

## **Riddles of Surendranath Banerjea: A Critique of His Role and Activities for the Masses of Bengal**

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**Abstract:** Surendranath Banerjea, a legend was once hailed as the “uncrowned King of Bengal” following his stewardship of anti-partition agitation and the swadeshi movement. As an orator, his reputation was unrivalled. His role in ushering in Local Self-Government in Bengal is an indelible chapter of history. However, this essay examines briefly the role he played as a public leader in: (1) (a) implementing compulsory education in Bengal while he was Minister of Local Self-Government; and (b) in the establishment of a proposed university at Dhaka; (2) recruitment to British Army in 1914; and (3) government’s initiative for the abolition of trial by jury. This also aims at highlighting the paradox of the anti-partition of Bengal agitation and the Swadeshi movement. The essay also explores the causes embracing issues of welfare and the development of the masses he espoused. One of his staunchest followers placed him on a high pedestal for reasons almost unknown to the common man and shied by historiographers: “যদিও সুরেন্দ্রনাথ বঙ্কুতায়ই সাধারণের নিকট পরিচিত, আমি কিন্তু বঙ্কু সুরেন্দ্রনাথকে সুরেন্দ্রনাথই বলি না। আমি ব্রাহ্মণ সুরেন্দ্রনাথকে চিনি।”

“He opposed strenuously compulsory elementary education. As Minister of Local Self-Government, he did not implement Compulsory Primary Education Act 1919. To a section of Bengalees, he was rashtraguru, who, strangely, opposed establishment of Dhaka University, exhibiting a dichotomy of his personality — one social and the other political. Under political garb, he pursued objectives for promoting social interests dear to his heart for a limited section to benefit. With the outbreak of World War-I in 1914, the British authorities appealed to “the people of Bengal” to join the army and fight for the Empire. Surendranath jumped into recruitment drive, urging exclusively the “respectable classes” and “better classes” comprising Brahman, Baidya and Kayastha who aggregated 24,45,318 and accounted for just 5.2% of Bengal to join the Imperial Army. He excluded a staggering 4,38,60,324 population [4,63,05,642-24,45,318] from his ambit of attention against the British appeal

*“to the people of Bengal.” His exclusion of 94.8% of the people of Bengal militated against and dented badly his pan-India image. Sir Charles Elliot, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal issued a notification on October 26, 1892, suspending trial by jury in Bengal. Surendranath crossed the sword with him and launched a movement against the official move. One of the District Magistrates reported that though the jury convicted under section 302 IPC every year during the period in his district under consideration, “in none of these cases was the accused a Brahmin, or a “bhadro or respectable.” He also observed that “the fate of a Mussalman or a low caste Hindus exteris peribus would not be the same at the hands of a jury as that of a bhadro; and that notably that Brahman would enjoy a certainty of acquittal.”*

**Keywords:** Anti-partition agitation, Public leader, Rashtraguru, Bhadro, Brahman

#### PART-I

##### **Surendranath Banerjea fought for perpetuating trial by jury**

Surendranath Banerjea began his career as an ICS in 1871 in the district of Sylhet. He was dismissed for his inability to try a case as a probationary Assistant Magistrate, though he was vested with first-class magisterial powers by the Government of Bengal. No other Indian was dismissed from ICS and suffered the misfortune to lose his heaven-born service too within 13 months of joining. The present article deals with hard facts of his long political life during which promoted social objectives with a political coating which militated against the aims and ideals formulated himself. The narrative hereunder may be unfamiliar to readers as fiction has been woven around him to present him in glowing colour.

The British rulers introduced the system of trial by jury in India. The jury comprised a group of people who specialized in the field of law. They were entrusted with the task of producing a decision on the submission of relevant facts in a case under trial. In this system, it is the Judge who explains to the jury the applicable laws in a particular case and with that, the jury has to apply them in the evidence and determine a verdict.

In course of time, the trial by jury had degenerated and developed a vested interest for a small section from which persons were drafted for the jury. The Government of India had initiated public consultation in 1890 as the system did not prove effective in the administration of justice with fairness and repression of crimes. In the large province of Bengal, trial by jury prevailed in eight districts, e.g., 24-Parganas, Hooghly, Howrah, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Nadia, Dacca, and Patna. Offences under Chapters VIII, XI, XVI, XVII, and XVIII of the Indian Penal Code came before the juries.<sup>1</sup> Chapter VIII of IPC covered offences against public tranquility; Chap. XI offences of false evidence and offence against public justice; Chap. XVI covered offences

affecting the human body; Chap. XVII offences against the property; and Chap. XVIII offences relating to documents and Trade or Property Marks.<sup>2</sup> It is clarified that in the event of a difference of opinion between the jury and the District and Sessions Judge in the trial of cases under these chapters of IPC, the latter could report it to the High Court for re-trial and verdict.

Surendranath Banerjea was a great votary of trial by jury. Maharaja of Burdwan sought the cooperation of Surendranath Banerjea for raising a public memorial in honour of Sir Charles Elliott, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (in office 1890-1895) before his retirement. He flatly declined to associate himself with the proposal. Sir Elliott had, Surendranath felt, wrecked his reputation by the Jury notification issued on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1892 whereunder trial by jury system was suspended in Bengal.<sup>3</sup> He expressed his strong reservation saying, "The public cannot honour such a ruler. To join such a movement would be for me to commit political suicide."<sup>4</sup> The Lieutenant Governor was a great friend of the Maharaja of Burdwan. It is appropriate to understand here briefly the role jury played in the suppression of crime or the selective protection of criminals in Bengal, nay, across India. Surendranath Banerjea and Sisir Kumar Ghosh launched an agitation against the move for abolition of the jury which was heeded by the colonial authorities and ultimately the suspension was revoked on April 21, 1897. In addition, the jurisdiction of the jury was extended to many more districts.<sup>5</sup> It was an unfortunate development and strangely Surendranath did not claim credit for reasons which are not difficult to guess. The jury system was harmful for the masses. The trial by jury, which favoured a tiny minority, caused grave injustice to the common man. Such inference must be substantiated with specific instances from unchallengeable records.

G. Toynbee, Officiating Commissioner of Burdwan Division in a letter of 31<sup>st</sup> December 1880 to the Secretary, Government of Bengal reported that Romesh Chandra Dutta, ICS, District Magistrate, Burdwan was critical of trial by jury. "During the short time that I have in Burdwan," wrote Dutta, "the jury system has worked in a manner most detrimental to the interest of justice and also to repression of crime." R. C. Dutta, notably, was one of the batchmates of Surendranath Banerjea in ICS. So, Indians with conscience were divided for and against the system of the jury trial. Those who opposed the repeal of the jury were an integral part of vested interest.

We may now probe why did nonetheless Surendranath Banerjea launch an agitation in Bengal against the official move to repeal trial by jury? It becomes an important issue for any researcher to appreciate and analyze why the two great friends—R. C. Datta and S. N. Banerjea who cleared and qualified in ICS examinations together in 1869. They did not worship at the same time over the issue of the jury. An illustration of a few facts based on ground realities regarding trial by jury in the Burdwan Division and elsewhere first may help us understand the entire perspective.

### Nature and character trial by jury in Bengal

H. G. Cooke, District Magistrate, Hooghly in a letter (no. 1275 dated 9<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> August 1890) to the Commissioner, Burdwan reported shocking and embarrassing facts and ground realities about jury trials.

“There is a reluctance on the part of the native juryman to convict where there was any possibility of a capital sentence; but I believe that this reluctance is not extended uniformly in all cases, and that is not connected, save in rare cases, with any delicacy about taking human life as such. There is not one year, in the period under consideration, in which a Hooghly jury has not convicted under section 302 Indian Penal Code; but I venture to say that in none of these cases was the accused a Brahmin, or even a member of that ill-defined class who are styled as *bhadro* or respectable. I feel confident that the fate of a Mussalman or a low caste Hindus *exteris peribus* would not be the same at the hands of a jury as that of a *bhadro*; and that notably that Brahman would enjoy a certainty of acquittal.”<sup>1</sup>

The opinion of the District Magistrate, Hooghly left us in no doubt that the system of trial by jury in Hooghly had, under the shadow and influence of caste, degenerated into a fertile field of discrimination at the hands of the jurymen. The District Magistrate, Nadia, E. G. Glazier had voiced identical concerns in his report to the Commissioner of Presidency Division. According to him,

“An ordinary jury is averse to convict in a case of a capital crime or when a man of high caste or social position would be liable to punishment, and miscarriage of justice constantly occurs. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the abolition of the system would be most distasteful to the educated classes of Bengal.”<sup>2</sup>

The Magistrate of Nadia brought to fore two dark sides connected to trial by jury—the first, accused belonging to the high caste enjoyed soft corner of the jurymen; second, on the same ground or influence miscarriage of justice was a feature of the jury system. At the same time, he had anticipated that ‘the educated classes of Bengal’ would be blatantly opposed to any move for revocation of the system of trial by jury. Accused belonging to the higher castes, as detailed by District Magistrate, Hooghly, had gained unmerited benefit out of jury trial it created vested interest.

That leaders like Surendranath Banerjea were likely to agitate to safeguard vested interest against the move for revocation of trial by jury was in contemplation of Nadia Magistrate Glazier. In the nineteenth-century education was confined, by and large, within the upper castes of Bengal. Surendranath was their leader in decrying the move for abolition of the jury. He was not inspired by the spirit of magnanimity nor universal consideration; rather he was provoked by parochial affiliation or narrow-

mindedness.

Section 302 deals with the punishment for murder. The frank and unambiguous official communication of the Hooghly District Magistrate brings out something, not at all known to the common man. Let us remember that the District Magistrate, in the colonial era, was empowered by law to try cases under section 302 IPC and award punishment. Separation of Power later divested the Magistrate of the power for trial cases under 302 IPC. Section 303 of the Indian Penal Code deals with the punishment of an accused of murder. The code says, "whoever commits murder shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine."

Caste in the relevant times had, as the letter of the District Magistrate exposed, overshadowed the process of trial by jury in Hooghly. In contents and facts, the District Officer was unambiguous that the jurymen had no problem in awarding death sentences if and when the accused were 'Mussalman or a low caste Hindus.' But when the accused were not Mussalman or low caste Hindus, their fate differed at the hands of the Hooghly jury. The Magistrate made it plain that they were averse against passing a capital sentence against Brahman or bhadralok.

Cooke also stated categorically that the Brahman or bhadralok accused of "arson, perjury, forgery, false charge, kidnapping, adultery and mischief with explosives" too enjoyed the same liberal treatment at the hands of the jury. The implication herein is also simultaneously clear that the jurymen were not at all averse to punishing for these offences if the accused were "Mussalman or a low caste Hindus."<sup>3</sup>

The jury, however, was against awarding capital punishment if the accused were not 'Mussalman or a low caste Hindus'. Hooghly District Magistrate marshalled an apt illustration of discrimination in the administration of justice by the jurymen. "One Khan Chand Boid, who shot a brother constable dead from pique, because his victim, a low-caste man", wrote the Magistrate, "had thrown him in a wrestle. This man was acquitted by a jury, because he was a Brahmin—that fact having been urged in his defence by his pleader. The High Court transported him for life."<sup>4</sup>

So, the culture of trial by jury attained distinctive discriminatory character on account of the caste of the accused in Hooghly as the case proves without any shadow of a doubt. The Brahmin, though accused of murder and under section 303 IPC punishment of an accused of murder was death, or imprisonment for life was acquitted by Hooghly jury. The High Court, on the other hand, transported the murderer for life.

