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In search of a forgotten martial Society: Group rivalry and class conflict in Bengal, 1900-1910

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Abstract

On July 19th 1905, Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, announced the scheme to divide the Bengal province into two parts. Of course, the alibi was entirely administrative, but historians say the government's real intention was to cut the throat of the growing revolution in Bengal. Three years later, on November 4th, 1908, one fine morning, the neighbours of 50 Uari, Dacca experienced a person named Pulin Bihari Das was arrested by a few red caped constables and two IB officers of the His Majesty's Government. After searching his house, officers from the detective department were surprised and the chargesheet observed that Pulin Bihari Das had set up a foolproof army of Bengali youths who were very capable of fighting with lathi (Indian sticks). The British officers also observed how, over the six years, Das had formed a revolutionary samiti which was on the backdrop of akhra¹, modelled on the Maniktala Bomb case.² The discourse of the history of physical culture in Bengal started with the work of John Rosselli, who understood the popularisation of physical cultures as a concerted effort by the Bengali babu to reinvent his 'lost valour' and respond to allegations of effeminacy. Mrinalini Sinha has shown in her Colonial Masculinity (1995), the contestation between the coloniser and the colonised was also a psychological conflict, Ashis Nandy has shown in his discussion of the construction of 'Kshatriya hood'- in his famous work The Intimate Enemy (1983). However, their work had paid limited attention to the Dacca Anushilan Samity and the initiatives of East Bengal and Assam's revolutionaries. So, this paper will try to fill the lacuna with the narrative of Pulin Bihari Das as a lesser-known revolutionary of Agnijug and also this paper proposes to re-interpret the history of conflict between elites and non-elites of colonial Bengal during

¹ To literal translation of 'akhara' --- a gymnasium, physical-culture club or a bodybuilding institute.

² Pulin Bihari Das, *Amar Jiban Kahini*. Ed. Amalendu De. Calcutta: Anushilan Samiti, 1987.

the swadeshi Movement and by exploring how class hierarchy, politics of religion and revolutionary nationalism seeks to contribute to the creation of an alternative narrative of martial cultures in colonial Bengal.

Keywords: Class-conflict, Lathi-play, bhadrak, dakaat, physical culture, bodybuilding, group-rivalry.

Introduction: On the 19th of July 1905, George Nathaniel Curzon, 1st Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, and the Viceroy of India, a hell-bent and insolent aristocrat, announced the scheme to divide the Bengal province into two parts. Of course, the alibi was completely administrative, but the real intention of the government was to cut the throat of the growing revolution in Bengal. The decision was implemented on October 16, the same year. By dividing the huge province of eastern India, it was a clear indication of the Government that, not only they want to divide the province but their real intention was to sow the seed of communalism between two communities, viz. Hindu and Muslim of united Bengal. After the formal announcement, it was a massive shock to the upper class of the society who used to indulge the privilege by sitting in Calcutta and ruling their *tehsils, zamindaris* in Dacca. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore, and Ramendrasundar Tribedi were the first who took the initiative for the anti-partition movement later Surendranath and others joined. On the other hand, Muslims of eastern Bengal were not very shocked and quite happy after this decision. The reason was not unknown; the age-old misrule of Bengali Hindu Zamindars was quite unbearable to the Muslim lower-class peasants. Due to the effect of Permanent Settlement, the newly formed rentier class of Bengal was detached from their Zamindari, and the system of middlemen turned out to be tyrannical to poor peasants. Under these circumstances, the decision to divide a province and give Muslims a separate province where they could flourish themselves was pretty relieving for the non-Hindu people of East Bengal.

It was an utterly panic-stricken situation for Bengali elites who feared missing their power, hegemony and lands. In high politics, the effort of Rabindranath was quite effective, which has always been portrayed by nationalist historians as a great moment of communal harmony, but at the local level, the role of peasant's organisers, middle-class businessmen, and religious leaders represents a different narrative. On the other hand, educated, middle-class bhadrak had mistrusted Congress politics, and as an outcome, the local Hindu Bengali gentlemen joined the extremist politics with the growing wave of Hindu revivalism. Since 1906, the situation in the upper side of East Bengal has been alarming. Many Bengali youths joined the path of violence and extremism to give the blow as an answer to the Bengal partition. Mainly two organisations, *Anushilan* and later *Jugantar Samiti*, were formed, and they recruited a considerable number of youths as their volunteers. To gather funds to launch a severe extremist venture, they started plundering wealthy businessmen and sometimes it was against some Muslim businessmen too; these created a riot-like situation in Eastern Bengal from 1906 to 1910.

