Trends of Swadeshi and Boycott in Barak Valley

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Abstract

The present Barak-Surma valley had played an important part in the struggle for Indian Independence when the Swadeshi and boycott movement started in Bengal, the people of the Barak-Surma valley responded and started the movement against the British Government. The trends of Swadeshi and boycott movement in the valley were not unlike of Sylhet and other parts of Bengal. Swadeshi and boycott movements were going on in the valley right from the beginning. The people of Barak Valley, both the Hindus and the Muslims took active part in the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement under the leadership of Kamini Kumar Chanda of Silchar. With a spirit of nationalism, the people of Barak – Surma Valley protested against the partition of Bengal 1905. the trends of Swadeshi and Boycott Movement was to encourage Swadeshi goods and national education by boycotting foreign goods and foreign culture. That was immense on the part pf the people of Barak Valley. It was a training in self reliance, determination and sacrifice. It was for the first time that the people of the valley were able to draw large sections of the society in the active participation in national movement. The little nationalism of Barak Valley ultimately merged itself into the broad stream of great nationalism of India.

Keywords: Nationalism, Swadeshi, Boycott, Terrorism, Revolutionary, Vigilance, Trends.

Introduction

Assam was constituted into a separate province in 1874 and the district of Cachar, Sylhet and Goalpara were transformed from Bengal to new province. Bengal having been partitioned in 1874, the partition of 1905 may be termed as the second partition of Bengal [1].In Bengal cities and towns were stirred by Bankim Chattarjee’s Bande Mataram, Krishna Kumar Mitra’s Sanjibani, Surendranath’s The Bengalee, Bupendra Nath,s Jugantar, Aurobindo,s Bande Mataram and many other news papers injected the Bangalees with the spirit of nationalism and inspired them to resist foreign rule. Likewise in the Surma Valley, Sylhet Chronicle, Silchar Paridarshak, Sreebhoomi, weekly Chronicles played a commendable role in focusing the public and to champion the cause of Swadeshi and Boycott [2].

The above quotation displayed the rare qualities, which the leaders should have and gave a proper direction not only to the leaders but also to the common people.

To make the people aware of what should be adopted and what should be rejected, the weekly chronicle gives its view that “……We think an exception should be made in favor of raw materials we should not exclude raw materials although these may be foreign”[2]

The above quotation bears in itself the seeds of success, which could lead a boom in native enterprises. In case of cotton yarn, which is no doubt in a partially manufactured state but need not all together excluded from use for that reason? But in case of sugar which is largely used in the preparation of sweets and thriving industry is dependent upon it. It was through that the prohibition of the use of sweets made of sugar, albeit foreign is any part of Swadeshi Movement. The object of the movement is not the adoption of primitive methods or asceticism but encouragement of Indian industries.
So far as the organized action is concerned, care was taken to avoid false and indiscreet steps, which were likely to defeat the Swadeshi end in view. The following principles were suggested to adopt, to guide the working of this movement:

- As far as practical indigenous goods should be preferred to foreign goods.
- Both cost and quality will no doubt in many cases absolutely determine the choice of goods but it should be the endeavor of every patriotic man to work in the spirit of self-help and self-sacrifice.
- In case of those Indian manufactures, which can entirely take the place of foreign manufactures, slight variation as to cost and quality should not be taken in to consideration.
- Cheapness and quality should not altogether be neglected, as in that case no attempt will be made to improve Indian products.
- The prohibition of the use of foreign goods need not extended to those goods for which there are no Indian substitute in the market.
- Raw-materials should be excluded from the operation of the foregoing rules as it always should be our endeavor to improve our products by employing the best material available.
- It should form no part of the Swadeshi Movement to discourage the use of those Indian products in the preparation of which some foreign articles has been used.
- No attempt should be made to compensate Indian dealers who have foreign goods in their stock, except in cases where desire to use Indian goods have extended even to the masses and that only in the case of those articles who supply from indigenous product is practically unlimited.
- Whenever it is deemed advisable to purchase these foreign goods, they should not be uselessly destroyed but should be utilized in some way.
- Except in the very urgent cases indicated above, the economic force of the Swadeshi Movement should be allowed to work undisturbed.

These are only reasonable and legitimate principles of Swadeshi Movement and under the ordinary circumstances they ought to surface. Their operations must however be very slow and will not prove effective as a method of agitation against the Bengal partition[2].