The motive and reasons why Surendranath Banerjea launched a movement directed against the repeal of jury trials are conspicuous. Dwelling on his experience, T. D. Beighton, District and Sessions Judge, Dacca reported to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal as hereunder-

"A Brahmin sepoy, in one of the Bengal Native Infantry regiments, ran 'amuck', shot several of his comrades, barricaded himself in a hut in the centre of the Native Infantry lines with his rifle and several rounds of ammunition, and threatened death to anyone. He was finally seized by an English officer who crept into the hut from behind. The murder had been committed in the sight of nearly the whole regiment, and a number of eye witnesses were examined. The accused had literally no defence, but on a single plea of not guilty in the Sessions Court the jury acquitted him."<sup>5</sup>

Caste was a very invincible shield to derive mileage in heinous crimes. The murderer in the instant case was blindly favoured by the jury not because there was any merit in his case but because he was by caste a Brahmin. Such sheer favouritism of the jurymen made the jury obnoxious in the administration of justice across India. In a Minute, dated January 16, 1891, Justice Ameer Ali of Calcutta High Court observed:

"In case of homicide, even when the crime is of atrocious character, Indian jurors are notoriously averse to bringing in a verdict which would subject the accused to capital punishment. In other cases, e. g., dacoity, rape, etc. race-feelings and popular prejudices, besides other influences, play a great part. In certain districts popular prejudice and race-feelings have, owing to a variety of circumstances, lately become more accentuated with the result that gross miscarriage of justice has often been occasioned by trials of juries."<sup>6</sup>

If the Calcutta High Court Judge was circumspect, the Sessions Judge of Hyderabad in Sind was explicit and frank. In his letter (No. 3, of November 28, 1892), to the Judicial Commissioner in Sind, he wrote:

"...there is in Sind a considerable degree of animosity between Hindus and Mahomedans. Hindu would not consent to being tried by a Mahomedan jury; no Mahomedan would expect justice from a Hindu jury."<sup>7</sup>

The animosity between the two dominant communities had a long history there in Sind to make trial by jury questionable. Interestingly, the Hyderabad Sessions Judge was of the view that since "Education is still in a backward state" the jury acted in an unsatisfactory manner. But such an argument does not hold good in the case of the Hooghly district which was not in a backward state. Close to Calcutta, the Capital of the British Empire, Hooghly was educationally a progressive state. Nonetheless, caste played a subversive role to render the jury system a black spot for the imperial administration. Since a few castes there harvested unmerited benefits because of jurymen, this law was detrimental to the suppression of crime. The heinous crimes committed by upper castes were protected and thereby the accused benefited thereby. The administration of imperial justice in India appeared to

the low castes and Muslims lacked fairness. This ultimately created sense of grievance in a vast section of the public.

The District Magistrate, Patna described more specifically the reasons for the failure of trial by jury. He wrote,

"The system fails markedly in cases of great importance, such as those in which a high caste commits any crime, in cases of murder where there is a possibility of a capital sentence being passed, and in such cases of forgery or cognate offences where the accused holds a respectable position in society. The juror who would convict a fellow countryman in such cases as these would be a bold man."<sup>8</sup>

Bold man in the system of trial by jury, we have seen, was wanting in Hooghly. But we may also ask, "did vested interest wreck the system of trial by jury in cases where the accused belonged to the Brahmin or bhadrakol caste?" Cooke had proved the point irrefutably. The Magistrate of Patna focused on other means and ways for subversion of trial that "deliberate attempts are made in all cases to bribe the jury and he has grounds for his opinion. Perhaps bribes are not paid so freely to jurymen as they are by persons who ought to be on the jury list in order to escape enrolment."<sup>9</sup>

J. White, District Magistrate, Benares, a letter bearing no. 4/XVII-29 dated July 10, 1890, to the Secretary, Government of North-Western Provinces and Oudh, disclosed how jurymen are detrimental to the administration of justice:

"(1) juries are averse to finding verdicts of guilty against wealthy or high caste criminals; and (2) juries are very ready to find verdicts of guilty against low caste men..."<sup>10</sup>

The real implication and ramifications of "popular prejudice and race-feelings" were exposed by the colonial bureaucracy to the rock-bottom leaving nothing to imagine. The native patrons of the jury system and jurymen were blind to see the drawbacks. One of the principal causes which militated against the efficiency of the system, according to the Commissioner, Patna Division was "Caste and religious prejudice, which lead to actual sympathy with some crimes."<sup>11</sup> Suppression and repression of crimes, in such a situation, would be out of the question. Trial by jury then became a cause of vested interests for certain castes.

An instance of the deplorable role caste played in the administration of criminal justice came to light from Assam Valley Districts. C. J. Lyall, a former Judge of the Assam Valley Districts reported a case of murder of a Rajbanshi, tried by him, to the Registrar of Calcutta High Court. Though the murder took place under his jurisdiction, the trial was held, assisted by a jury, at Gauhati. The trial was held at Gauhati on an application by the Deputy Commissioner, stating that it was impossible to obtain an impartial jury owing to the

influence of the prisoners in the Goalpara district. The apprehension of subversion of justice by the administration is a key role caste played across India.

The prisoners were charged with several offences, the most important being the murder of one Umakanta Rajbansi, with minor charges of voluntarily causing hurt to extract a confession of restoration of stolen property and wrongful confinement, and the jury acquitted them all under all the charges. The Deputy Commissioner agreed with the jury that the evidence was not sufficient to establish the gravest charge, that of murder; but he considered that it was sufficient to establish, "at least against the principal men among the accused, Kali Kishore Chakravarti and Ghana Kanta Chakravarti, the minor, but still very serious, charges under sections 330 and 342 of the Indian Penal Code."

From the statements of the accused persons, the Deputy Commissioner was doubtless that a theft had taken place at the house of Bhim Nath Chakravarti on the 6th January, and that on the 7th January a meeting of Brahmans was held at Bhim Nath's house, at which the deceased Umakanta, with the witnesses Darbaru and Puhatu, was put through a close examination as to his suspected complicity in the theft. On the afternoon of 7th January, Umakanta died in an out-house in Bhim Nath's homestead by his throat being cut. The accused person said that he committed suicide. The prosecution attempted to prove that he was murdered. Of the most probable of these two stories, the former Sessions judge took the hypothesis of suicide, which appeared "inconceivable to me that a person of Umakanta's race and position in life would have killed himself as described unless he had been subjected to some sort of ill-treatment of the nature detailed by the witnesses Puhatu and Darbaru." If on the other band, "he was murdered, it seems to me still more probable that before proceeding to that extremity, the accused Brahmans could have tried some means of bringing him to confess or restore the property. The jury concluded that the case was one got up by the police."

But the Deputy Commissioner Lyall did not share the view of the jury. According to him, there was throughout the case "no suggestion that the witnesses were animated by ill-will towards the Brahmans, their superiors in the station, and their masters and landlords." The trial judge accepted the police view in the case and reported twice that it was "a suicide." Considering the influence and character of the accused, the demeanour of the witnesses did not appear to Lyall to be that of persons who were telling a fabricated tale, though he thought that "they were sensible of the enormity they were committing in giving evidence at all against persons of so sacred a character as the accused Brahmans. It was only to be expected, considering the caste and status of the accused that the police would meet with great difficulties in establishing a case against them, and he admitted frankly that he had discovered nothing which led him to suppose that the case has been dealt



with by the investigating officer irregularly or unusually.<sup>12</sup>

In this view, the Deputy Commissioner believed that Umakanta Rajbanshi was murdered and, therefore, he submitted the case for consideration of the Calcutta High Court. The case was still pending at the time the instant report of Assam Valley districts was submitted to the government.

Before we pass over the trial by jury, a sensational case drawn from Hooghly merits our attention.

#### **Tarakeswar Affair**

At Tarakeswar under Hooghly, a teenage Elokeshi was murdered by her husband Nobin Chandra Banerjee. The murderer had slashed a fisher-cutter (in Bengali 'boti') and she died on the spot. Her husband Nobin Chandra Banerjee reported to the police instantly and confessed the crime.

The Mahanta had abused Elokeshi sexually by offering allurements. A sex scandal involving the Shiva temple in Hooghly district exploded in the public domain in 1873. The Mahanta was the head of the "popular and prosperous" Hindu shrine. Accused to Nobin Banerjee, a government employee in the Military Press, Calcutta and the Mahanta were charged by police for the crime. Egged on by her stepmother and connived by her father, Elokeshi approached the Mahanta for obtaining medicine for childbirth. Nobin beheaded his adulterous wife. The jury acquitted Nobin, who pleaded not guilty, for the heinous crime but the Sessions Court overturned it and referred its trial to the Calcutta High Court. Nobin was sentenced to life and the Mahant to three years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 2000 by the High Court.

To frustrate the sentence of the Calcutta High Court, three public petitions, signed by 10,000 persons who were "acknowledged leaders of the native society" of Calcutta; "some gentlemen from Mymensingh" district in East Bengal and endorsed by Maharani Swarnamoyee of Cossimbazar Raj family were submitted to the Government. In consequence, Nobin Banerjee, serving two years of sentence, was released in 1875 from jail.

The question of caste over the coldblooded murder of Elokeshi by her husband assumed enormous prominence in the high noon of the so-called renaissance of Bengal a section that is tireless in taking pride. Within three years of the gory slaughter of a young housewife, Surendranath Banerjee went hyperbole in claiming as well as proclaiming in a public meeting at Calcutta that "educated sentiment of the country has been marshalled against it (caste).... The institution of caste is (then) doomed. The decree of fate has been pronounced against it (caste)." A miracle had taken place in Bengal that caste had died in three years if we go by what Surendranath Banerjee wanted his audience to believe. Do we?

Historian Tanika Sarkar pinpointed the reason for the public activism. "Nobin was the poor and helpless Brahman... He was incidentally a purer Kulin Brahman more exalted in caste terms than the Mahanta whose precise caste status in his pre-ascetic life was in some doubt. Some thought that the unquestioned public sympathy for Nobin derived from this."<sup>13</sup> She was explicit that the murderer's caste status as a Kulin Brahman had galvanized Bengal into launching a movement for saving Nobin Chandra Banerjee from the ignominy of a jail sentence. The Kulin status of the convict, in the eye of the law, guaranteed no escape from punishment. But the administration of Empress Queen Elizabeth ultimately showed magnanimity in the face of public pressure created by an appeal for mercy preferred by the acknowledged leaders of the native society. Would the same campaigners do what they did for convicted Nobin, was he someone else lower in the caste hierarchy, goes a question-begging?<sup>14</sup>

Their attitude towards the Mahanta, the co-accused though an inferior Brahman amply testifies against miscarriage of justice in trial by jury. The "acknowledged leaders of the native society" and others who endorsed the public petition showed scant respect for the dignity of and right to life of teenage Elokeshi. Maharani Swarnamoyee's endorsement of the mercy petition was sought by the calculative leaders to turn the scale of favour for the convict. Her endorsement ensured the high weightage for the attention of the colonial rulers for reasons touched briefly below.

The Viceroy Lord Mayo (office 1879-1872) had conferred on Swarnamoyee Devi, "the title of Maharani."<sup>15</sup> Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, George Campbell described her as "the best female subject of the Queen in Bengal Presidency" on August 20th, 1872. The Lt. Governor "paid the Maharani a visit at Cossimbazar."<sup>16</sup> These developments preceded the murder of Elokeshi.

In munificence and charity, Maharani Swarnamoyee was without parallel in nineteenth-century Bengal. As a "friend of education," she made an enormous contribution to education. Maharani Swarnamoyee showered her charity for the promotion of public instruction in the district after district across Bengal, as per Bengal Government annual reports in the 70s of the nineteenth century. The Maharani, we can refer to, with benefit, what Charles Edward Buckland, ICS recorded about her liberal charities.

"It would be impossible to recount all the Maharani's benefactions for public purposes. Her purse was always open to applicants for any good cause. She continued her husband's policy of assisting literary efforts and Education. The principal objects of her munificence were—The Berhampore water-works, Rs. 1,50,000; the North Bengal Famine, 1,25,000; the Hostel for female medical students, Rs. 1,00,000; the Campbell Medical school Hostel for female students, Rs. 10,000; a number of other institutions and charities received handsome donations from her hand. She supported Berhampore College for Rs.

