy in the farms. At the time, this movement spread to 22 out of 30 police stations in Dinajpur district. Under the leadership of Basanta Lal Chatterjee, the Tebhaga Movement in Itahar area became quite strong. Revolutionaries like Jogendra Nath Sarkar, Bhuvan Sarkar, Tufanu Sarkar, and Bhupati Sarkar joined this Tebhaga Movement in Raiganj Subdivision<sup>[30]</sup>.

### Conclusion

The role of local leaders and Nationalist activities in the Raiganj Subdivision made a substantial contribution to the broader freedom movement of India. During this period, local leaders such as teachers, lawyers, peasants, students and social reformers played a vital role in mobilizing public opinion against British rule. The contribution of these local leaders were not confined merely to political agitation. Through public meetings, pamphleteering, the establishment of National Schools, promotion of Swadeshi and khadi, and cultural activities with Nationalist themes, they awakened political consciousness among the common people. This regional participation strengthened the National struggle and highlights the importance of local initiatives in achieving independence.

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