When the first beam of nationalism dawned upon the eastern horizon, the Barak Valley threw open its door for its reception. In the Barak Valley, the political activity against British government had begun directly during the Swadeshi Movement. The apostle of the new era was Kamini Kumar Chanda. Since his joining in the Silchar Bar, he started political activities in the Barak Valley but at the same time continued to take part in the national programmes and attended the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress held at different places. Cachar, Sylhet and Goalpara districts of Assam were included in the Bengal Provincial Congress must be ethnic reason and Kamini Kumar Chanda was although an influential member of the Bengal Congress. The leaders of the National Congress were divided into two groups-extremists and moderates. The extremists like Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai wanted active resistance but the moderates led by Surendranath Banerjee believed in passive resistance. Kamini Kumar Chanda being an old co-worker of Surendranath Banerjee in the Students Association and a personal friend of Bipin Chandra Pal was an active link between the two and at times was successful in bringing the two giants of Indian national politics together. No wonder a man of high status in all India politics, Kamini Kumar Chanda was a real spirit behind the national activities [1] including Swadeshi Movement in the Barak Valley. The trends which were available in parts of Bengal were to be experienced in this valley also. Mainly Kamini Kumar Chanda set all these trends from the beginning of the anti-partition movement.

The people of Barak Valley both the Hindus and the Muslims took active part in the Swadeshi Movement under the leadership of Kamini Kumar Chanda. The people in the legal profession were not far from the movement. In the freedom movement of India, lawyer played an important role and the Barak Valley was in no exception. The Cachar Swadeshi Sabha was established in 1905 with Kamini Kumar Chanda as President and Abanti Nath Datta as the Secretary. Most of its members were from Silchar Bar Association. A massive campaign was carried out under the auspicious of Swadeshi Sabha in favour of anti-partition movement [4]. Mahendra Chandra Dutta, Kali Mohan Dev, Radha Roman Datta, Durga Sankar Datta, Negendra Chandra Datta, Dinanath Datta, Ram Tarak Bhattacharjee, Nur Muhammad Laskar, Kushiram Namasudra among others were the members of the executive committee. The Cachar Swadeshi Sabha successfully spearheaded the agitation in the Barak Valley and preached the Swadeshi ideals. Almost everyday protest meeting were organized and students made large scale bonfire of British goods in this boycott movement. In Sylhet the movement was highly successful and the repressive measures of the government could not in any way suppress the agitation. The Surma
Valley had a common response to the political programmes under the leadership of Bipin Chandra Pal, Kamini Kumar Chanda, Sundari Mohan Das, Shrish Chandra Datta, Satish Chandra Deb, Dulal Chandra Dey, Shymal Charan Deb and a host of other illustrious sons of Sribhumi [1]. Under their leadership Surma and Barak Valley responded equally with other parts of Bengal to the anti-partition movement.

**Trends of the Movement**

*Swadeshi* Movement i.e. movement for encouraging country made articles, first began at Malugram in the Silchar town and the resident of that word met in the firm of Dinanath Datta and took vows to use *Swadeshi* articles in 1905. *Suhrid Samiti* was established under the guidance of Radha Roman Datta, pleader who had worked hard to encourage the movement and to facilitate the sale of indigenous goods. The main object of the *Samiti* was to foster a more extended use of country made goods in preference to British manufactures. A mass meeting was held under the presidency of distinguished man of the town, Kamini Kumar Chandra M.A.B.L. under contemplation[3].

The people of the Surma Valley had a great role in the *Swadeshi* movement. The leading nationalist leaders of the Valley established the Surma Valley Association on 11th August 1906. This Association played a significant role in rousing political consciousness among the people of the Surma Valley. Of its earlier members mention may be made of Radha Binode Das, Sarada Charan Shyam, Brojolal Das Choudhury, Harish Chandra Roy, Bipin Chandra Pal, Raj kumar Banerjee and Brojendra Krishna Roy Choudhury. This association was established as enunciated in the fourth resolution of the first meeting of the Association (1906) ......With the avowed object of promoting the general welfare of the people of this Valley and taking practical steps for ameliorating the condition of the masses in matters of sanitation, agriculture and such other matters [2].