This paper seeks to analyse the clashes between indigenous elite and non-Brahmin, non-Hindu agricultural class as one of the layers of Swadeshi movement in Bengal and thereby recovering the narrative of a figure like *Lathiyal*, revolutionary Pulin Bihari Das who was primarily been subsumed by the dominant discourse of indigenous elites. It is surprising how Pulin Das's effort was seen through the judicial and police records of the Government of East Bengal and Assam. There is a latent hint of fear, distinguishing the *Dacca Anushilan Samity* from the Jugantar Party of Calcutta, which was much visible in the chargesheet and judgement copies. Consulting judicial proceedings on *Dacca Anushilan Samity* from West Bengal State Archives, situating this case study that how through the ideas from Bankimchandra's *Bangalir Bahubal*³ to Hindu monks like Tripur Linga Swami of Dacca influenced the *Samity* to form their own form of self-imagery against the colonial sneer of native effeminacy and illuminating Das's own voices to understand pressing needs for the *Samity* and questioning whether it was a result of Anti- Partition Movement or it had some previous influences from anti-British and anti-Islamic fanaticism struggle this paper seeks to sketch a biographical understanding of a forgotten revolutionary, a lone wolf and a semi formal physical instructor in undivided Bengal and this paper also wants to understand how the very original idea of Bengali *lathi* ((Indian Sticks) and Das's effort of making an army of Bengali youths made the British judicial system confused whether the His Majesty's Government will see him a notorious revolutionary, a gang leader of *Bhadralok Dakaats* or an outstanding teacher thousand Bengali youths who taught them first organised bodybuilding training, helped them to defend themselves with *lathi* (Indian Sticks).

To understand the theoretical approach of extremism in the early twentieth century, nationalist historian Amales Tripathi's magnum opus book *The Extremist Challenge India between 1890-1910* could be an essential study. It starts with a notion that the Swadeshi and Boycott have been celebrated in such a manner in the past like it was a golden revival age for Bengal. Not even that, it got the status of neo-enlightenment or so. Now Dr Tripathi thinks this notion needs massive reinterpretation from where it began; the idea of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Before Amales Tripathi, R.C. Majumdar called the swadeshi movement the 'Great Bengali Revolution.' Now here comes the question of exaggeration. This idea was somewhat challenged by Amales Tripathi and, a few years later, historian Sumit Sarkar. Both of them attacked this celebratory notion, but in a different way. Dividing three categories, Amales Tripathi argued Bankim's idea, which paved the ideological base of revolutionary terrorism, and Tilak's idea of Swaraj and his understanding of the Gita and Vivekananda's thoughts that influenced the revolutionaries.⁴ On the other hand, Marxist historian Sumit Sarkar is giving us the larger picture of the Swadeshi era in his *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908* (1973) where his effort was not to write a long chronological history of this period but to provide an understanding

³ Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra. *Bangalir Bahubal*, in Bankim Rachanabali. Sahitya Samsad, 1954.

⁴ Tripathi, Amales. *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890-1910*. Orient Longmans, 1968.

of many layers and reason of conflict over the first Bengal Partition between ruling British and their subject and more importantly conflicts between shadow ruling class, viz. zamindars and their local subjects, viz. Muslim agricultural class. Before Sarkar and Tripathi, most of the works done on the Swadeshi movement failed to understand the pulse of extremist politics. Either they made them on a high pedestal or defamed them. But after the independence of the access of government files, private papers opened a new highway to forward their research and compare them with vernacular sources. But these researches also had their own limitations. Sumit Sarkar himself pointed out in his new preface of the book *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, that the initiative of *bhadralok* elites to prevent the partition was more of the last try to save their own long-running profits. Sarkar argued that even Rabindranath, who was a pioneer character of the anti-partition movement later became a vehement critique of Swadeshi, which we have seen in his novel *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World). Apart from that, no sign of equitable work has been done on the caste identities and the question of women, which were subsumed by the elites. As Sarkar mentioned, Rabindranath alone was vocal about it. For instance, in *Nastanirh*, the question of the liberation of women in the inner domain was prominent. Another essential input by Sarkar was the detailed study and descriptions of Samitis of Eastern Bengal, which could be a helpful source to analyse the nature and characteristics of extremist group rivalries in this period. Shukla Sanyal, on the other hand, dealt with the idea of virility and martial bodybuilding as a process of building the nation-state in the age of revolutionary terrorism in her *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal* (2014). Peter Heehs has shown the trial of the Maniktala Bomb Case and other conspiracies in his work *The Bomb in Bengal: The rise of revolutionary terrorism in India 1900-1910* (1993). This work was evident in the way those trials were conducted and surveyed a considerable number of archival sources from which we can get an idea of how group rivalry was one of the problems in the politics of extremism.