16,000 to Rs. 20,000 a year, and set apart Rs. 11,000 for giving winter clothes to the poor. Her smaller gifts were innumerable.”<sup>17</sup>

Her zamindari was sprawling, embracing districts of Murshidabad, Rajshahi, Pabna, Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Bogra, Faridpur, Jessore, Nadia, Burdwan, Howrah, and the 24-Parganas in Bengal and Ghazipur and Azimgarh in the N. W. Provinces (present Uttar Pradesh).<sup>18</sup>

Some cases in which Brahmins were convicted by juries mostly composed of Hindus are cited in Appendix-A below. A significant note in the official report while presenting the appendix asserted speaks that “Sessions cases in which accused are Brahmins are, it is well known, comparatively rare.”<sup>19</sup> Official assertion as this raises grave doubts about the impartiality and integrity of the administration of justice in Bengal.

#### APPENDIX A

N. B.— Sessions cases in which accused are Brahmins are, it is well known, comparatively rare. This list has been drawn only of such cases with reference to the Law Reports and newspapers.

*From 1862 to 1872.*

1. Sital Ghosal, Convicted by a jury at 24-Parganas of perjury. As reported in 2 W. R., 60. Verdict confirmed on appeal. Rookmini Kant Mazumdar, Convicted by a jury at Murshidabad of perjury. Verdict affirmed appeal. Confirmed on appeal 3. W.R.
2. Rookmini Kant Mazumdar, Convicted by a jury in Assam of attempting to receive a bride. Conviction quashed by the High Court. W. R., 69
3. Sital Chunder Bagchi, Convicted by a jury in Assam of attempting to receive a bride. Conviction quashed by High Court. 3 W. R. 69
4. Dina Nath Banerji, Convicted at Nadia of forgery. Verdict upheld. 4 W. R. 25
5. Baikunt Nath Banerji, Convicted at Burdwan of perjury. The conviction was set aside by the High Court. 5. W.R. 72
6. Bissoranjan Mukerji, Convicted at Hooghly of rape and culpable homicide. Verdict affirmed. 6 W. R., 76. Verdict upheld
7. Suprassana Ghosal, Convicted at Nadia of wrongful confinement. Verdict upheld. 6 W.R., 88
8. Kali Charam Ganguli, Convicted of perjury in Assam. Verdict upheld. 7. W.R. 2
9. Chandi Charan Banerji, Convicted in Assam of bribery. Verdict upheld. 6. W. R. 94
10. Joy Kishto Goswamy, Convicted of theft at Murshidabad. Verdict upheld. 7 W. R. 22

11. Baikant Nath Banerji, Convicted of forgery, 24-Parganas. Conviction reversed on appeal. 10 W.R., 7
12. Hurry Prosad Ganguly, Convicted at Nadia of hurt to extort confession. Verdict upheld. 14 W.R., 69
13. Kashi Chunder Chukerburty, Convicted by a Dacca jury of a minor offence in a murder case. Prisoner did not appeal, but High Court as a Court of Revision acquitted him. See R.W., 57
14. Ramsadoy Chukervartti, convicted of murder by a Hindu jury at Hooghly and sentenced to death. Acquitted by the High Court on appeal. 20 W. R., 19
15. Nim Chand Mukerji, Convicted at Howrah of hurt to extort confession. Verdict upheld on appeal. 20 W. R., 14
16. Prosonno Moitra, convicted of forgery at Burdwan. Verdict upheld. 23 W. B., 56.16. Gopal Chunder Mukerji, Convicted by a Hindu jury of murder (24-Parganas Session) in a case in which the only possible sentence would have been capital.
17. Gopal Chunder Mukerji, Convicted by a Hindu jury of murder (24. Farganas Sessions) in a case in which the only possible sentence would have been capital. The Judge differed, and in reference to High Court the prisoner was acquitted. This was known as the Shapur case.
18. Ashutosh Chukerturty, 24-Parganas, convicted by a Hindu jury in 1878 of murder and sentenced to death. Sentence confirmed.
19. Hurry Churn Chukerburty, Jury at Hooghly convicted of grievous hurt in 1883. New trial ordered on appeal. 10 I.L.R., Cal.140
20. Matangini Devi, Convicted at Nadia in 1886 of murder of her husband. Sentenced to transportation for life.
21. Kedar Nath Chatterji, Convicted of murder also der by a Hindu jury at Nadia in 1892 of murder and sentenced to death. Sentence confirmed by High court. Prisoner hanged.
22. Ram Charan Mukerji, Convicted of murder by a Hindu jury at Howrah in 1891 and sentenced to death by the Judge. Prisoner acquitted by the High Court.
23. Mokund Bhattacharji, Convicted at Hooghly of murder and sentenced to death in 1892 and prisoner hanged.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the preponderance of Brahmin convicts in trial by juries in Bengal, we have noted how Surendranath Banerjea launched a movement for not only the continuation of the same system but also its expansion in other districts. This surely establishes a fact undoubtedly that a section of people, as accused, benefitted in trial by jury. Though the system was not defective or partial many of the men drafted as jurors were susceptible to influences of various factors as highlighted in the above

narrative, the movement of led Surendranath Banerjea against jury was deemed to be favourable to the Brahmins and the bhadrakal castes in particular, over others. This was perhaps why he uncrowned king had crossed the sword with Lieutenant-Governor Elliot.

Indian intelligentsia not excluding Bengalees are deeply aggrieved that the colonial rulers were highly apprehensive of entrusting the administration of justice to Indian hands whom they considered incompetent and incapable. The above brief account may be a window to understand why and how Indians/Bengalees made themselves obnoxious on this behalf. We may cite here what Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar observed about the Bengalees employed as native law officers. His observation in Bengali culled from his work runs as below:

“কিছুকাল পূর্বে, প্রত্যেক জিলায়, যথাসম্ভব ব্যবস্থা দিবার জন্য, এক একজন ধর্মশাস্ত্রজ্ঞ পণ্ডিত নিযুক্ত ছিলেন। তাহাঁরা, সচরাচর আদালতের জজ পণ্ডিত বলিয়া উল্লিখিত হইতেন। এই পণ্ডিতচূড়ামণি, বেতনভোগী ধর্মাবতারেরা অত্যন্ত উৎকোচগ্রাহী অর্থাৎ ঘুসখোর ছিলেন, এবং ব্যবস্থাদান বিষয়ে, যার পর নাই, যথেষ্টাচার করিতেন, শাস্ত্র ও ধর্মের দিকে ভুলিয়াও দৃষ্টিপাত করিতেন না। বাদী ও বিবাদী, উভয়েই, ধর্মাবতার পণ্ডিত মহারাজের আনুগত্য করিতে আরম্ভ করিতেন। উভয়ের মধ্যে যে পক্ষ, উৎকোচের আধিক্য ও তদীয় আত্মীয়গণের অনুরোধ দ্বারা, তাঁহাকে বশীভূত করিতে পারিতেন, সেই পক্ষের অভিমত ব্যবস্থাই তদীয় লেখনী হইতে বহির্গত হইত। পণ্ডিতগণের ঈদৃশ্য যথেষ্টাচার দর্শনে বিরক্ত হইয়া, রাজপুরুষেরা আদালতের জন্য পণ্ডিতের পদ একেবারে রহিত করিয়া দিয়াছেন।”

East India Company involved Indians in the administration of justice in Bengal. Regulation XII of 1793 empowered the Company to appoint Native Law Officers, both Hindus and Muslims. The former was called Pandit and the latter Kazi. The Pandits in Bengal were fondly called Judge Pandit. The Regulation mandated the appointment of men of “integrity and well-versed in the laws...to discharge their duty with uprightness.” They were employed to facilitate “the due administration of justice.” However, their unrestrained depravity, misconduct, ferocious cupidity and wholesale corruption brought irredeemable disgrace compelling the authorities to go on the back foot. None other than Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, who launched vigorous campaigns for social reforms in nineteenth-century Bengal, had roundly condemned the personnel appointed as judge pandit for the administration of justice of Bengal.

In a Bengali tract, Vidyasagar says that “sometime back every district had a pandit well versed in scriptures to advise the courts for adjudication of cases as per law. They were known as judge pandits of the courts. But these salaried men were extremely corrupt, greedy, perverse and remorselessly unscrupulous. They advised the presiding judges (who were alien citizens) in such manners as to serve and enhance their own (judge pandits’) selfish ends only. In other words, the pandits were given to bribe and never followed the

letter and spirit of scriptures in the discharge of their duties. Though some of them were reputed scholars in scriptures, the pandit advised the presiding judge of the court in favour of either of the parties whoever greased their palms with the higher number of bribes to win the case. Their unfettered perversity, misconduct and immoral behaviour embarrassed the government so much so that the law itself was repealed, and the office of judge pandit was abolished.<sup>3</sup>

Perception of corruption, perjury, perversity etc. so widely plagued the administration of justice that led ultimately to the repeal of the office of native law officers. The judge pandits were mostly, if not entirely, Brahmans. There was no secular law to enforce or administer. They interpreted shastras as guiding the courts. Noticeably, the venerable and upright Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar did not mention the greed, corruption and immorality of the Kazi.

## PART-II

### Harbinger of the darkness

Education in this country has been the vagaries of malice nursed by upper-caste against minorities and lower caste accessing light at all. They were uncompromising persecutors who submerged Indian society in overpowering darkness through illiteracy. A sweeping generalization may be apt to describe the case. The more a man opposed literacy of the masses of lower social strata, the greater has been his fame and standing in the public life of India!

A fierce nationalist, Bal Gangadhar Tilak opposed extension of 'liberal education' for the masses, arguing that the reformers committed 'a grave error' as 'English education encouraged the people to defy the caste restrictions and 'the spread of English education among the natives will bring down their caste system.' The immense potential of English education to destroy the caste system makes it the most potential, if not enviable, weapon in Indian hands to get rid of the vicious caste cancer. No greater contribution to Indian civilization for equality, liberty, fraternity, peace, prosperity, and happiness of 1.3 billion Indians could be imagined if English education alone could cure cancer responsible for immense social ills and evils.

Tilak asserted that caste was the basis of the Hindu nation and that it was extremely essential to preserve it to assist the process of nation-building. The prince of Indian nationalism was terribly afraid of the spread of light save and except in a microscopic few in the society. Tilak and his ilk forgot that education is a human right and giving education to people irrespective of caste, creed and sex is the most pious duty. The only enemy of humanity could be blind to such a pious duty.

When social reformer Ranade and his compatriots established a school for girls in 1884, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the high priest of orthodoxy fulminated that 'education would make women immoral'.<sup>4</sup> He did not have faith in girls,

who, he believed, would become "immoral" on receiving "education." Tilak's yardstick prescription of moral women presupposed illiteracy, wasn't it?

Gandhi too followed Tilak's footprints with avidity to begin his political odyssey in India. The 'Hind Swaraj or 'Indian Home Rule' published in 1910, propounded his own puerile brand of philosophy, as quoted below, on the question of compulsory primary education.

"What do you propose to do by giving him (peasant) a knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness? It is not necessary to make this education compulsory. Our ancient school system is enough...We consider your modern school to be useless."<sup>2</sup>

He extolled the virtues of the ancient school system, i. e., tols and Pathshalas in the same breath. The tols and Pathshalas, as seminaries of Sanskrit learning, which were a thriving cottage industry in Bengal, dished out verses under the garb of scriptures and succeeded in perpetuating superstition and orthodoxy over the masses with malefic grip, advocating entitlement of education strictly on caste line which had, we cannot forget or overlook, the disenfranchised vast majority to receive an education. Can there be any doubt that the ancient school system turned India into a nation of educational destitution? Gandhiji's admiration for the ancient school system applied a divine gloss over exclusion of the lower social strata from the system of literacy which was dear for ages to the orthodox Hindus. Upon this vicious attitudinal outburst in such an important issue of human development and progress, someone might have discovered the streak of the spiritual glow of a 'mahatma' in his obscurantism. Nobody could attain greatness with such an uncivil attitude towards education in his formative years under the sun, save and except in India.

The point may better be illustrated, by citing the celebrated Bengali novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterjee how Sanskrit verses with sinister motives were composed in tols and Pathshalas of Bengal and propagated as also popularised with immoral objectives to push and deceive people.