The *Swadeshi* Movement, which commenced as a protest against the partition of Bengal 1905 gave a massive awakening in the spirit of nationalism in the Barak-Surma Valley. In reality the Surma Valley Association provided the political forum of the nationalist leaders of the Surma and Barak Valley in the early decides of the 20th century. That the members of the Association were imbued with the spirit of nationalism is evident from the fact that the whole proceedings of the Surma Valley Conferences of 1906 and 1908 were filled with nationalist cries of Sankirtan and Bande-Mataram. The conference openly supported the establishment of national schools, *Swadeshi* Movement and physical training of the youths and the art of *lathi* and sword play [5].

Though the policy and programme of the association was intensely nationalistic, its nationalism did not degenerate into terrorism. Nor did it follow the policy of appeasing moderation; petition had no place in its deliberation. The people of Sylhet and Cachar because of their historical, linguistic and cultural oneness never felt the existence of the different political system. No wonder therefore Barak Valley and Sylhet were joint partners to the Surma Valley Political Conferences.

When the whole country was full with the tide of *Swadeshi* in the wake of the partition of Bengal, the members of the *Srihatta Swadeshi Sabak Samity* under the Presidentship of Sarada Charan Shyam decided to organize conference in the Surma Valley for spreading the ideas of *Swadeshi* Movement in both the districts of the valley [6] within an incredibly short time, the *Samiti* drew the attention of Bipin Chandra Pal, Kamini Kumar Chanda, renowned political leaders, enlightened Zamindars and Mirasdar, merchants and middle class intelligentsia of the valley.

By the middle of 1906, the *Srihatta Swadeshi Sebak Samiti* voluntarily liquidated itself to usher in the formation of the Surma Valley Conference [7]. The first session of the Surma Valley Political Conference held on 11th and 12th August, 1906 in the house of late Surya Kumar Das of Telehowr under the presidency of Kamini Kumar Chanda, was addressed by Bipin Chandra Pal [5]. A Big Pandal, specious enough to accommodate five hundred people was constructed with the help of Banka Bihari Das, a Zamindar of Sylhet. But actually one thousand visitors excluding the 235 delegates attended the session. Of the earlier members of the conference mentioned may be made of Bipin Chandra Pal, Shrish Chandra Dutta, Sarada Charan Shyam, Banka Bihari Das, Pramod Chandra Datta, Moulavi Idris Ali Choudhury, Kali Charan Pare, Sarat Chandra Choudhury, Sundari Mohan Das and others [7].

The Subject committee which was formed on August 1906 with 69 members declared that the Surma Valley Association was established with the avowed object of promoting general welfare of the people and taking practical steps for
organizing national life of the valley [2]. Extending its whole hearted support towards the *Swadeshi* Movement that was started for amelioration of the political and economic condition of the present Barak Valley, the subject committee passed the following resolutions:

- The first resolution mourned the death of Rama Kanta Roy and Umesh Chandra Bandapadhay.
- The second resolution appealed to the people to contribute to the famine founds of the various organization that were working for the relief of distress of the famine stricken people of Sylhet district. The contribution of the people of the Barak Valley was not negligible towards the Famine stricken people of Sylhet.

Next the subject committee appointed a committee later known as Central Committee with Sarada Charan Shyam as President, Radya Binode Das as Vice-President, Nikunja Bihari Datta as General Secretary, Satish Chandra Datta as Assistant Secretary and Ambica Charan Das as Treasurer. It was formed with a view to formulate the constitution of the Association. This committee divided the constitution of the Association. This committee divided the whole Surma-Barak Valley into a number of graded organization units in the following order

- Village Committee.
- Sub-divisional Committee.
- Central Committee.

Village committees were formed in village level and the representatives of village committees were to send to the Sub-divisional committees. The Central Committee was to be composed of the representatives of different Sub-divisional committees. The most important activities of these committees were the following:

- Improvement of the condition of the masses in matters of sanitation, education, industries, agriculture and such other matters.
- Appointment of preachers for the spread of *Swadeshi* Movement throughout the Valley.
- Establishment of Co-operative stores for the sale of indigenous goods.
- Collection of subscriptions and donations to meet the necessary expenses of the committee. And
- Establishment of National Schools [2].

Moreover one of the most important achievements of the first conference was the entrance of the people of the Surma-Barak Valley in the field of active work. Responding to the call of the Association, meetings were organized at Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulavi Bazar, Silchar, Karimganj and Badarpur on the anniversary of the anti-partition day (16th October) [8].