By dividing the huge province of eastern India, it was a clear indication of the Government that, not only they want to divide the province but their real intention was to sow the seed of communalism between two communities, viz. Hindu and Muslim of united Bengal. Though this decision was a piece of sudden news to the common masses, as many historians say, it was not at all a matter of hurry. Sumit Sarkar shows how the seeds were sown since the Orissa Famine in 1866. The first hint of dividing the province was entrusting Assam to a Chief Commissioner and transferring Sylhet into it in spite of agitations. This was the first step toward the experimental procedure before the partition of Bengal. Proposals like transferring South Lushai Hills to Chittagong Division and later proposals to do the same to Dacca and Mymensingh were proving nothing but the hidden intention and planning of the Government to restructure the province in future days.⁵

Planning, debate and decision was just for the level of bureaucracy and made in acute secrecy. Being the loyal representative of Queen Victoria Lord Curzon was part of the old

⁵ Sarkar, Sumit. *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*. 2010. 8.

strategy of the game. The game that was duly played by his predecessor Lord Dalhousie; Queen Victoria's most loyal Governor General in India. Curzon was not an exception but rather a more advanced one. In chess, the Crown is always sitting idle but his/her Queen, two Bishops, two knights and two rooks march towards the opponent. Here in India, the game was not an exception. Curzon, being Royal Crown's most trusted, an acclaimed Victorian and a part of late nineteenth century British aristocracy, wished to imply his white man's burden and believed in *Pax Britannica*.

In 1901, the question of reconfiguring the Bengal boundaries was resurrected along with Sir Andrew Fraser's suggestions of restructuring a few districts of Bengal. Later in 1903 Fraser vehemently appealed with reference to his previous note that the Government must consider the readjustment of Mymensingh, Dacca and Chittagong division and also mention its political leverage. In the meantime, in another letter on December 3, 1903, Risley urged the transfer of the Chittagong division, Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam.⁶

Although he was new in this game, he was an important bishop of the board. One of his key contributions was the detailed and meticulous ethnographic study of the 'Castes and Tribes of India'. We need to remember the Government had already seen the turbulence in the North Eastern hills. They somewhat categorised the inhabitants as tribes, but their golden rule was yet to be implied; whenever they invested, intruded or invaded, the most important thing was the paperwork. This time was not an exception either. The report compiled by H.H Risley in the 'Bengal' section clearly mentioned the sheer difference in demography between the people of East Bengal and the Western part of Bengal. Before this report, he had produced his hypothesis based on scientific racial theory. He categorised Bengalis as the admixture of Mongoloid-Dravidians. His indication was that the inhabitants residing on the banks of Ganges were more civilized, following norms and etiquette rather than the inhabitants residing on the banks of the Padma, who were less mannered, arrogant and rigid. Not only that, his later point was more striking; the difference between dialect and culture.

As Tom Bottomore defines in his seminal work, *Elites and Society* about the definition of elites, "it is a seventh century term which describes commodities of particular excellence; and the usage was later extended to refer to superior social groups, such as prestigious military units or the higher ranks of military units or the higher ranks of nobility." If we describe the Governing elite or ruling elite; it is itself composed of distinct social groups. Bottomore quoted Pareto where he defined, 'upper stratum of society, the elite normally contains certain groups of people, not always very sharply defined, that are called aristocrats.' Also, Bottomore has mentioned Pareto's argument in the context of defining elites and non-elites. He made a clear division between these two contrasting sections of the society.⁷

⁶ Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 9.

⁷ Bottomore, Thomas B. *Elites and Society*. Routledge, 2016.