“আমিষাসবসৌরভ্যহীনং যস্য মুখং ভবেৎ।  
প্রায়শ্চিত্তী স বর্জ্যাশ্চ পশুরেব ন সংশয়ঃ॥

The novelist himself rendered the meaning: Anyone who, according to Lord Mahadeva, does not smell wine and flesh round the clock is undoubtedly a beast.

Under the pseudonym of Anila Debi, novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterjee wrote an article that exposed the extent to which the immoral content of Sanskrit verses could embrace. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee hereafter added that such verses were composed in hundreds and propagated as well as passed off as sacred texts of the ancient era. The verse, according to the novelist, implies:

“চব্বিশ ঘণ্টা মুখে মদ-মাংসের সুগন্ধ না থাকিলে সে একটা অস্বস্তি জানোয়ারের সামিল। এ কথা ভগবান মহাদেব বলিয়া দিয়াছেন। হিন্দুর শাস্ত্ররাশি (এমন) অধঃপাতিত হইয়াছে। নিছক নিজের সুবিধার জন্য কত যে রাশি রাশি মিথ্যা উপন্যাস রচিত এবং অনুপ্রবিষ্ট হইয়া হিন্দুর শাস্ত্র ও সমাজকে ভারাক্রান্ত করিয়াছে, কত অসত্য যে বেনামীতে প্রাচীনতার ছাপ মাখিয়া ভগবানের অনুশাসন বলিয়া প্রতিষ্ঠা লাভ করিয়াছে, তাহার সীমা পরিসীমা নাই। জিজ্ঞাসা করি, ইহাকে মান্য করাও কি হিন্দুশাস্ত্রের প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা করা?”

Society is being misled and debased, according to the novelist, by Sanskrit verses which cannot be respected. Without offence to Gandhiji, we must assert that his obscurantist views merited to be consigned to the trashcan without a second thought. People with sick minds only could view it as a pious idea for progress and the onward march of any nation.

#### **Surendranath Banerjea, a curse for mass education in Bengal**

The rashtraguru was inimical to the universalization of education whereas parochial and exclusionary for high education. An assertion as this about Surendranath Banerjea will surely be viewed with strong disfavour by a section of Bengalees indeed. So, the reasons and factors for the contention merit a critical probe.

The boon of high education was turned into a curse for Bengalees when opportunity furnished itself to those who sang paeans for it. Reacting to reforms for University Education initiated by Lord Curzon, Surendranath had observed,

“I had been an educationist all my life, and I naturally felt a deep interest in the educational problem. Of the many disservices which Lord Curzon had done to India, his so-called reform of the universities was the most far-reaching in its consequences.”<sup>5</sup>

He was indeed an educationist but at the same time, he was consumed by his bigotted antagonism.

In their approach and commitment, the British rulers were far more earnest and upright toward the promotion and expansion of literacy among the masses vis-à-vis many of the overrated Indian protagonists and patrons of education. While addressing the British Indian Association Kishori Chand Mitra had loudly advocated in 1868 the contemporaneous social trend.

“The lower strata of society must be permeated through the higher strata. That the downward filtration has commenced is abundantly evidenced by the immense number of schools and Pathshalas already established since the Despatch of the Court of Directors came into operation. Educate the upper and middle classes, and the lower classes will be instructed and elevated.”<sup>6</sup>

Such paeans were propagated by those who, like Kishori Chand Mitra,



mostly from the upper social strata belonging to the brahminical filter had benefited. Rev. Lal Behari Day had, however, torn such hypocrisy into shreds. According to him,

“In this country knowledge never filtered from the higher classes. The fact is the upper classes filter in India, at any rate, is not a filter, but a jar hermetically sealed.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Penance of Vidyasagar for establishing primary school at Birsingha!**

In 1859 the government wanted the spread elementary instruction among the lower orders. Regrettably, the educationist who was idolized for over a century as the brightest and noblest icon in Bengal held views of which people perhaps are unaware. What Vidyasagar had once told was recorded in his memoirs by Nobin Chandra Sen, Deputy Magistrate and poet of the nineteenth century.

“এই পোড়া শিক্ষা এই দেশ হইতে উঠিয়া গেলেই ভাল হয়। আমি আমার গ্রামে একটি স্কুল খুলিয়াছি। আর তাহার ফলে আমি দেশত্যাগী হইয়াছি। চাষাভুষার ছেলেরা পর্যন্ত যেই দু'পাতা ইংরাজি পড়িতে আরম্ভ করিল, আর তার পৈতৃক ব্যবসা ছাড়িল। তাহাদের ভাল কাপড় চাহি, জুতা চাহি, মোজা চাহি, মাথায় টেরিটি পর্যন্ত চাহি। এখন আমার বাড়ি যাইবার জো নাই। গেলেই কেহ বলে, “দাদাঠাকুর! তুমি কি করিলে? ছেলেটা খেতের দিকে ফিরিয়াও চাহেনা। আমার আধা বিঘা জমির চাষ হইল না। খাইব কি? ইহার বাবুয়ানার খরচই কোথা হইতে যোগাইব?” কেহ বলে— ‘আমার গরুগুলি মারা গেল। ছেলেটি তাহাদের কাছে একবারও যায় না। চরান দূরে থাকুক। আমার উপায় কি হইবে?’ আমি যেমন পাপ করিয়াছি, আমার তেমন প্রায়শ্চিত্ত হইতেছে। আমি আর পাড়াগাঁয়ে স্কুলের নাম মাত্র করিব না। এ দেশ তেমন নহে যে, লেখা পড়া শিখিয়া আপন ভাল করিয়া ব্যবসা করিবে। এ লক্ষ্মীছাড়া ছেলেগুলো দু পাতা ইংরাজি পড়িলেই আপনার পৈতৃক ব্যবসা ছাড়িয়া দেয়; আপনার পিতামাতাকে পর্যন্ত ঘৃণা করে।”

The Deputy Magistrate continued:

“কথাগুলি শুনিয়াছি আজ কত বৎসর। কিন্তু এখনও সে কষ্টস্বর আমার কানে বাজিতেছে। তিনি এই শিক্ষা বিভ্রাটের আরম্ভে যাহা দিব্য চক্ষে দেখিয়াছিলেন, আজ তাহা অক্ষরে ফলিয়াছে। আজ চাষা, ধোপা, নাপিত, জেলে, হাড়ি, সকলের ছেলেই লেখাপড়া শিখিতেছে। লক্ষ্য— পেয়াদাগিরি ও কনস্টেবলি। এই শিক্ষার পরিণাম কি, ভগবানই জানেন।”

Translated the above quote conveys:

“It will be good riddance, should the accursed education policy get a burial. I have established a school in my village in consequence of which I've deserted my native place. As soon as children of farmers and labourers start muttering a few English words, they shun their ancestral occupations. They start keenness for fashionable dresses, shoes, socks, hats, etc. It is for them only that I am unable to go home. As soon as I reach home (Birsingha), I am surrounded by the parents of those boys from my school. They make my life miserable repeatedly

pestering, "Oh! My venerable, Sir, what have you done? My ward ignores my agricultural farm. Half a bigha of my land remained untilled in the current season. How shall I provide food for my family? Over and above, I have to foot bills for his fashionable dress, hats, etc. Someone says, "my cattle have died but my son does not care to graze them." I have committed sin for which I have been undergoing penance. I have solemnly taken vow that I would never ever establish any other schools in countryside. In this land, nobody, after receiving education, engages himself in ancestral occupation. No sooner than one starts muttering few English words, he shuns ancestral profession; and even hates his parents."

The neo-literate bumpkins, who are wards of cultivators, washermen, barber, fishermen, Hari, etc. seeking employment as peada, constable, etc. made the bhadralkdom tizzy. Their behaviour and attitude have influenced everybody. The educated gentry took measures to guard against the germination of aspiration in the mind and imagination of the low castes by raising well in advance shrill cries against their demand for and awakening by attaining literacy. Vidyasagar, Surendranath Banerjea, Tilak, Gandhi—one and all were nursed and enriched on the same ideology and culture.

We must probe what Lord Macaulay, who is perceived, by and large, as the rank imperialist for his policy by Indian historians and political class, for advocating English education to modernize India. He held:

"Are we to keep the people of India ignorant in order that we can keep them submissive? Or do we think that we can give them knowledge without awakening ambition? Or do we mean to awaken ambition and to provide with no legitimate vent? Who will answer any of these questions in the affirmative? Yet one of them must be answered in the affirmative, by every person who maintains that we ought permanently to exclude the natives from high office. I have no fears. The path of duty is plain before us; and it is also the path of wisdom, of national prosperity, of national honour."<sup>10</sup>

Macaulay was also keen on providing "legitimate vent" for the educated Indians who acquired knowledge in pursuance of his education policy. Vidyasagar and his ardent followers, on the contrary, had nightmare that literacy inspired the wards of peasants, washermen, barbers, fishermen, basket makers, etc.—all belonging to the low and despised castes, for white-collar employment! They hated their ancestral occupation. Nobody questioned them, "Did the bhadralk castes ever show any respect for the ancestral professions of the untouchables and underclasses?"

Vidyasagar did not visit his mother Bhagawati Devi for two decades. In 1276 BS her son left the village and his mother wrote in 1296 BS, making a fervent appeal to visit her.<sup>11</sup> This unfolds an unimaginable, if not

incomprehensible approach of an educationist, who has become a legend vis-a-vis his attitude towards literacy of the masses in Bengal. A 70-year-old ignored or disregarded the soulful entreaties of his elderly mother who was alone at home. She could be then over 80 years, if not 85, assuming that, I guess, she was 15 when Iswar Chandra was born. What a penance the son, a legend though in Bengal for devotion to his mother, had undertaken for the imaginary sin he committed by establishing a school in the ancestral village. The emotional appeal in Bhagawati Devi's letter is sure to move even a brute to tears. Vidyasagar, who is cheered universally as one of the leading educationists and social reformers of Bengal, it sounds odd to believe that he did not visit his mother for long two decades as a mark of mortification for the sin he committed by establishing a primary school in his village. His repugnance or revulsion against giving literacy to a low caste and/or untouchables was unsurmountable or uncompromisable is explicitly established by his denial to visit his mother. Filial attachment or affiliation to their mother was too weak to overcome his sense of mortification caused to him by the establishment of his school. This is a serious issue that stood as a cause against the literacy of the masses in Bengal. The facility was created him opened the doors of education for the low and untouchable villagers. The rural Bengal, nay India was, therefore, destined, for reasons of caste, to suffer blinding darkness for eternity. A school established at Calcutta, Howrah, Serampore, Krishnagar, etc. by the same son would not fill him with gnawing remorse to drive for a penance spanning twenty years. But the hold of Manu on Vidyasagar was hypnotizing. The ancient lawgiver ordained:

"Sudra is unfit to receive education. The upper varnas should not impart education or give advice to a Sudra. It is not necessary that the Sudra should know the laws and codes and hence need not be taught. Violators will go to as amrita hell." (Manu IV-78 to 81)

Why else does Bengal's great social reformer and educationist disregard his mother's fervent appeal to visit her? We have no answer. American journalist Miss Katherine Mayo was prophetic in her observation as follows:

"...if Indian self-government were established tomorrow, and if wealth rushed in, succeeding poverty in the land unless she reversed her own views as to her untouchables and as to her women, must still continue in the frontline of the earth's illiterates."<sup>12</sup>

Poor Miss Mayo was subjected to virulent criticism by great men of knowledge and high standing. India failed to understand the extraordinary prophecy about the country's educational destitution. She was subjected to mindless condemnation as an imperial mole under the cover of a journalist even by men with conscience and fellow feelings. The "untouchable" and "women" of India stand glaring proof even after 95 years of Miss Mayo's prediction. The level of literacy the country has attained continues to be deplorable even now, despite official claims which are difficult to rely on. The

official claim of the literacy rate of India is doubtful because the projection of literacy suffers from political manipulation.