In both the valleys the observance was marked by the attendance of the Hindus and the Muslims as joint partners of the agitation. National songs were sung and processions were taken out accompanied by shouts of *Bande Mataram*. In some places mass prayers and *Rakhibandhan* were performed symbolizing the solidarity among the different communities. On the anniversary of the anti-partition day at Badarpur, the Hindus and Muslims both observed *Rakhibandhan* Ceremony and fasted for the whole day. In a public meeting at Moulavi Bazar, resolutions were passed renewing the *Swadeshi* vow and supporting the scheme of moving the authorities for placing the entire Bengalee speaking population under one administrative unit [9].

The Surma Valley Association kept up the agitation and strengthened people’s belief in *Swadeshi* and *Swaraj*. The frequent visit of Bipin Chandra Pal and the stirring speeches, he made at the meeting held at Habiganj, Baniachang, Badarpur, Silchar, Karimganj spread the message of *Swaraj* to the masses [2]. Bipin Chandra Pal asserted that it would be impossible to cheek the exploitation until and unless *Swaraj* was established. He did not advocate a war with the *Feringhe’s* but they must be driven to a corner and compelled to give the Indians what they wanted and this could only be effected by a boycott not alone of foreign cloth but of everything foreign. A vow should be taken not to serve the *Feringhi’s* and those who serve should be boycotted. To him *Swaraj* was the system where in the people made their own laws, decided what taxes were to be paid, how it was to be spent and appointed and controlled the state officials as the people of other countries did.

*Swadeshi* and boycott meetings were organized by the Surma Valley Association at several places and a *Swadshi* mission was started at Sylhet to propagate the message of *Swadeshi* amongst the masses in rural areas [9]. The people of the valley pledged to boycott British goods and use indigenous goods. Wholesale traders warned their retailers that the later on could not be supplied with tobacco and pulses in case they sold foreign salt. Cateress of the town boycott those merchants who stocked Liver Pool Salt. What was most significant was that several *Zamindars* through their agents called upon their tenants to give up the sale and purchase of foreign goods. The
Zamindar’s agents often combined with local people exercised coercion through the more effective and subtle weapon of social ostracism. In many places, merchants and traders voluntarily refrained from selling foreign goods. As a result, the demand for indigenous goods was on the increase and the sale of Liver Pool-Salt, Manchester-Cloth and other foreign goods were practically decreasing [1].

Responding to the call of the nationalist leaders of the Swadeshi Movement, a public pandal was constructed in an open field near the house of Dinanath Datta of Malugram in Silchar town and a volunteer team was organized under the leadership of Radhakishore Pande, Kedar Nath Sen and Kamini Kar to maintain discipline. This was a first ever mass gathering on political issue which had created a great stir in the Barak Valley. Bojendra Nath Ganguli of Mymensingh, who was specialized in Bipin Pal’s self-composed Lyrics, presented some Swadeshi songs in the public meeting. There was also some Chorus from Tagore besides Bande Mataram [2]. Ignoring the prohibitory orders of the authorities; the students of Silchar Government High School attended the meeting.

The National Congress in its Calcutta session, 1906 not only adorned the Swadeshi plan but for the first time in its history laid down Swaraj as its goal. Bipin Chandra Pal published Swaraj or self-rule by taking a lecture tour in the country. Through his speeches and writings in New India and Bande Mataram laid down that Swaraj cannot come by resolution and must be achieved by other means. By Swaraj he meant an absolute autonomy free from British control, that it will be the Swaraj of Indian people ant not of any section of it. His inflammatory speeches stirred the whole nation and the spirit of nationalism now acquired a dynamic character that was needed to offer a positive challenge to British rule. Swadeshi was an all India phenomena and wherever he addressed the meeting the people upheld the extremist method. So Bipin Chandra Pal’s activities posed a serious threat to the British and the government soon sent behind the prison bar. In October 1907 he was sentenced to six months imprisonment and sent to Boxer Jail. His absence created a great political crisis. The moderate leaders could not keep pace with the radical resolution of the Calcutta session and were all out for a change in the Congress policy. As a result in the Surat Session in 1907, held under the presidency of Rash Bihari Ghosh there was an open split in the Congress. The extremists now kept themselves out of the Congress for some time and pursued the Swadeshi plan more vigorously [1]. The extremists were also failed to organize an effective alternative party or to sustain the movement.