If we call the Battle of Plassey a watershed in the Eighteenth Century or a new departure from the old administrative structure in India, granting the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa striking the iron when it was hot. Getting the legal rights to generate revenue from the subjects, there was endless corruption and looting on a massive scale. But in London, the rumour on the embezzlements of East India company was quite familiar since 1765. As Alexander Dow, an Elizabethan Scottish aristocrat rightly observed “an ample field lay open before us. but we have appropriated revolution and war to history”. Truly the rest was history. In 1770, Bengal has seen a famine like never before. Two third of the population wiped out and the history remembers it by the Great Bengal Famine of *Chhiyattorer Manwantar*. By 1773 East India company had to take a harsh decision by passing a Regulating Act in House of Commons to put a bar on company’s embezzlements and mismanagement of staffs. But that too was not enough to put a chain on the greed of company’s misrule, by 1784, under a huge pressure the British Parliament’s House of Commons had to pass the Pitts India Act or the East India Company Act. The long title “An Act for the better Regulation and Management of the Affairs of the East India Company and of the British Possessions in India, and for establishing a Court of Judicature for the more speedy and effectual Trial of Persons accused of Offences committed in the East Indies” could not do the better regulation, so in 1793 the company appointed a war veteran of American war of Independence. Lord Cornwallis who had the fame of regulating the Permanent Settlement in his name, but Phillip Francis who originally did was in the dark. The Permanent Settlement did set a norm of monopoly of a new zamindar class who called themselves elites of Bengal. Initially there were few of them, but slowly a new rentier class created out of this new land revenue system. The new rentier class called themselves a zamindar and they were entrusted a duty of collecting land-revenue from the famine-stricken population with double rate and there started a new era of semi-colonisation of Bengali elites.⁸

Ruling elites and their *prajas*; Muslim peasants, non-Brahmin class: As Suranjan Das opened his argument in his magnum opus Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947, that the Census of India of 1872 revealed for the first time that merely half of the total population in Bengal were Muslims, most of them resides in the low-lying areas of eastern Bengal present day Bangladesh, erstwhile East Pakistan. Some important districts where Muslim peasants were dominant are, Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, Backerganj, Noakhali and Chittagong and more than one third of this population were Muslims. Most of them were employed by those Hindu Zamindar or landholding class and earning their livelihood as tenant farmers.⁹ As per Professor Das’s statistics, “In Mymensingh for instance, Muslims formed 70 per cent of the populace but owned only 16 per cent of the land; in Backerganj the figures were 64.8 percent respectively.”¹⁰ An estimate was assumed, “out of a cash rental of eighty lakhs

⁸ Guha, Ranajit. *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*. Orient BlackSwan and Permanent Black in Association with Ashoka University, 2017.

⁹ Das, Suranjan. *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*. Oxford University Press, 1993. 17.

¹⁰ Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*, 17.

shared by Zamindars and first grade tenure holders, half of the total sum went to just twenty-five Hindus of Saha, Nabashakh and Banik castes.” If we see the district wise survey, the interesting thing was that the district Dacca was historically ruled by a Nawab family viz. Muslim Zamindar whereas its neighbouring districts like Pabna, Barisal, Faridpur, Comilla and Khulna had their Hindu local ruling landholding families. But what the more interesting was, in Dacca subjects of the ruling Muslim elites were predominantly Hindu on the other hand, subjects of the neighbouring districts were predominantly Muslims. In Pabna district, the upper-caste Hindus were the main landholders who were 9 percent of the population and had their cruel monopoly over land ownership, whereas the Muslim peasants earned their livelihood as small cultivators and agricultural labourers, constantly suffering from the insecurity of the tenure and living at the mercy of their Hindu Zamindars.¹¹ As Professor Das cited a District Gazetteers from where the alarming situation of Muslim peasants can be traceable: “In the ordinary occupancy a *ryot* has as a rule no patta ; the only documents from which he can produce titles are generally rent receipts, and these do not show what land he holds.” The Hindu domination over Muslim peasants was a never-ending thing. Not only by Zamindari oppression but also Hindu *Sahukars* like Saha and Marwaris were infamous for their black hole of debt records of peasants. “The rates of interest varied from 24 to 50 per cent and sometimes were even higher than 100 percent.” These suffocating rates of interest were called ‘a severe drain’ on the resources of the agricultural population. Moreover, “Money-lenders also imposed additional subscriptions such as *Iswar Britti* for the upkeep of Hindu Idols,” which was unbearable for the religion who could not afford such polytheistic practice. As Mihir-O-Sudhakar a local newspaper reported, ‘Every year Muslim tenants are paying their creditors their dues, still, like Tennyson’s book, their debt goes on forever.’¹²

Discontent, anger was turning into frustrations when some radical *maulavis*, *huzurs* started to pay visits in remote villages of eastern Bengal during the eve of Bengal Partition. They were having religious gatherings, *jalsa* and used to ignite the local people against the tyrant zamindar. Needless to say, apart from addressing the economic deprivation by Hindu Zamindar, all gatherings and *jalsa* had one thing in common, all were oxidized by anti-Hindu sentiment, and discontent of the populace was wholeheartedly ready to accept it.