In 1916, Ambica Charan Majumdar, Surendranath Banerjea's great disciple, while delivering the Presidential address to the Indian National Congress at Lucknow, might have surprised, if not shocked, the audience by his observation: -

"Education....is not an indispensable condition or a condition precedent to self-government."<sup>13</sup>

Political leaders of his kind were not wanting to propagate then and even now.

### PART-III

#### **Sir Surendranath betrayed compulsory primary education As the Minister of Local-Self Government of Bengal**

Surendranath Banerjea, a great admirer and devotee of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was charged to execute Indian aspiration for education as minister of transferred department under Dyarchy introduced under the Government of India Act 1919. A study on compulsory primary education in India by United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in cautious and polished language took a dig at the continued educational backwardness in its report with the following comments that "... Local bodies are not taking adequate measures to enforce compulsory attendance."<sup>1</sup> The responsibility for failure to enforcement of compulsory attendance in school could be ascribed to the doorstep of Minister Sir Surendranath Banerjea.

According to a report of the census of 1921, "The bhadralok castes Brahman, Baidya and Kayastha castes come first" In the table of literacy. The truth is explained with concrete data. Of 1000 Baidyas, 662 were literate as against 484 Bahman and 413 Kayastha literate. <sup>2</sup> The status of literacy of other castes is shown in the following-

Showing ratio of literacy of selected castes of Bengal in 1921 census

- Of the 1000 Chasi Kaibartta, 131 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Pod, 131 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Sudra, 138 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Sutradhar, 121 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Goala, 119 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Kumhar, 116 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Kapali, 115 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Dhopa, 88 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Namasudra, 85 were literate;
- Of the 1000 Jalia Kaibartta, 68 were literate;

Of the 1000 Koch, 38 were literate;  
Of the 1000 Chamar, 35 were literate;  
Of the 1000 Bagdi, 24 were literate.<sup>3</sup>

The above caste-wise data of literacy demonstrate wide divergence existing among three upper castes and the few lower castes taken randomly above. The same census disclosed further that

“The extent of literacy among males of the bhadralok castes seems to have reached its limit. Practically all Baidya males have had the opportunity of acquiring the art of reading and writing Bengali and most of those who cannot do so are either not yet old enough or a defective. Brahmans and Kayasthas are rather behind the Baidyas, among them too elementary education have gone no further than in 1911; in the case of the three, the last decade has shown great progress in female education.”<sup>4</sup>

By 1911, in literacy, the male population of Brahman, Baidya and Kayastha in Bengal had reached its limit. In 1921, the census superintendent W. H. Thompson, ICS observed that their literacy level did progress no more than that attained in 1911. But in the decade between 1911 and 1921, ‘great progress in female education’ of all three castes was achieved. This was what Lord Ripon had apprehended in his warning, noted before, that it is not desirable that ‘a small highly educated class’ is brought into contact with ‘large uneducated masses’. The large uneducated masses, in such a situation, encounter mindless exploitation by the small educated Brahman, Baidya and Kayastha. As result, they enjoyed the vicious fruits of illiteracy and therefore they tended for perpetuating mass illiteracy only with the evil objective of economic gains and social as well as political dominance. In today's India, democracy is facing serious threats only due to the vast illiterate population who are being misled by manipulation for political gains.

Surendranath Banerjea took the oath of office on 4 January 1921 as a minister under Dyarchy. His joining the Council of ministers was denounced by many of his well-wishers, and admirers. To allay their misgivings he made a deceptive statement “I owe allegiance to God and my people.”<sup>5</sup> A pertinent question to seek answer here from Surendranath Banerjea is: Who were “my people” to him? Did they include “the masses”? By “my people,” I am afraid, it is grossly erroneous to believe that he at all implied or suggested the ordinary or common man who did not include by any stress of imagination “the respectable classes” and “better classes.”

“In 1919, 50 percent of the posts in the Indian Education Service were given to Indians.”<sup>6</sup> This was a positive step that provided the impetus for the expansion of compulsory education in Bengal. With this cadre of an officer from IES the Minister, given his sincere dedication to promoting elementary education for the masses, wonders could have been achieved. But he was

attitudinally averse to using them in the public interest. This indeed was a deep dark and indelible spot of glaring dimension as a minister.

The era of Gandhian ideals and philosophy had swept India till the UNESCO study was commissioned for ascertaining, *inter alia*, India's status in literacy. After 1947 speaking a word in praise of Lord Macaulay was deemed as a slave mentality of the foreign rule by beneficiaries of the British education policy. Two instances in support of this contention may be adduced here. During the backdrop of the anti-Partition of Bengal agitation (1905-1911) coupled with the swadeshi movement, Gopal Krishna Gokhale introduced in the Central Legislative Council a Bill for Compulsory Education in 1911 only to be defeated the next year. The educated countrymen from higher social echelons were instrumental in having the Bill of Gokhale rejected unceremoniously in the Central Legislature.

Boastful claim notwithstanding as "an educationist" all his life," Surendranath campaigned against Gokhale's Bill clandestinely, resulting in its ultimate rejection in the Central Legislature. Documenting this unsavoury fact, Gokhale's biographer B. R. Nanda disclosed:

"The critics of Elementary Education Bill were not confined to the ranks of British officials. Surendra Nath Banerjea opposed it, fearing that it would divert funds for elementary education from higher education—in which he was personally interested." <sup>7</sup>

Who did paint and portrayed Banerjea's interest as a national cause? We hope researchers in future would focus intensely on this aspect and throw light to satisfy the curiosity of relevant questions. As of date, I have no material to support this contention. He was stubbornly opposed to the masses, getting access to literacy. So, he vociferously criticized Lord Curzon and became a nationalist leader.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale breathed his last barely three years later on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1915. The celebrated scientist and Professor Prafulla Chandra Roy, addressing a public meeting at Bhowanipur School, Calcutta bemoaned that Gokhale died heartbroken not because his Compulsory Education Bill was defeated in the Central Legislative Council but on account of the opposition of the unsympathetic and arrogant colonial bureaucrats, as it is usually made out, but because he could not bear the shock of betrayal of his close friends. <sup>8</sup> They were friends like wolves in sheep's clothing. A close friend of Gokhale though, Surendranath was also one of the backstabbers who was keen to keep the masses at bay to perpetuate illiteracy among the masses.

We should state that Gokhale's Bill was not at all radical or revolutionary in character or spirit. The stipulation for enforcement of compulsion that occupied the central position in the Bill was awful:

"In any area, where 33% per cent of the male population is already at school, there this principle of compulsion should be applied."<sup>9</sup>

At this stage, we may explore which of the provinces of India boasted 33% of the male population "already at school". In 1911, few cities with an advantage for the concentration of schools, colleges, courts and commercial establishments better placed for the achievement of higher levels of literacy, could perhaps take advantage of compulsory primary education. The table-2 may help us understand the case.

Table-1<sup>10</sup>

## Showing literacy of population of Province, State or Agency in 1911

Province, State or Agency	Number of literate persons per 1,000 of each sex			
	Total population		Cities	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
India	106	10	303	91
Bengal	140	11	389	146
Bihar & Orissa	76	4	252	39
Bombay	120	14	283	99
Burma	376	61	479	280
Centra Provinces & Berar	62	3	260	50
Madras	138	13	422	108
Punjab	63	6	214	62
United Provinces	61	5	198	41
Hyderabad	51	4	239	44
Kashmir	38	1	153	22
Mysore State	112	13	354	118
Rajputana Agency	59	2	190	13

Table 1 demonstrates that the cities of Bengal had 38.9%, Madras, had 42.2% and Mysore State had 35.4% of males already at school. With 47.9% males at school, Burmese cities were unrivalled. Being a Buddhist society, Burma was free from social bias and discrimination. In 1921 when Surendranath Banerjea won the election, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Lord Ronaldshay appointed him as the Minister of Health and Local Self Government under Dyarchy. By 1919, every Province in India had the Compulsory Education Act in place. The Department of Local Self Government has entrusted the responsibility for enforcing and implementing the Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1919.

The London Times, 13, November 1926 published an Educational Supplement on Primary Education in Bengal. The Supplement laid bare the status concerning achievement under the Compulsory Education Act in Bengal. Miss Katherine Mayo, an American journalist, was the target of untold abuses and condemnation from tall and towering Indians and their friends at home and abroad alike for exposing many ills and evils of Indian society. Mother India had dealt with the state of primary education in Bengal to

familiarise the readers with an analysis of The Times of London on the Education Supplement:

“The Bengal Legislature passed an Act introducing the principle of compulsory primary education in May 1919.; but it does not appear that a single local authority in the province has availed itself of the option which the Act provides.”<sup>11</sup>

Surendranath Banerjea predeceased the publication of Education Supplement by The Times. He did not, therefore, suffer public denunciation for his deplorable role in frustrating the objective of the Compulsory Primary Education Act 1919. Having regard for his subversive role cited above concerning the Compulsory Education Bill of Gokhale, such antipathy towards enforcing compulsion in attendance by Surendranath Banerjea was an inevitable, if not a foregone, conclusion.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) commissioned 1952, a study on Compulsory Primary Education in India. The august body's findings were bitter, to say the least. The study found that “.... the local bodies are not taking adequate measures to enforce compulsory attendance.”<sup>12</sup> Some of the towering personalities inimical to the need for mass literacy, make no mistake, were solely responsible for the disgraceful state of compulsory education. And that the studied neglect coupled with the role of hostile Minister Surendranath Banerjea of Local Bodies under Dyarchy had set the trend can rarely be overlooked with equanimity. Public interest was sacrificed to promote high education which infatuated Sir Surendra to benefit a microscopic minority of Bengal. The authorities under Dyarchy were opposed to the expansion of primary education and thus deprived the masses of the benefit of elementary education. The extent and depth of harm as UNESCO documented are simply shocking for millions of illiterates as it militated against also wrecked national development. The international body laid bare the dimension of havoc inflicted on the faceless masses of Bengal.

“The results (of compulsory education) obtained ... vary from area to area and there is a world of difference between a State like Bengal where compulsion exists only on paper and a State of Baroda where some remarkable results were obtained.”<sup>13</sup>

A sharp condemnation for Bengal vis-à-vis warm applause for Princely State, Baroda for “remarkable results” obtaining there from the premier international body does not escape notice and candid approbation. What did UNESCO desire to imply, connote or convey by the terms “compulsion exists only on paper?” Sir Surendra became the trendsetter for adopting negligence calculated to deceive and deprive the blessings compulsory education policy of the State was to bestow on the masses. Ministers who succeeded the rashtraguru got the sanctified signal to drive fast till catastrophe befell the



nation's crippling holistic growth and development. The deprivation of the masses of the benefit of elementary education was a gigantic, if not unpardonable, failure under Dyarchy and afterwards.

With Lord Curzon at the helms, "...the old policies in primary education were soon abandoned and more vigorous attempts were made to educate the masses. Lord Curzon took the lead in this matter and sanctioned large recurring and non-recurring grants for primary education during his tenure (1898-1905)".<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, we do not overlook an interregnum of almost three decades between Sir Surendra's tenure as minister of Bengal and the UNESCO study, but the discriminatory trend, once set in motion, could rarely be reversed, if we look at the social attitude of 'the acknowledged leaders of native society.' Viceroy Lord Mayo (in office January 12, 1869-February 8, 1872) deviated from the policy of downward filtration of education authored by Lord Macaulay. He was perfect in the diagnosis of the vicious results of Macaulay's education policy that benefited exclusively the upper castes in Bengal. In a letter to his wife, the Viceroy of India expressed anguish in the following words:

"The more education you give them, the more they will keep to themselves, and make their increased knowledge a means of tyranny.... But let us also try to do something towards teaching the three R's to "Rural Bengal".<sup>15</sup>

The tyrannical Bengali upper castes, so overbearing in effect, captured, as a favourite issue, space in a personal letter between husband and wife. Yes, education was, make again no mistake, used as a means of "tyranny" at the elite hands for discrimination, deprivation, exploitation and deception. I have no idea where else could knowledge have been used to mischief under the globe a harm a population larger than many nations. That education was turned into a weapon of "tyranny" instead of ushering in an era of humanism, enlightenment, fellow feelings, and compassion is incomprehensible to an ordinary man. It is, however, surprising that this possibility did not occur to Macaulay who was endowed with admirable intellect and wisdom. The baboos in Bengal, one and all, were brutal defenders of darkness enveloping the masses all over the vast province of Bengal. With power and authority vested in him, Sir Surendra, as a minister, was at a commanding height for inflicting disaster. Failure to recognize this grave catastrophe is a deplorable flaw for the academicians and the effort to hide the shameful failure by enlightened people was a crime against Bengal. The minister himself failed Compulsory Primary Education Act 1919 and the results were only to be expected, if not, a foregone conclusion.