However, on 9th March 1908, Bipin Chandra Pal was released from Jail. He accorded a public reception at Calcutta and there was general illumination in his honour. The Easter Chronicle published from Karimganj, welcomed his release and referring to the recent crisis in the Congress, wrote in following way: ......The citadel of Moderation is yet averse to reconciliation and a constitution for the Congress is being hatched in secret. The expectant eye of our people is now upon the coming hero who is to guide us to our destination [2].

As excepted Bipin Chandra Pal immediately resumed his activities and undertook an extensive tour, first in the Surma Valley then in the Barak Valley. The Surma Valley Political Conference in its first session, which was held in Sylhet, was determined that a conference will also meet next year and accordingly the conference was publicly invited to hold its next sitting at Silchar. But more than a year was clasped and the general public has not yet heard whether there will be a second conference or not and when and where this is to take place. Naturally there has been much impatience of this delay and many people expressed their disappointments at this. The member of the Central Committee of the Surma Valley Association had been blamed for this. But the fact shows that the association had never slackened their effort to arrange for the next session of the conference [10]. Silchar however, was lacking in enthusiasm and when Bipin Chandra Pal visited Silchar at the time of Swadeshi Melo at Badarpur he expressed his opinion that under the peculiar political situation in the country when the political atmosphere was surcharged with electricity it would be in advisable to attempt to hold conference at Silchar during the rain, was therefore dropped.

Under these circumstances, the members of the Karimganj Sub-divisional Committee decided to invite the conference there. Accordingly the second session of Surma Valley Political Conference held its meeting in the house of Ramoni Mohan Das of Karimganj on 18th, 19th and 20th April 1908 [2]. It was a brilliant success, perhaps even more brilliant than previous session at Sylhet in August 1906. It was to the earnest and self-sacrificing devotion of the Karimganj
Sub-division of the Surma Valley Association headed by the eminent leader Rai Mohan Das that the success was mainly due.

The proceedings of the second conference held at Karimganj in 1908 provided a clear picture as to the nature and working of this Association. In his presidential address Radha Binode Das affirmed that the ideal of the Association was Swaraj as preached by Dadabhai Naoroji in the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress in 1906. He deplored the Surat split. He pointed out that Swadeshi was a divine dispassion. He was in favour of keeping the Hindu-Muslim unity intact. He called upon the members of the Association to bring out a team of dedicated workers to move about in the villages to preach the gospel of Swaraj, Swadeshi and Boycott.

The Surma Valley Political Conference in its second session which was held at Karimganj in 1908 extended its whole hearted support towards the Swadeshi Movement for the amelioration of the condition of the masses to enable them to live on their own strength. It resolved that attainment of Swaraj was the political goal of the conference and the only efficient means to reach that goal was the cultivation and development of unity and strength the people. It urges the Association to appoint preaches and to distribute pamphlets to inculcate in the masses the lesson on agriculture, industries and sanitation. The Association thus kept the Surma Valley abreast with nationalist throb and made it one of the most politically advanced areas in India. The physical training of some of the youth particularly to those from Habiganj and Sylhet is worthy to notice. The Habiganj volunteers extorted the administration of the delegates and visitors by their feasts of Lathi and sword play. Bipin Chandra Pal was supposed to come, & for the occasion, a large number of people, numbering over a thousand, gathered there to accord him reception. But disappointment was profound, when Bipin Chandra Pal, did not arrive, till the proceedings of the conference were almost over [11]. Aurobindo graced the occasion as chief guest.

The proceedings of the conference also provided a clear picture as to the nature and working of the Surma Valley Association. This conference again expressed its “heartfelt sympathy with the Swadeshi Movement and urged the inhabitants of the Surma Valley to more thoroughly adopt the policy of Boycott to support the vow for the use of Swadeshi goods and for the attainment of political liberty” [12]. Guidelines were given to the association to popularize the cult of Swadeshism.

It was to appoint preachers and distribute pamphlets for the education of the masses and thereby to move all old and young, rich and poor by one common sentiment, the sentiment of nationality. Secondly, a rigid system of social ostracism should be drawn up for excluding from society those who would use foreign cloth, sugar, salt or any other foreign articles where a country made substitute was available for it. Thirdly, a fund should be raised by collecting at least one rupee a year from those who would pay it willingly. Lastly, the system of Mustibiksha should be spread everywhere for it was to be a most successful means for collection of money and for carrying on Swadeshi propaganda [7]. These are the important resolutions resolved in the second session of the Surma Valley Political Conference that took place at Karimganj in the Brak Valley in 1908.