On the other hand, in the urban Bengal Muslims were in second position, good to say disadvantageous position. Only 15.3 percent of Muslims were literates in Calcutta, 1911 in comparison with 32 percent of Hindus.¹³ After the 1857’s great rebellion, Aligarh Anglo Oriental Movement and Sir Syed Ahmed’s influences were not very enough to energise the Indian Muslims to get western education. Rural Muslim subjects were more unprivileged and financially backward whereas urban Muslims were being educated under Calcutta Madrassa and University of Calcutta. Now the question arises over the claim over unity and

¹¹ Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*, 18.

¹² Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*, 19.

¹³ Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*, 19.

claim over united Bengal. During the anti-partition movement, the swadeshi upheavals were at its peak. Boycott of the foreign goods, burning clothes were happening every nook and corner of the metropolitan city. But did it really influence the rural peasant class who have no intentions to boycott foreign goods? The gap between them and the landholding class (those who were feeling threatened by the partition of the province and their zamindari in eastern Bengal) was increasing. The volunteers were forcing peasants to buy swadeshi goods made of *Khaadi/Khaddar* which was a bit expensive then. In some cases, communal riots happened between local peasants and swadeshi boys and over a couple of days, a political initiative had turned into a violent religious clash. Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned poet and a leading figure of the anti-partition movement, was vocal against these vile elements and flaws of the anti-partition movement and swadeshi dacoities. In his *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World), he strongly condemned the role of Hindu youths who belonged to upper caste well to do families and joined the movement not to protest for a noble cause instead, they attached to a violent clash with rural Muslim peasants who were even misguided by a few Muslim fanatics. But still, a question loomed over the debate, was the duty of maintaining peace and fluency of the movement entrusted only to Hindu youth? Was there no role of the Muslim subjects? Did they even try to maintain the bridge? Or was the other side of the bridge weakened by a few sections of elites?

Dacca Anusilan Samity at the age of bomb: On the 7th of August, 1911, trial no. 3 for January 1911, was the case bearing the name “Emperor versus Pulin Behari Das” had 43 names with the chief offender Pulin Behari Das. The judgement was sanctioned by W.S. Coutts, ESQ., I.C.S., Additional Session Judge, Dacca. As the judgement mentioned, “the 44 accused have been charged under section 121 A, Indian Penal Code. The charge was to wage war against His Majesty King-Emperor of India, and to deprive the King Emperor of the sovereignty of British India, and to over awe by means of criminal force or show of criminal force the Government of India by law established.” It shows the charge was clear that it was a sedition case.¹⁴ On 4th November, 1908, Pulin Behari Das was arrested under Regulation III of 1818 and on 14th December he was deported to Montgomery jail. In context of this case, on 11th December 1908, the Criminal Law Amendment Act XIV was passed, by this law a special bench of three judge of High Court can prosecute and trial of accused. There was no chance of appeal.

The case between Pulin Behary Das and others vs Emperor was quite an interesting. The main offender was produced in front of the judiciary, Pulin Bihari Das, a man who single-handedly formed an army under the banner of Dacca Anushilan Samiti. In Manikganj, Tangail, Mymensingh, Noakhali, Comilla, Sonargaon and Mahewardi Pargana Dacca Anusilan Samiti had full length branch.¹⁵ With the immediate effect after arresting him, the administration was quite shocked. Not because he was a big name like Barindra Kumar

¹⁴ “Emperor (versus) Pulin Behari Das 1911,” dated 1911, Political-Confidential, Serial. 50, File No. V.A. 50, West Bengal State Archives.

¹⁵ Amar Jiban Kahini, 251-262.

Ghosh or Aurobindo Ghose, but his organising skill to train local boys of Dacca and its suburbs astound the investigation officers. Not even that, in case of proceedings, the judiciary also had to mention that Anushilan Samiti in Dacca had their own motive to boost the Bengali race and give them martial training to reincarnate their valour.

“Barindra’s object in returning to Bengal was as he subsequently stated, to organize a revolutionary movement with the object of overturning the British Government in India by violent means. This object could only be attained after elaborate effort, of which the first stage would be secret conspiracy. It is probable that he had been attracted by stories of the exploits of secret societies in Europe; and it is certain that the idea of starting such organization in Bengal he devoted himself to working among English educated class to which he belonged, the *bhadralok* (respectable people). He had found among these a few associations organized for the promotion of physical culture.”