A tiny tyrannical class was the product of education during the era when Macaulay's down filtration policy was implemented in Bengal. Under their boots, generations of "ignorant and untrained many" suffered and groaned

with no remedy. An unfazed Hindu zamindar of Rangpur in East Bengal paraded his indecent obstinacy against the access of the low and untouchable castes to literacy as follows.

"A Hindu zamindar did not conceal his apprehension over the Compulsory Elementary Education Bill of Gopal Krishna Gokhale when he wrote to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, that the "System of the wholesale spread of education for the masses.... will cause a great and violent disturbance in every phase of the present settled order of things; and will throw the whole country, as it were, or of its equilibrium, and such a system.....will not only.... spoil the temper of the masses, but will tend to upset and disturb all the harmonious relations now existing between various classes and communities, domestic relations not escaping its disturbing influence."<sup>16</sup>

An infinitesimal minority, dominating the educational fate of the masses led Bengal to the inescapably disastrous state. No knowledge of rocket science was necessary to understand all who had patted the dim-witted Raja Kumar of Kakina, now in Bangladesh, for spewing venom against the people the Eastern Bengal and Assam targeting Gokhale for his compulsory elementary education bill tabled on March 16, 1911.

The feudal classes as also the upper caste together had created education as a fortified zone putting barriers against the access of all others to schools and colleges in Bengal. A candid observation recorded in the Bengal Administrative Report of 1871-72 by Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal George Campbell explains the potion most succinctly:

".... the Mahommedans have not been fairly treated in Bengal in regard to our educational machinery. It seems that no a single member of the inspecting agency is a Mahommedan; there is scarcely, if at all, a Mahommedan in the ordinary ranks of schoolmasters of the Government schools: the Bengal Education Department may be said to be a Hindoo institution. Hindoos have monopolized all the places below the highest, and all the executive management. This undoubtedly places the Mahommedans at some real disadvantage....It is very difficult, almost impossible, to remedy it."<sup>17</sup>

Expression and appreciation of sympathy, if any, by authorities of higher echelons of the administration, as this, to denote the stark ground reality obtained in the field of education not only received a barrage of sharp ridicule but denunciation also against them as sentimental Englishmen from the aforementioned beneficiaries or their cohorts. The bhadrak, besides education, there, is little doubt, took likewise almost exclusive charge of except the top office of every other department, e.g., treasury, police, revenue, judiciary, jail, registration, post offices, opium, railways, etc. of district collectorate across Bihar, Orissa, Assam, besides Bengal. Those Departments

too were "Hindu institutions." They raised invincible and high walls against all others for their exclusive employment and benefit. This was the inevitable result of the downward filtration of education policy. Such spatial development created a class or group of educated men who were inimical against the educational empowerment of everybody beyond their caste or class.

The historians and contemporary political leaders overlooked the Indian Education Policy Lord Curzon Viceroy and Governor-General (11 January 1859 — 20 March 1925), put in place in 1904 for universalization of education. He regretted most poignantly that:

"It may be said indeed that the expansion of primary schools has received a check in recent years from the calamities of famine and plague; and it is further impeded by the indifference of the more advanced and ambitious classes to the spread of primary education."<sup>18</sup>

The Viceroy Lord Curzon underlined the deeper implication or inevitable significance that harmed or hurt the expansion of primary education in Bengal, if not elsewhere. "The indifference of the more advanced and ambitious classes" was worse than the calamities of famine and plague that befell Bengal simultaneously. It is incomprehensible to believe that the gentlemen were more injurious to the causes for the expansion of primary education than even plague! In other words, the Viceroy wanted us to believe that the *bhadralok*, more advanced and ambitious, offered worse impediment than famine and plague to the expansion of primary education. The Policy noted that the Education Commission recommended in 1883 that "the elementary education of the masses, its provision, extension, and improvement should be that part of educational system to which the strenuous efforts of the State should be directed in a still larger measure than before."<sup>19</sup>

The Policy of Lord Curzon underlined the observation made in 1868 by Lord Lawrence to emphasize why primary education was so important thus "among all the sources of difficulty in our administration and of possible danger to the stability of our government, there are few so serious as the ignorance of the people."<sup>20</sup> The gulf between the Indian thought on the education of the masses and that of the colonial rulers was as vast as the Atlantic Ocean. Indians boast of their ancient sages and seers who, as the epitome of blinding orthodoxy, advocated against the education of the masses who belong to the low castes and women. The Indians in the position of power and influence would do everything including keeping the masses in ignorance even by denial of education to the lower ranks to keep themselves in power.

#### **Self-professed educationist**

##### **A brazen antagonist of the universalization of education!**

A nation is accursed if her blessed and gifted sons and daughters are antagonistic to universalization of literacy. Such a nation is destined to grope

in the dark and long tunnel of ignorance and illiteracy for ages and centuries no end. India has suffered such destiny, thanks to the enlightened sons who were inimical to her masses in allowing them access to light. Therefore, Indians have atoned for ages and generations for the sins of their noble sons against the countrymen. Such unfortunate hostility against the masses ultimately eats into her vitals of the country. Pandit Iswar Chandra Bandyopadhyay (1820-181891), Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), to note outstanding few, were in the frontline as hardened adversaries of mass education. While Tilak and Gandhi were unabashed in their antagonism against mass getting an education at all, G.K. Gokhale was circumspect in subverting universalization of education by his attempt to legislate compulsory primary education bill. Sir Surendranath Banerjea, of all, on the contrary, was remorseless in successfully sabotaging selectively high education and mass education. A narrative below explains his attitudinal hostility.

All the miseries Indians encountered were results mostly because of their so-called celebrated sons. The hard fact is that Surendranath Banerjea was against any form of education—elementary or higher—to benefit the illiterate masses comprising the lower and neglected social hinterland. In 1907, the Chief Secretary, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, conveyed the perception of the Lieutenant Governor to the Government of India about the “present great keenness for education among the Muhammadans and Namasudras” who “practically” comprised “almost the whole of the peasantry” of the new province.<sup>21</sup> History bears ample testimony to the opposition of the hawkish upper-caste Hindus against the educational aspirations of the weak and vulnerable low castes and Muslims in Bengal. Chronicler of the British rule in India, William Wilson Hunter traced the inviolable thread of malice in the nineteenth century.

“The upper classes are opposed to the lower orders being taught at all. The Brahmans and Kayasthas deem education to be strictly their inheritance; and in losing the cooperation of the wealthy classes, the Government unavoidably fails to reach the ordinary cultivator; for however much the latter may be oppressed, he looks to the former to interpret every action of the foreign race which rules them.”<sup>22</sup>

#### **The necessity of partition of Bengal felt before the birth of Curzon**

The partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905 was warmly welcomed by Muslims and the low castes, particularly Namasudras who were an overwhelming majority in Eastern Bengal. They expected that the new administration from the capital Dhaka would pay closer attention to their hopes and aspiration—Calcutta being far off for them. The action of Viceroy Lord Curzon provoked in them a prospect, nay, dream for harvesting the demographic dividends.

Before Nathaniel George Curzon (January 11, 1859, died on March 20, 1925) was born, the necessity for partition of Bengal was felt by Governor-General of India, Lord Dalhousie (in office 1848-1856). According to him, the Government of Bengal alone imposed upon the Governor-General "a burden which in its present mass is more than mortal man can fitly bear." Twenty years later Sir George Campbell, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, observed, "It is totally impossible that any man can properly perform single-handed, the work of this great Government." Since 1873, however, the population of the province had increased by over 26 million; the increase of population was accompanied by remarkable development of resources of the country; while the spread of English education and wider diffusion of the native press had tended to demand more precise methods of administration and in every way to place a heavier strain upon the Government and upon all ranks of his subordinate. It was felt that the burden was excessive, and there was accumulating evidence of a deterioration in the standards of government, notably in proportion of East Bengal. The Government of India accordingly came to the conclusion that relief of the Bengal Government was an administrative necessity of the first order, and relief could be effected by reducing the territory under the Lieutenant-Governor and not by organic changes in the form of government. At the same time, they were impressed with the importance of making Assam a self-contained and independent administration with a service of its own, and of providing for its future commercial and industrial expansion."<sup>23</sup>

Annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911, therefore, disillusioned them very deeply, if not sorely. To assuage the hurt feelings of the majority of the population, Governor-General Lord Hardinge declared in 1911 a plan for the establishment of a university at Dhaka, capital of the new province. A contemporary account of protests against the proposed university may be delicious to recall in the words of an academician:

“বঙ্গভঙ্গ রদ হবার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে লর্ড হার্ডিঞ্জ প্রস্তাব করেন যে, ঢাকায় একটি নতুন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় স্থাপন করা হবে। তখনি স্যার সুরেন্দ্রনাথ বন্দোপাধ্যায় এবং স্যার আশুতোষ মুখোপাধ্যায়, রাস বিহারী ঘোষ ইত্যাদি সম্মিলিত ভাবে সে প্রস্তাবের প্রতিবাদ করেন।”

The enlightened men took no time to bear their fangs against the second university of Bengal proposed for the establishment, though in embryo, by the highest imperial authority of India. Surendra Nath Banerjee (1848-1925) and Ashutosh Mukherjee (1864-1924) educationists among others, led the charge against the objective! Rash Behari Ghosh was a prominent advocate of the time. Other prominent patrons who joined the chorus of denunciation against the proposed Dhaka University included Bipin Chandra Pal, Suresh Chandra Samajpati, Barrister Byomkesh Chakraborty, Pyarimohan Mukherjee, zamindar Uttarpara, zamindar Amvica Charan Majumdar, very successful advocate and former chairman, Dhaka Municipality Ananda Chandra Roy, Babu Trailokyanath Basu, Barrister Abdul Rasul, Moulana Akram Khan,

Moulavi Abul Kashem, and Moulavi (Bihar Congress leader).<sup>25</sup> That intolerance, if not hatred, could be packaged as logic and justification against the proposed university in Bengal after 54 years of Calcutta University, which seems most likely, to have sowed the seeds of partition after 36 years! According to one account:

“On February 16, 1912, a delegation, headed by advocate Dr Rash Behari Ghosh, met the Viceroy and expressed apprehension that the establishment of a separate university at Dhaka would imply ‘an internal partition of Bengal’. They also contended, as was recorded in the Calcutta University Commission report later, that ‘Muslims of Eastern Bengal were in large majority cultivators and they would benefit in no way by the foundation of a university.’ At one stage, Lord Hardinge told Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee that he was determined to establish a university at Dhaka in spite of all their opposition.”<sup>26</sup>

The argument against the majority of illiterate Muslim cultivators in Eastern Bengal reminds us of the well-known problem of management. Give attention to providing light to the areas where darkness is the thickest but to overlook it as the unimportant issue is to allow the problem to and resist until it degenerates into a huge crisis. This is managerial incompetence.

With jaundiced and abominable intelligentsia at the driver's seat to determine the destiny of millions saw and counted their interest. India, therefore, provided the worst example of illiteracy enveloping the hapless masses for ages and generations. Disgraceful opponents of universalization of literacy though, they advocated garrulously the boon of high education! Their approach to education ran blindly on the caste line benefitting the upper strata, i.e., the elites of Bengal. The Greek philosopher Plato was proved centuries later infallible by antagonists of the university at Dhaka.

“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.”

In thousands of voices, we admire aloud his wisdom. His prophecy. His vision.