In 1909 the third session of the Surma Valley Political Conference was held at the village of Jalsuka of Habiganj with Sarat Chandra Choudhury, a poet and priest of nationalism in the chair. Aurobindo Ghosh graced the occasion as chief guest. The fiery and inspired speeches of Aurobindo Ghosh, Kamini Kumar Chanda and Ramoni Mohan Das added to the determination of the people to resist the British rule and to attain Swaraj. The entire valley was now in ferment. In the proceedings of the conference the spirit of radical nationalism ran high. The conference helped to work up the feeling all through the Valley to a high pitch of Swadeshi, self-help and national unity. ‘Unite and Work’ become the motto of the people. Rakhibandhan ceremony was revived as a symbol of Indian brother-hood. Physical exercise, Lathi and Sword play, emphasis on the teaching of Gita and the scheme of ‘Santan Organisation’ as outlined in Bankim Chandra’s Anandamath formed preparatory programme and supplied inspiration for younger section of the Valley [8]. Evidently the anti-partition agitation in the Surma Valley turned into a popular movement based on Swadeshi, boycott and national education.

In response to the clarion call of Bipin Chandra Pal to boycott government schools, forty students came out from their institutions. To cater the need of such students in October 1907. The Sylhet National School was established on voluntary contributions as Zamindar of Gouripur Rs. 500/-, Ramoni Mohan Das Rs. 500/- and Basanta Bairagi Rs. 300/ [13]. This school was started at the residence of Sachindra Chandra Singh, editor of the Weekly Chronicles. It had four buildings and playing close to Jinda Bazar. It had
Ayurvedic and Carpentry Classed following the Syllabus and examination laid down by the National Education Committee, Calcutta. The Circular issued by the government debarring students and teachers from participating in anti-British agitation led to the starting of Similar Schools at Habiganj, Srimangal, Baniachang and Lakhai.

These institutions which were looked upon by the official circles as the ‘hot bed of seditions’ exercised in their views the most pernicious influence over its students, teachers and students openly took part in organizing meetings. Processions and in picketing of shops selling foreign goods, political leaflets and pamphlets like Swadhin Barat and Bande Mataram were widely and regularly circulated among the students who were also required to commit to memory the patriotic songs of Bankim Chandra’s ‘Anandamath’. In an exhibition held at the Habiganj, National School in 1909 nitric acid and hydrochloric acid prepared by the students were shown and paintings on Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh and Ajit Singh were exhibited. Thus National Schools were used those on East Bengal as centre for spreading the agitation. Being alarmed at the increasing anti-British activities of the students, repressive measures were taken one after another by the government of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

One of the major achievements of Swadeshi age was the sudden emergence of Samiti or national volunteer movement in the national level and the present Barak Valley and Sylhet were in no exception in this regard. In Bengal, not less than five revolutionary societies sprung up; of these Anusilan Samiti Dacca and Suhrid of Mymensingh extended their activities by establishing in different parts of the province. The Suhrid Samiti at Sylhet was reported to have collected funds from the business community and threatened them with dire consequences if they indulged in the sale of foreign goods. Intelligence had also reached the government of the existence of a gun factory run by the Samiti in the north of Sylhet on the border of the Garo Hills; some members of the Samiti, it was believed by the official circles were involved in the Alipore Conspiracy case and three of its members were arrested in this connection [9]. The Jugantar and Anusilan Samiti had attracted many revolutionaries from Barak valley and Sylhet and the underground activities had shaken the government machinery in a positive manner. Among the prominent revolutionaries of the valley mention may be made of Shrish Chandra Datta, Basanta Das Purakayastha, Debendranath Choudhury, Jnanendra Chandra Dhar, Ramoni Mohan Roy, Upendra Roy, Monoranjan Singh, Mohini Barma who had formed Suhrid Samiti. The Tarun Sangha was ran by Upendra Dhar, Tara Kishore Bardhan, Kaliraman Bhattacherjee; Lila Nag, a well known revolutionary lady of Sylhet who had attained almost a legendary character, ran Sree Sanga [14]. Thus it was during the anti-partition movement revolutionary activities began in the Valley.