-Extract from chapter II, the beginning of a revolutionary movement in Bengal, Seditious Committee Report, 1918

The extract was from the famous report of the Seditious Committee, which was formed to analyse the revolutionary movements and their influence on later anti-British violence in India. At the beginning of the Bengal section, they started with Barindra Kumar Ghosh and his alliance with the *bhadralok* (the educated middle-class section among Bengalis). According to the British Intelligence report, the infamous revolutionary was charged under sections 121-A and 122 and transported to Cellular Jail, Andaman and Nicobar Island, for life. What is interesting here is the subtle difference between Barin and Pulin Bihari over their caste, economic background and most importantly, different geographic origin, viz, Dacca and Calcutta.

The first partition of Bengal was announced in July 1905 by Viceroy Lord Curzon and implemented on October 16, the same year. The government’s version was clear that the partition of Bengal was necessary and timely due to the huge size of the province and to maintain the efficiency and smoothness of any administrative decision. The reason behind this administrative decision was apparent to the political leaders. When the first Bengal partition was announced, people who have a minimum common sense could get the point that the administrative reason is not enough to hide the real political motive; the division between Hindus and Muslims, more precisely, the underlining division between Hindu-Brahmin landholding class and the Muslim agricultural class. Though the origin of this underlining division was started to formulate at the advent of Permanent Settlement by Lord Cornwallis, it became visible after the immediate effect of the Sepoy Mutiny. We need to remember Bengal had never experienced any religious clash in the colonial period before the twentieth century. Many scholars have argued this religious clash was even the result of economic extortion by Hindu zamindars. Anyway, if we come back to our point here, the Government knew the probability of otherness between the two communities, and they had no other plan but to use it as a pawn in their game. After the formal announcement, it was a massive shock to the upper class of the society who used to indulge the privilege by sitting

in Calcutta and ruling their *tehsils*, *zamindaris* in Dacca. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore and Ramendrasundar Tribedi were the first who took the initiative for the anti-partition movement later Surendranath and others joined.

Barindra Kumar Ghosh was born in England and came to India with his family after that. Having an influential sibling, his access to Bengali intelligentsia was relatively easy. There is a hint in the Sedition committee report that Barin is a man who never really thinks about his fellow comrades; if he comes in front of his career, he/she would have to pay the price. At the emergence, the initiative of the armed revolution was full of such people who were men of their own ideology. Sumit Sarkar even discussed the problem. The incident of failed attempt to assassinate Governor-General Fuller at Majaffarpur Bomb Outrage exposed the face of the Jugantar wing of the Bengal revolutionaries. But nationalist historians have always portrayed it as a part of glorious martyrdom which was nothing but an aggressive self-murder. They failed to understand the importance of this period as the era of sectional group rivalry and religious clashes in the name of the boycott. Their only intention was to show the movement as a significant resistance from the high pedestal of nationalism. Now we will unveil how did the figures like Pulin Behari Das and Aswini Dutt play a vital role in organising the youths of Bengal and waging war against the mighty British Empire. Not only that, it will be a process of excavation to find how the cult of Pulin Behari Das and his Dacca Anushilan Samiti attached in the conflict with Muslim fanatics and how did their activities affect the relation between Anushilan and Jugantar with special reference to the subtle division between East Bengal and western part of Bengal.

Pulin Behari Das: A lone wolf or A Forgotten Revolutionary?: At the advent of the Bengal Partition, the Nawab of Dacca invited Lord Curzon to show his allegiance and his Muslim subjects to the crown. Now I have discussed the role of pawns in chess boards when they think they are essential in the game. In most cases, they become part of a farsighted turn of the crown. Salimullah, the Nawab of Dacca was not an exception. During the Anti- Partition movement Lord Curzon accepted the invitation of the Nawab and paid his visit to Dacca. The natives of Dacca welcomed him wholeheartedly. Did they really welcome? As discussed earlier, the population of Dacca was mostly Hindu dominated while their Nawab was a Muslim. In the first place, the Nawab was not in favour of partition of the province, but after getting a handsome bribe he was convinced to give his support to the Empire. When Lord Curzon came, needless to say, Hindus were not so happy. Many protests, picketing and boycotts were being organised. On the other hand, a teenager, a student of Dacca College was searching for salvation. This salvation was nothing like any yogic salvation, rather it was a desire for making a strong body with well-quipped *lathi* skills. He was searching for a guru who could teach him lathi skill. Having failed to have proper training from Abbas Sardar (his old guru), Pulin was searching for another instructor. Professor Martaza, an Armenian, renowned sword and Lathi skilled instructor, came to Salimullah's Court. On this tour, Martaza showed Magic, fencing skills and circus skills. During this time, he was invited by professor P.K. Roy in the Dacca College field. Martaza delivered a speech to students. In the meantime, Pulin Behari and his friend