Plato perhaps did not have the misfortune to see that his worst apprehension was translated into reality by men who are worshipped as noble souls in the Presidencies of Bengal and Bombay in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Scriptures of Manu formulated the laws of slavery which proved to be a goldmine for the Hindus. The Sudras, terrorised by malefic codes of Manu, became easy prey for exploitation as bonded labour. Their brawn and toil became essential ingredients for the prosperity and happiness of the Manu Vadis. This necessitated permanence and preservation of illiteracy under a divine gloss propagated in the name of shastra. And whoever joined the anti-

Sudra campaign was hailed a seer and sages, if not avatar in high esteem and gratitude. The Hindu scriptures are the fountainhead of ignorance, superstition, orthodoxy and social evil.

Almost about three decades before the proposal for the establishment of Dhaka University was mooted, as the President of the Indian National Congress, Ahmedabad in December, 1902 Surendranath Banerjea had eulogized high education as a boon showered by the colonial administration on Indians.

"The noblest gift which the British rule has conferred upon India is the boon of high education. It lies at the root of all progress. ...the high education is the most prized, the most dearly cherished of them all."<sup>27</sup>

The boon of high education swept off Surendranath so much so that he betrayed the critical needs of mass education for Bengal even while he held a constitutional office, in blatant violation of the oath of his office. Did anybody point this out to him? His commitment as also compliment to high education was reaffirmed in flowing terms a year later at 'On the Universities Bill' in December 1903.

"Such a boon we cannot part with. Such a boon we cannot allow to be tampered with. Such a boon we cling to with fond devotion, promoted by a spirit akin to that of filial reverence. Next to religion, education is our most sacred interest. The feelings prompted by religion deepen our affectionate devotion to our educational concerns."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, he demonstrated his staunchest attachment to high education conversely parading thereby his extreme bitterness against mass education. The ordinary masses had no place in his scheme of education. The proposal of Lord Hardinge to establish a university in Dhaka encountered stubborn opposition. His destructive role against the idea of a new university in Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh) is surprising from someone so enamoured with high education. Did anybody utter a word against Banerjea's abomination against the proposed Dhaka University in East Bengal. Was this because the temple of higher learning was not planned to be sited in the backyard of patrons of education aforementioned? Could we imagine a similar protest or opposition from the rashtraguru and his cohorts had the Viceroy proposed to establish the University (hypothetically) at Krishnagar (district), Nadia instead of Dhaka?

When a grain of the boon was likely to benefit anyone beyond a tiny circle of elites, who comprised the brigade of antagonists of Dhaka University, they raised the architecture with long shadow leading to the fear of partition of Bengal in 1947. The deprivation of light by the upper caste on the plea of "internal partition" was, without doubt, an unpardonable crime against humanity with disastrous consequences from tens of millions, deceived and hoodwinked.

## PART-IV

**Political aims and ideals of Surendranath Banerjea**

Surendranath had formulated and espoused three core ideals, as below, for his long public life and political odyssey.

- (1) The unification of the various Indian peoples upon a common platform for the advancement of our common political interests
- (2) the establishment of friendly and fraternal relations between Hindus and Muhomedans as the first indispensable condition of Indian progress; and
- (3) the uplifting of the masses and their association with us in our public movements.<sup>1</sup>

Despite many vicissitudes strewn all over his political path, he "endeavoured... to give effect" to these objectives.<sup>2</sup>

These were, no doubt, appreciable aims and objectives for public life. The anti-partition agitation of Bengal in 1905 offered him the earliest opportunity to show to the countrymen his inner self. In 1905, when the architect of the partition of Bengal, Lord Curzon declared, "Bengal partition is a settled fact," in quick repost he thundered, "I shall unsettle the *settled fact*." Known for his fearlessness and inflexible determination, he earned the sobriquet from the colonial masters '*Surrender Not Banerjea*'. But the same leader accepted Knighthood in 1921. This robbed him of the sheen and admiration of many of his colleagues and admirers who considered that acceptance of colonial honour as a grave mistake ushering in his inglorious defeat in election to Bengal Legislative Council in 1923.<sup>3</sup>

"A few shone more brilliantly and with purer lustre," said Shibnath Sastri in his tribute to Surendranath Banerjea, "but none excelled him in magnitude or spread of illumination. In steady periods and glittering phrases, he formulated the ideal of Indian nationality and taught the full meaning and scope of Indian patriotism. Surendranath was the morning star that heralded the dawn of our public life."<sup>4</sup>

To underscore his attitudinal makeup, one of his biographers wrote in a Bengali volume over a century ago that once Surendranath was chided by his guru as blockheaded or dullard for being late in reaching class. Despite all efforts including physical torture, his parents could not send the child to the Pathshalas.

"পাঁচ বছর বয়সে পাড়ার পাঠশালায় সুরেন্দ্রনাথকে ভর্তি করা হয়। একদিন পাঠশালায় পৌঁছাতে বিলম্ব হলে গুরুমশাই ছাত্রকে "ম্যাড়া বামুন" বলে ভর্ৎসনা করেন। "শিশু সুরেন্দ্র নিজেকে অপমানিত বোধ করে তৎক্ষণাৎ পাঠশালা পরিত্যাগ করেছিলেন।" মাতাপিতার অশেষ চেষ্টা, এমন কি পীড়ন সত্ত্বে, তারা পুত্রকে ঐ পাঠশালায় আর পাঠাতে পারেন নি।



His unwavering commitment to any cause, if fixed as his goal, Surendranath did not falter to achieve. In every early childhood, he showed this streak unmistakably. But his tenacity or doggedness, we may point out, proved very costly for the country.

### **Favouritism of Surendranath in Recruitment of soldiers from Bengal for World War I**

At the outbreak of the First World War, the British Government issued a universal appeal to Indians, irrespective of creed, caste, or place of birth to join the Army and fight for the Empire. Surendranath Banerjea, however, did not see in it an opportunity to forge solidarity among the "Hindus and Mahomedans as the first indispensable condition of Indian progress." He did precisely what militated against the pledge he made and drove a gulf in his narrow drive for the recruitment of men from Bengal. His memoirs reveal a strange mindset which is odd with the reputation Bengali bhadralok intelligentsia showered on him. He wrote:

"The war had broken out in 1914, and an appeal was made for recruitment to the people of Bengal. I went about from town to town urging my country men to enlist the better classes as soldiers and fight for the Empire, which was in danger. I addressed more than thirty meetings in different parts of the province. We were able to raise something over six thousand recruits, mostly from among the respectable classes."<sup>6</sup>

Note the terms "the better classes" and "the respectable classes" whom he endeared with fervent appeals in meeting after meeting across Bengal during his whirlwind tours. We must not have misgivings about his appeal directed specifically to "the better classes and "respectable classes."

According to the reputed Bengali periodical *Sambad Prabhakar* in the mid-nineteenth century, Bengali Hindus were divided thus as (1) better classes; (2) intermediate classes; and (3) lowest classes. The better classes included, said the journal, Brahman, Baidya, Khastriya, Chatri and Kayastha whereas the intermediate classes comprised Tanti, Karmakar, Gandhabanik, Sadgop, Teli, Napit, Shankhabanik, Tamali, Mali (gardener) etc.<sup>7</sup> The nineteenth-century Bengal's obsession with castes was camouflaged as a class. The periodical edited by poet Iswar Chandra Gupta did not bother to note the lowest castes occurring at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Were Bengali intelligentsia embarrassed to highlight that their rashtraguru in so dastardly a canvas? He converted a universal appeal of the Empire for recruitment to the army from Bengal into a caste affair limited to "the better classes" and "respectable classes" a euphemism for bhadralok only. A golden opportunity for army recruitment offered itself too close on the heels of the annulment of the partition of Bengal. The authorities wanted a unified army, irrespective of caste, creed, place of birth etc. But Surendranath

Banerjea made it into a simple tri-caste affair. An obdurate riddle though, surprisingly no historian or academician seems to have attempted to unravel it.

His laborious efforts resulted in the recruitment of "over six thousand" from the gigantic province that returned Census of India in 1911 returned 4,63,05,642 population in Bengal Proper with an area of 84,092 square miles. <sup>8</sup> By denomination, they were Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, animists, etc. We are baffled at why was Surendranath stone-blind to all others, save and except the tri-caste, in his approach in the backdrop of universal British appeal. No such megalomaniac group can be compatriots or followers with them.

According to the census authorities, "the Bhadrak" castes comprised the Brahman, Baidyas and Kayasthas. Brahman, who accounted for 12,53,838; Baidya, 88,796; and Kayastha 11,13,684 persons, thereby aggregating at 24,45,318 of 4,63,05,642 of Bengal population, accounted for just 5.28% in 1911. <sup>9</sup> The colonial authorities appealed to "the people of Bengal" for joining the army but the rashtraguru was narcissistic and clannish as against liberal colonial authorities. The Indian intellectual and political class keep berating the alien rulers for promoting a divide and rule policy. Surendranath zeroed in instead on a microscopic section! He was exclusionary of the staggering 94.72% of Bengalis. Bengal's rashtraguru, strangely, is anybody aware, was the pioneer in founding apartheid, which in Africans means "separateness" in one of eleven official languages spoken in South Africa. This separateness began in 1948 and remained in effect for over forty-two years.<sup>10</sup> Did anybody ever blush in embarrassment at his colossal blunder or arrogance? No one committed blasphemy by pointing out Banerjea's poor appreciation of "the people of Bengal!" This is the shinning paradox— tail wagging the dog; not the other natural way round. It was not the first occasion Surendranath exhibited his predilection. The Panjdeh incident triggered an armed engagement between the Emirate of Afghanistan and the Russian Empire on March 30, 1885, leading to a diplomatic crisis between the British Empire and the Russian Empire. The Russian expansion south-eastwards towards the Emirate of Afghanistan and the British Raj (India) alarmed India. The capture of an Afghan border fort at Panjdeh by the Russian army threatened British interests in the area. Seeing a threat to India, Britain prepared for war but both sides went back foot and the matter was settled by diplomacy. But Surendranath, then 37 years of age, with a party of 500 healthy youth of respectable families, rushed to the Army headquarters and offered honorary service to fight as soldiers against Russians!<sup>11</sup> This was his voluntary initiative for which we avoid treating on footing at par with the official appeal for recruitment to the imperial army merits.

**PART-V****'Chandal, war heroes****The active and successful enemy of the Aryan invader'**

The infatuation of the rashtraguru for better classes and respectable classes had blinded his vision to consider alternatives for recruitment as soldiers from Bengal. Official records revealed information about a section of Bengalees who belonged to what in Bengal could be termed as a martial race. The census superintendent of Bengal in 1891, C. J. O'Donnell, ICS documented a startling historical truth, as follows, to demonstrate the martial qualities of the Chandals:

"....it is certain that the tall, large-limbed Chandal is not the same in race as the short, compactly built Bauri or Bagdi. The former was the active and successful enemy of the Aryan invader, and there is little trace of actual conquest by the early Hindu kings beyond the Bhagirathi, except in the riparian districts along its east bank. The Brahmans used the name of Chandal to express everything that was vilest, and when at last the Mussalmans in the time of Akbar finally broke down the resistance of the eastern peoples, only a remnant accepted the religious supremacy of Hinduism, the vast majority finding salvation in the faith of Islam."<sup>1</sup>

The abovementioned cryptic information, shunned assiduously in academic discourses, now helps us understand and appreciate the historical truth of why Aryans or their descendants were so noxious and toxic against the Chandal. The decisive and crushing defeat inflicted on the Aryan invader by the Chandal army in the war had shattered their misadventure against Bengal. The pride of the alien attackers was humbled and on the bank of the Bhagirathi. Instead of earning the loudest ovation for the conquerors for their glorious feat in defeating the invaders to subjugate Bengal, the Chandals went down in the Hindu scriptures marked by unmixed hatred, antipathy, abuses and stigma. The humiliated invader's psychological reaction towards their conquerors was on expected lines. The Chandal readily shed blood and sacrificed life in defence of their motherland. Save and except the Aryan colony, in no other country, across the globe, the victorious defenders of motherland were/are treated so brazenly or savagely as in India.