Apart from these, some religious institutions had played significant role in the history of the revolutionary movement in the valley. Among these religious institutions maintain may be made of the Arunachal Ashram, near Silchar founded by Gurudas Choudhury later Dayananda Swam. It had two branches-Gauri Gauranga Ashram at Dinajpur and Jagatshi Ashram at Baniachang in the Moulavi Bazar Sub-division, district of Sylhet. The Ashram had a mouth piece of its own, the Proja Sakti published under the editorship of Mahendra Nath De at Habiganj. Apparently the Ashrams were religious and charitable organisations but the government considers these as “disreputable institutions”, “a nest of immorality”, nuisance to the villagers and a hunt of sedition mongers masquerading as Sadhu. The Ashrams were no doubt the rendezvous of the young men and women having firm faith in Swadeshi and Swaraj.

The Ashram at Arunachal and Baniachang were suspected to have published and circulate revolutionary literature of the Yugantar type. When a search was made on both on 28th April 1910 nothing was found of criminal or seditious nature; yet these were believed to be suspicious institutions demanding watchful vigilance. Police suspicion was deepened when Dayananda declared “we are not under the government, we have cut off all connection between the king and the subject [9]. Matters came to a head on 5th July 1912, when on the pretext of rescuing a minor boy alleged to have kidnapped by the Ashramites, the police raided the Jagatshi Ashrom. On the scuffle that followed between the police and the Sadhus, a police officer was hit by a Trishul (Trideal). The police resorted to firing and a bullet struck Mohendra Nath De, the editor of the Proja Sakti, who succumbed to his injuries. The main reason behind the raid was that on 3rd June 1912, Thakur Dayananda publicly issued a statement where he asked the people for non-cooperation with the British government.
Soon after this a big party of the armed police led by top European officials made a planned raid midnight swoop upon the Ashrams. The Ashrams were cordoned and members both men and women were brutally tortured and several rounds of shoot were fired. Mahendranath Dey was ultimately passed away in Sylhet jail. Altogether 58 men and 28 women and 10 boys and girls were arrested and sent to Moulavi Bazar. Thakur Dayananada was imprisoned for 1 ½ years. The arrest and imprisonment of Dayananda and some of his followers raised strom of protests in the press and platform alike. The Bengalee questioned the justification of firing and the Amrit Bazar Patrika demanded a full and open enquiry. Anonymous letters threatening severe reprisals were issued to Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet Sub-divisional officer, Moulavi Bazar and several others unless Dayananda and his followers were released forthwith [9]. The Commissioner of the Surma Valley instituted an enquiry due to heavy pressure. Patriotic lawyer of Karimganj Debendranath Datta favored the side of Dayananda and his followers. But the commission supported the seditious act of the government. The revolutionaries of Surma Valley burst with anger. They planned to murder G. Gordon, the Judge of this incident. The task was taken up by the revolutionaries of Anusilan Samiti of Surma-Barak Valley. When the revolutionary Jogesh Chakraborty went to kill Gordon, got himself killed when the bomb accidentally exploded before time [15].

Beside this there were some other revolutionary personalities who had a great significant role in the history of the revolutionary movement. Special mention may be made of Sushil Sen, Hem Sen and Biren Sen and Nagendranath Datta. Sushil Sen, a resident of Baniachang in Sylhet came to Calcutta. He went to attend the hearing of the criminal case against Bipin Chandra Pal pending in the Court of the Presidency Magistrate, Calcutta. The Courtroom was packed with visitors and in a class with the sergeant who was behaving roughly while controlling the crowd. Sushil Sen came to blows. Magistrate Mr. Kingsford ordered whipping on Sushil Sen. The whip on the tender skin of the teen-ager Sushil Sen lashed the heart of resurgent Bengal to avenge the wrong, the movement chose the path of violence. Khudiram in his attempt of kill Kingsford who was since transferred to Mazzafarpur, became the first martyr on the gallows. Sushil Sen’s other two brothers Hem Sen and Biren Sen also joined the revolutionary movements and Biren Sen was convicted in the Alipore Bomb case and transferred to Andaman Jail. Sushil Sen sacrificed his life and died a martyr though unhonoured and unsung [8].