Bhupesh Nag proposed to Martaza and started to get training from him. Martaza was quite a rebellious person but never revealed that attitude in front of Nawab or British, rather he expressed his views to his students.¹⁶ But deep down Pulin Behari was experiencing a few hidden traits of hatred against Hindus inside Martaza's behaviour, his surroundings, which resulted his anti-muslim sentiments. Meanwhile physical practice, lathi and wrestling were arranging duly practiced by the students of Dacca Jagannath College. He felt there is a need to form a new wing of students who could lead the anti-partition movement, anti-British struggle for independence from the banks of Padma. The sheer negligence of the babu culture of Calcutta was not unknown to him. So, when Pramathanath Mitra and Bipin Chandra Pal came to Barishal to give a speech, he felt this was the right time to form a body and lead them at the front. Speeches by Pal and P. Mitter was somewhat ignited him and it was anti muslim also. Quoting from Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Mr P. Mitter has misquoted a few lines and said Muslims are barbaric religion, they are not on the side Hindus against the British rather with them (British Empire).¹⁷ His fear was not unnecessary though.

A few days later after establishing the Dacca wing Pulin Behari Das started giving training to young boys at another home at 50, Wari. According to the judgement file of the case against him for waging war against the King of England, the judicial department report stated, a was reported that Pulin Behari's home 50 Wari was got under attack by a group of Muslim goons. Local police reported there is no such evidence that any clash happened. On the basis of that report the Judicial department reached a conclusion that there was no provocation, it was Pulin babu who started everything.¹⁸

Group rivalry and the *agnijug*: Grouping or Daladali in Bengal was not new the early decades of twentieth century. It had a century old history as understood by S.N.Mukherjee. Daladali or grouping was always an important part of educated Bengali gentlemen of Bhadrakok section since, eighteenth centuries. Calcutta being the hub of Daladali, it ran all over the Bengali intelligentsia. Moreover, it had spread like a spider web through a nexus of political gurus or dadas. In the nineteenth century students of Hindoo College played a pivotal role in making the skeleton of Bengal Renaissance. Later through the initiatives of Bramho Samaj and many social reformers, Calcutta, knowingly or unknowingly became the centre of enlightenment. But it was all created by the Calcutta's intellectual's writings, songs, stories poem. In reality, all these intellectuals had their root to suburban areas of Bengal.¹⁹ In the late nineteenth century, East Bengal also became the centre of learning and processing knowledge. By the time of Bengal partition, there were many suburban press and newspapers who could be the mouthpiece of mufassil or suburban town. Dacca,

¹⁶ Das, Pulin Bihari. *Amar Jiban Kahini*. Edited. Amalendu De. Anushilan Samiti, 1987. 47.

¹⁷ Das, *Amar Jiban Kahini*, 60.

¹⁸ "Emperor (versus) Pulin Behari Das 1911," dated 1911, Political-Confidential, Serial. 50, File No. V.A. 50, West Bengal State Archives.

¹⁹ Mukherjee, S. N. "Daladali in Calcutta in the Nineteenth Century." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1975, pp. 59–80. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/311797>. Accessed 24 Jan. 2025.

