

CHAPTER \_ II

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ROY AN ARDENT NATIONALIST.

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When Narendranath was growing up, Bengal was passing through a ferment. The ferment reached its high point during the days of the agitation against the partition of Bengal which took place in 1905. But the rumblings of the same had begun to be heard much earlier. As a matter of fact, the partition could be said to be the British Government's clumsy answer to the ferment. It had hoped to contain the ferment by partitioning the troublesome province. But the result was exactly the opposite, and the ferment was felt country wide. It began in the closing years of the 19th century and was born out of disillusionment with the results of the politics of representation and petitions and constitutional agitation, the growing poverty of the masses and the unemployment of educated youths and revival of faith in the nation and its religion. The last factor which took the form of religious nationalism was the major force which in these days inspired a large number of brave young men to engage themselves in revolutionary activities for the liberation of the motherland.

The idea of the mother land was evoked by Bankimchandra Chatterji by his famous novel Ananda Math. It gripped the imagination of the young men and Vande Mataram became their war

cry. They wanted to be the Sanyasins of the novel dedicated to the task of the liberation of the mother. Another important factor which influenced his thought and action was Swami Vivekanand who after his triumphant return from the United States of America became the most powerful spokesman of the religious nationalism in the form of resurrected spiritual Hinduism. In ' India in Transition ' M. N. Roy has described the role that Swami Vivekanand played during this most disturbed period in the history of India.

It is the goal of Indias freedom which drew Naren in the revolutionary movement in 1905. Narendranath used to attend anti-partition meetings held frequently in Calcutta along with his two friends, Harikumar Chakravarty and Saileshwar Bose. Once the three friends invited the celebrated nationalist leader, Surendranath Banerjee to Kodalia and arranged a meeting with him. For that political activity they were rusticated from the school; the order which was withdrawn and they were allowed to appear for the Entrance Examination. Naren was an avid reader of Bhagvad Gita, Anand Math of Bankim Chatterji, Bhavani Mandir of Aurobindo Ghosh and of other revolutionary literature of the period. But what impressed him most were the books of Swami Vivekananda.

Naren and his friends then joined the Anushilan Samitee, an organisation established in Calcutta in 1902 for physical, mental and moral regeneration of Bengali youths. In a short while it developed an inner or underground wing which became the centre of revolutionary activities all over Bengal. In course of time similar organisations were set up in many other towns, some as branches and others as independent centres. The most prominent among the latter was the Anushilan Samitee of Dacca. Each Samitee was under one leader. Rigorous rules of admission were enforced, strict discipline was maintained and effective steps were taken to preserve the secrecy of operation. The Government and police were all along suspicious about the functioning Samitees, but they were unable to take any action against them as their ostensible activities were lawful, and because of the association with them of a number of prominent public men like C. R. Das and others. By 1908 however they had enough evidence in their hand to connect the Samitees with political dacoities and murders as a result number of raids and searches that were carried out and thus they moved against them by declaring them unlawful organisations. The Calcutta Anushilan Samitee was declared illegal in 1908. Along with it a number of other Samitees were also declared illegal; which came as a big blow to the revolutionary movement.

Soon after joining the revolutionary movement Naren was initiated in the art of shooting and bomb making. Bullets and bombs were the main instruments of the revolutionaries. They were to be used for terrorising British officers, for punishing defectors from the ranks and Indian collaborators, for awakening and enthusing the people and for armed insurrection and the freedom of the motherland. It was only a few revolutionaries who visualised the last goal. They drew their inspiration from Aurobindo Ghosh and prominent among them were Jatindranath Mukharjee and Naren. Both had worked together in a number of revolutionary ventures.

Roy had committed the first political dacoity in the province in order to secure funds for the revolutionary activities under the leadership of Jatin Mukharjee. Roy had already accepted Jatin as his leader. The dacoity was committed at the Chingripota Railway station on Dec. 6, 1907. The station master was assaulted and money in the safe of his office was taken away. Roy absconded after the dacoity but was arrested a few days later. However he was released on bail. In the application for bail before the Police Magistrate of Sealdah in Calcutta, the lawyer Babu Promotho Nath Mukharjee stated that " The youth was a student of the Bengal Technical Institute and passed

the Entrance Examination of the National College and got a medal."<sup>1</sup> In the couple of years that followed Roy committed several political dacoities, but little definite information is available about them. The only information available is about the dacoity at Netra, near Diamond Harbour in the district of 24 paraganas. It was committed on April 25, 1909. After collecting about Rs. 2,000/- Roy is reported to have told the owner of the house " We are only borrowing the money to drive the British away." He was arrested in connection with the dacoity. He was released on bail and then he absconded.<sup>2</sup>

Living as a fugitive, Roy spent most of his time in Howrah and Sibpur. Anushilan Samitee had been banned by this time; Aurobindo Ghosh had retired from politics; Barin Ghosh and others had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The revolutionary movement was therefore in disarray. It fell to the lot of Naren to get together the scattered elements, revive their confidence and re-organise their ranks. He did this under the leadership of Jatin Mukharjee. He was the organiser who moved from place to place and met the active workers; while Jatin provided the inspiration and the rallying centre. The organisation that grew out of it was known as the Jugantar Group. All this brought Roy very close to Jatin Mukharjee.

1. Sameron, Roy. The Restless Brahmin, p. 39, Calcutta. Allied Publishers, 1976.

2. Ibid., p. 42.

Sameron Roy states the following about Naren's work and thinking ; " while in Howrah, Naren carried on political discussions with various groups and was planning guerilla type warfare and other means to drive the British out of this country. Nirvan Swami who met Naren frequently in those days and was later put in charge of conducting the defence case in the Howrah Conspiracy case as an absconding accused, said " Naren's political thinking was much ahead of others and he was intensely a political revolutionary." He further said " Naren held socialistic views and never mixed religion with politics." Naren used to talk about what kind of government he wanted in replacement of the British Government and he thought of a " People's Government " as distinct from the government of privileged few, and he thought the only way that such a government of privileged few, and he thought the only way that such a government could be formed was through the revolutionary means of attainment of freedom. Bhupati Mazumdar also averred that Naren was our leader during those days and discussed politics " in a much more advanced way than most of us."<sup>3</sup>

The Howrah Sibpur Conspiracy case was instituted early in 1910. There were in all 46 accused in the case including Naren and Jatin Mukharjee. They were arrested on

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3. Ibid., p. 42.

January 29. The magisterial inquiry commenced on March 4, The magistrate committed them for trial before a special Tribunal of the High Court on July 20. The charge against the accused was that they " between the Christain years of 1905 and 1910, both inclusive at Sibpur, in the District of Howrah and at other places in British India, did conspire with one another and with other persons... to wage war against His Majesty the King Emperor and deprive the King Emperor of the sovereignty of British India and to overawe by means of criminal force the Government of India by law established and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code." An attempt was made to link the newspaper Jugantar also with the conspiracy as since 1907 it was under the control of Jatin Mukharjee's Group.<sup>4</sup>

The judgement of the Special Tribunal was delivered by the Chief Justice of the High Court on April 19, 1911. " Of the 46 persons originally sent up one died, one became insane, and five were acquitted or discharged in the course of the hearing. Of the remaining 39 the Court acquitted 33 convicting only six men who had been already sentenced in the Haludbari case."<sup>5</sup>

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4. Roy, M.N. Men I met., p. 47, Bombay : Lalvani Publishing House, 1968.

5. Campbell Ker, James. Political Trouble in India 1907-1917, Calcutta : Editions Indian, 1973.



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