Another martyr from Sylhet whose name may be mentioned for the proud record of his sacrifice was Nagendra Nath Datta alias Girijada, son of a Sunamganj lawyer. He was incharge of the terrorist organization in North India after Sri Subash Chandra Bosh left for Japan. Nagendra Nath Datta was arrested and died in Agra Prison. His portrait was been placed among martyrs in the Mahajati Sadan, Calcutta. Some of the notable revolution leaders worked incognito in Sylhet and found shatter in some Indian owned tea estates. Training in the use of rifles and revolver was given to the young members by them [2]. Thus the revolutionary personalities had played a great role against the British government during the Swadeshi and boycott movement in the Surma-Barak Valley.

The British government took various repressive measures to suppress the anti-partition movement in the valley. One of the most important repressive measures followed by the British was ‘Divide and Rule’ by which they sought to detract large sections of the Mohammedans who had willingly participated in the Swadeshi Movement. Partisan and communal attitude of the rulers led to estrangement of relationship between the two communities of the valley. At the initial stage the Mohammedans made a common cause with the Hindus and joined the movement but due to efforts of the British they gradually began to cut themselves adrift from such agitation. Muslim Associations like Anjuman-I-Islamia, Silchar, Sylhet Anjuman, Mohammedan Association of Moulavi Bazar, Anjuman-I-Itehad of Habiganj took part in the Pro-Partition agitation [9]. The Anjuman-I-Islamia of Silchar sent delegates to attend partition meeting of Dacca organized by the Provincial Mohammedan Association of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Similar meetings were organized by a section of Mohammedans at Moulavi Bazar, Habiganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet [14]. However, these communal agitations did not to a great extent, flare up in the Surma Valley district Sylhet and Cachar mainly because prominent Muslim leaders remained unconcerned with the pre-partition agitation. But since 1910 nationalist movement of the Surma Valley crushed by repressive measures went underground and terrorist outrages increased [9].

The British government also took another repressive measure to prevent the students from participating in the anti-partition movement.
Before Fuller's taking over charge as Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, R.W. Carlyle, the Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal sent a confidential circular to the District Magistrate and Collectors directing them to take stern action educational institutions if their management did not prevent their students from participating in anti-governmental agitations. Similar circulars followed in quick succession including one, which prohibited the shouting of Bande Mataram and the holding of political and quasi-political meetings. Disciplinary actions against teachers and management of educational institutions were taken; many students were jailed, fined and expelled from their institutions. When the movement took a serious turn in certain areas of Eastern Bengal, the government smelt sedition everywhere. Meetings and processions were banned, editors of newspapers were imprisoned and political leaders were deported [2]. Thus government adopted all possible measures to suppress students' participation in the anti-partition movement which gradually dragged them into the movement for Swaraj.

In spirit of violent opposition against the partition, British Government remained adamant. Government thought they would be able to crush the movement by adopting oppressive measures and a policy of 'Divide and Rule'. But the movement did not die; rather its character changed. Soon terrorism raised its head. Secret revolutionary societies were formed and members of these societies advocated the cult of the bomb. This alarmed the Government. Government tried to satisfy the people by passing the Morley-Minto Reform Act in 1909. By this act certain political concessions were given to the Indians. But it failed to satisfy the people. Ultimately a time came when the Government realized that the only way to resist the movement was to revoke the partition. So on 12 December 1911, the Government declared the modification of the Partition. Bihar, Chotonagpur and Orissa were constituted into Province under a Lieutenant Governor. Assam including Surma Valley and Goalpara was reverted to Chief Commissionership and the rest of Bengal was constituted into a Province under a Governor. In 1912, the Capital of India shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. And the new arrangements were immediately carried into effect [1]. Eventually, the annulment of the partition was only partial. The Surma Valley district-Cachar, Sylhet, Goalpara were again transferred to Assam. The public leaders in Surma Valley, therefore, continued to press their demand for transfer of Barak Valley and Sylhet to Bengal. The prominent leaders of the Barak-Surma Valley like Brojendra Narayan Choudhury, Rai Bahadur Girish Chandra Nag, Rai Bahadur Ramani Mohan Das of Karimganj and others formed the Sylhet Bengal Re-Union League [2] and started their movement. Therefore, it is clear that the trends in the Barak Valley were not different from the Surma Valley in particular and other part of Bengal in general.

Reference

2. Ibid. 22 April, 1908.p. 12-16,189,256,257,258,260,263.
10. Singh Sachindra Chandra (ed), op cit, 12th February, 1908.
11. Singh, Sachindra Chandra (ed), op cit, 22nd April, 1908.
12. Ibid, 29th April, 1908.
13. Reports on the National Schools in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Pp. 35-36.