Mymensingh, Rangpur, Barisal and Faridpur were all the places where people were awaiting eagerly to communicate with the world bypassing the Calcutta's high hopes. When Anusilan Samiti of Calcutta was found in 1902, Pulin Das and their associates never thought of its Dacca's wing, but when Bipin Chandra Pal and P. Mitter intervened, Pulin Behari took it's duty. Initially it was one organisation. There was no anti-lobbying as such. But the fraction in party started through Aurobindo's radical move. While working in Baroda Estate's education department Aurobindo Ghose identified a strong man named Jatindranath Banerjee. After resigning from Baroda estate, Aurobindo brought him in Calcutta and Jatindranath started mobilising like-minded people who are more into Aurobindo. The infamous conflict between the founder of Calcutta Anushilan Satish Chandra Basu and Jatindranath Banerjee led him to quit the path of revolution and join the ascetism.²⁰ A new wing emerged out under Jatindranath and Aurobindo's initiative but they were compelled to obey P. Mitter as their leader. Aurobindo was the invested himself to collect funds from different sources and Hemchandra Kanungo started its Medinipur wing separately. There was no co-relation with Dacca-Calcutta and Medinipur. Instructions used to send directly from Calcutta to Medinipur. Jatin Banerjees ideology was anti British too but his method had no discipline. So followers of P.Mitter were against the Banerjee's wing and overall his ideology. This led a grouping and daladali in the path of swadeshi movement in Bengal. Meanwhile, Barrister C.R. Das and P.Mitter supported Satish Chandra Basu's wing. But Bhupendranath Dutta and his other followers did not sit idle. They formed a new samiti named *Atmannoti Samiti*.²¹ The split was necessary. By 1906, the Calcutta wing divided with a new name Jugantar Dal and the old Calcutta wing remained Anushilan. The Dacca and its suburban wing became Dacca Anushilan Samiti and they also remained to their loyalty to Satish Basu and P. Mitter.²² Interestingly Atmannoti Samiti and Jugantar too was built in mistrust. As Hemchandra Kanungo shown in his *Banglay Biplab Prachesta*, that Barin Ghose and his followers were nothing but a citadel of lost hopes. His humbug ideas and hurried decisions in every aspect of revolution made the armed-insurrection suffered. Barin Ghose's high hopes and self-dignity did the first mistake. The Mujaffarpur bomb outrage exposed everything and Maniktala's Muraripukur garden house was searched. This bomb culture of Atmannoti samiti and Jugantar group was associated mainly in Calcutta's new intellectual group those who opposed ideas of Satish Chandra Basu's Anusilan Samiti. As Pulin Bihari Das, being the loyal commander of it's Dacca wing never had a disbelief on it's mother wing or P.Mitter's ideology of Lathi, Ju-jutsu and mock-fighting. The idea making strong body to build strong nation was in the first and foremost

²⁰ Satish Chandra Basu did not mention about this conflict but the rift was enough to weaken the Calcutta Anushilan party. See Bhupendranath Dutta, Bharater Dwitiya Swadhinata Sangram, pp182-183, cited in *Amar Jiban Kahini*, Pulin Bihari Das, edited Amalendu De, Anushilan Samiti, 1987.

²¹ *Amar Jiban Kahini*, 102-111.

²² Sachindranath Basu was the founder of Anusilan Samiti while Aurobindo with new ideas associated with radicalism founded Jugantar party with all enthusiastic boys from Calcutta and Medinipur.

duty of samiti but Jugantar patrika started bullying the Dacca wing that they have become coward and timid to make bombs rather they relied on swadeshi dacoity and lathi. They behaved like only bomb can find the solution of British Empire.

The rivalry ended in a very sad note. The *Anushilan* and *Jugantar* started fighting with words about their contribution to the revolution. As Anushilan Samiti said conducted a lot of Swadeshi Dacoity, Jugantar boasted later, that they did *Rodda Arms Dacoity* too, but this did not lead the movement farther, rather into the ashamed culture of grouping of educated middle class of Calcutta and Dacca. If we compare the organisational skill, Anushilan was far ahead of Jugantar. Not only in East Bengal and Assam, Anushilan Samiti spread their wing in Benaras and northern India in a very short span, while Jugantar was busy in their small fight between Barin Ghose and his opposition.²³

Conclusion: Many years later when Pulin Bihari wrote his autobiography ‘Amar Jiban Kahini’, his narrative was clear, it was a few Muslim goons who attacked his house at Dacca and it was provoked by Nawab Salimullah. In 1908, after many swadeshi dacoities, the government became furious to catch Pulin Behari. As per Judicial reports, IB intelligence reports, his samiti was being watched by detectives of the Bengal Police. One fine morning his *akhra* was raided and he was produced to Court and after that transferred to Montgomery jail. Getting released from there when he came back to Dacca his samiti’s library, activities were less. During 1906-1908 Dacca Anushilan had about 400 branches. Like many great battles, he had surrendered. He was transported to Andaman Cellular Jail. His understanding of his staying at Andaman was an eye-opener. Bhupendranath Dutta had even campaigned against the Dacca Anushilan. Pulin babu wrote that the initiative of revolution taken by East Bengali revolutionaries was backstabbed by the revolutionaries staying on the banks of Ganga. His indication was clear. For Aurobindo Ghosh and his brother’s immature thoughts it was the Swadeshi Movement, that paid a heavy price. Even the suspension of all revolutionary activities.

²³ *Amar Jiban Kahini*, 102-111.
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