The invaders harnessed Manu, Parashar, Yajnavalkya, etc., who are eulogised as seers and holy men for smearing their conquerors aimed at suppressing or camouflaging the ignominious defeat the invaders suffered. The defenders, who repulsed and drove away from the alien invaders away, were the earliest patriots Bengal had produced. Sadly, sustained and relentless vilification against the victorious Chandals with fictitious fables under the garb of scriptures about Aryan greatness and supremacy misguided the countrymen. The history of Chandal's victory has been erased

by the Aryan mischief and vilification. William Hunter, the chronicler of the Empire, had recorded:

“They (Chandals) are semi-amphibious in their habits, and capable of enduring the extremity of exposure and fatigue. Their superior physical development is attributed, not to their being a different race, but to their mode of life: inhabiting a river District, and constantly employed in rowing, the muscles of the arms and chest get more developed in men who pass their days at the plough.”<sup>2</sup>

These physical attributes were certified by the Civil Surgeon, Dr. B. N. Basu in his report submitted to the District Magistrate of Faridpur.<sup>3</sup> He further noted that from time immemorial, the Chandals were “despised by the upper-class Hindus and a Brahman thought himself defiled even by treading upon the shadow cast by a Chandal.”<sup>4</sup> Underscoring the stamina of the Chandals, H. Beverley, recorded in the report of the Census of Bengal 1872 this:

“Living amid a net-work of rivers and morasses, and nourished by a watery rice diet, the semi-amphibious Bengali in appearance belongs to a weak and puny race, yet he is capable to endure an amount of exposure to which the up-country Hindustani would soon fall victim.”<sup>5</sup>

The same report disclosed that, “Chandals or Charals aggregate upwards of a million and a half...They are most numerous in the Eastern districts of Jessore, Furreedpore, Bakarganj (now Barisal), Dacca, Mymensingh, and Sylhet.”<sup>6</sup> The six districts could be identified or termed as the heartland of the Chandals. In 1872, they aggregated at 16,20,545.<sup>7</sup> Table-3 shows their density and concentration in their heartland:

Table-2<sup>8</sup>

Showing the strength of Chandal in the 1872 census in selected districts with their largest concentration

District	No. of Chandal
Jessore	2,71,325
Dacca	1,91,162
Furreedpore	1,56,223
Backergunge	3,26,775
Mymensingh	1,23,362
Sylhet	1,22,457
Total:	11,91,304

Table 2 exhibits that the Chandal of six districts totalling 11,91,304 souls, accounted for 73.5% of their full strength in the province.

Edward T. Dalton observed that a "very large proportion of the Hindu population is if the Puranas are to be believed, the offspring of mixed alliances. According to different authorities, the number of inferior castes that originated ranges from 30 to upwards of 40, and includes some of the most useful of people, such as carpenters, smiths, weavers, potters, fishermen, and braziers. Strange to say, the caste Chandala, vilest of all, whose chief duty is the removal of dead bodies, is sprung from the union of a Sudra male with a female of the Brahman caste."<sup>9</sup>

According to the theory of the origin of castes in the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, a Chandala, the 'lowest of men,' is the offspring of a Sudra father and a Vaisya mother or a Kshatriya and a Brahmani. They became mlecchas by the abandonment of proper rites." Dalton further mentions that the chief duty of the Chandala, who sprung from the union of a Sudra male with a Brahman female, is "the removal of dead bodies." We are also told that from time immemorial the "vilest of offices" were assigned to the Chandal so that they could seldom rise from their abject condition.<sup>10</sup>

All these arrangements by scriptures and epics point to the fact that the Aryans did not forget the humiliating defeat they suffered at the hands of the Chandals in their audacious attempt to conquer Bengal. Every word, if not every letter of their scriptures, hurling abuses against the Chandal, suggests their burning anger and insatiable hatred aimed at maligning their conqueror.

Besides, if the sole duty of the Chandals was "the removal of dead bodies" they could not have multiplied in great strength. This fact nullifies the Aryan hatemongering against the Chandal through scriptural idiosyncrasy and manipulation or conspiracy. The scriptures propagated in the name of men hailed as seers and sages were works of fiction without any grain of truth or essence. They failed or overlooked to see and recognize the secrets of physical endowments for the proliferation and multiplication of the Chandal. This provokes genuine suspicion about Hindu scriptures that desecrated and vilified the Chandal.

In 1911, the Chandal, rechristened as Namasudra, aggregated at 19,08,728 and further increased to 20,06,259 in 1921. They were the largest Bengali caste next only to Chasi, Kaibartta (Mahishya) numbering 22,10,684 in 1921. <sup>11</sup> Their physical prowess, already pointed out, was certified by the Civil Surgeon of Faridpur. In fact, the geophysical conditions obtained in Faridpur were identical all-over precolonial Eastern Bengal now Bangladesh.

### **Bhu-devata**

To analyse the truth, we should understand that every word uttered against Chandal as so-called sacred scriptures bear testimony of their burning shame, excruciating pain and bloodshed inflicted by Chandals. John Wilson, the first Vice-Chancellor, of Bombay University quoted a Sanskrit verse which can be termed as the epitome of self-praise to establish brahminical supremacy or

authority over all others. The verse goes as:

“The whole world is under the power of gods,  
The gods are under the power of mantras,  
The mantras are under the power of the Brahmans,  
The Brahman is, therefore, our God.”<sup>12</sup>

They proclaimed themselves as the *Bhu-devata*, i. e., God on earth. Let us refer to Surendranath Banerjea's own dalliance over Aryan supremacy. In a speech on “Joseph Mazzini” delivered to Uttarpara Hitkarini Sabha on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1876 Surendranath Banerjea extolled the virtues of Aryans as hereunder:

“Were not our Aryan ancestors great in literature, great in science, great in war, great in morals? Who will tell me that the country of Valmiki, or Vyasa, of Gautama, of Shankaracharya, of Panini and Patanjali, will for ever remain in the depths of her present degradation? If the mere mention of the names of these immortal worthies strikes a chord in our hearts, will not the proud consciousness that some portion of their noble blood runs through our veins, inspire us with love for country, love for truth, love indeed for everything that is great, noble and sublime in human nature? Descendants of the ancient Aryans of India! will you not prove yourselves worthy of your lineage, worthy of the great name you inherit? Gentlemen, I have learnt the lessons of history in vain, if I could not predict a great future for my country. We may not indeed live to see that day. But let us work, gentlemen, harmoniously together to lay the foundation-stone of the fabric of Indian greatness.”<sup>13</sup>

The speaker was swayed by Aryan glories of the past and their greatness in various fields inclusive of literature, science, war and morals. The emotional outburst of the future leader who would sway his audience with remarkable oratory continued further in the same vein in another address captioned “England and India” delivered at London Missionary Society's Institution on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1877 to Bhowanipore Students Association, Calcutta.

“Gentlemen, you are Aryans, you boast of the past of your country. You boast of the illustrious traditions of your race. I too, sympathize with that feeling; I too am proud of the past glories of my country.”<sup>14</sup>

Invoking the greatness and tradition of the Aryans, Surendranath went on in the same tone and tenor: I know there are people who call themselves Nationalists”— I would call them “Denationalists” for they are people who would suck life-blood out of the nation and destroy everything that is great and manly in it—who would have us believe that our social atmosphere is holy, pure, untainted by sin or corruption, and that therefore, it becomes our duty to preserve the institutions of our fathers and to guard them against the ingress of modern thought and civilization. Gentlemen, I yield to none in my

respect for the name of Aryan. I yield to none in my respect for the time-honoured institutions of my country. But I should be false to myself, false to my countrymen, false to traditions of the Aryan race, if I would conceal from myself the conviction that there are foul blots connected with our social system which must be cleansed and wiped out, before the political regeneration of India can be possible."<sup>15</sup>

## PART-VI

### Dark spots of Anti-Partition agitation and Swadeshi movement

Banerjea identified four blots of public life, e. g., the institution of caste, child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage and system of the zenana. On of caste, he had interesting views, as below, to offer to his audience.

"Now, with reference to the institution of caste, it is my pleasing duty to be able to say that the educated sentiment of the country has been marshalled against it, and that it a custom which finds favour now-a-days only with women and ignorant men. That being the case, we may hope for its extinction at no remote distance of time. For by a process of filtration with which you are all familiar, the sentiment of the educated classes becomes in the course of time the sentiment of the entire people. The institution of caste, is then doomed. The decree of fate has been pronounced against it."<sup>1</sup>

Suffice it to stress that all his life, his favourite plunk seems to have been caste, some of his comments I have already referred to. On various occasions in different parts of the country, he exhibited his caste card, to which he belonged with a high sense of pride, which earned him spontaneous and loud cheers from the audience. We can refer to a contemporary report.

"Surendranath Banerjea had gathered around him some paid agitators who included Liakat Hossain (Calcutta), Din Mohamed, Abdul Kasim and Deedar Bux. Din Mohamed, by birth was a high caste Brahmin, son of Govinda Chandra Ganguli of Bakarganj District, Eastern Bengal. Poor education. He is said on one occasion to have shot a calf mistaking it for a boar; he applied for advice on the religious point raised first to the Hindu pandits, but failing to get satisfaction from them turned to the Mohamedan Maulvis. Was persuaded by them to embrace Islam and took the name of Din Mohamed. After the partition [of Bengal in 1905] he was made use of as a swadeshi lecturer, and in 1907 was being paid Rs. 30 a month by a Calcutta society. Has frequently delivered speeches at meetings presided over by Surendranath." Of the four agitators, Din Mohamed, son of Govinda Chandra Ganguli alone was fortunate to receive a monthly honorarium of Rs. 30.<sup>2</sup>

The real reason behind ensuring payment of a monthly emolument or honorarium to Din Mohamed does not require transcendental intelligence to understand anything other than his ancestral caste before his conversion to

Islam. This volume, it is clarified, does not show the name of author, publisher, printer, place and year of publication. I guess it was published by the CID Department of Bengal Police. Partition of Bengal in 1905 provoked loud protest by a section of Bengali. An agitation against partition coupled with the swadeshi movement demanding its annulment continued till 1911. Viceroy Lord Curzon had declared that "Bengal partition is a settled fact," which elicited a polemical reaction from Surendranath, "I will unsettle the settled fact."<sup>3</sup>

To us, a relevant question is: Did Surendranath unsettle "the settled fact"? How did that effort to unsettle the "settled fact" impact or jeopardise the Bengali nation, if we may call it so, referring to Bengal of the time? This should be or is, to any student, a genuine field, hitherto untouched for in-depth research. The history of anti-partition agitation coupled with the swadeshi movement is too well-known to repeat. The historiography of anti-partition agitation has been written usually from the perspective of agitators, who represented a minuscule minority—the educated Bengali Hindus who turned out as a tyrannical force against all other Bengalees.

Surendranath Banerjea how himself administered a swadeshi vow with the image of "the god right in front of me" to a crowd in the courtyard of a Kali temple.

"The atmosphere of the place was religious. Swadeshim had evoked the fervour of a religious movement. It had become part of our Dharma. Priests refused to officiate at ceremonies where foreign goods found a place. Foreign articles of clothing and of food, foreign sugar and salt, were eschewed with almost religious scrupulousness. The sentiment of religion is with us so all-pervading as to colour and dominate our activities even beyond its legitimate sphere. The swadeshi sentiment had thus become to assume a religious hue."<sup>4</sup>

Amvica Charan Mazumdar, an ardent follower of Banerjea, claimed that between 1903 and 1905, over 2,000 public meetings with attendance of 500 to 50,000 enthusiastic Hindus and Muhammadans, in both East and West Bengal were held. The people in their hundreds and thousands, boasted Mazumdar, in every city, town and village marched in solemn processions bare-footed and bare-bodied chanting dirges, and national songs and repaired to the nearest channel or stream and after ablution tied rakhi, the silken band of unity and fraternity, round one another's wrists when amid the deafening cries of Vande Mataram took the solemn vow in the name of God and motherland.<sup>5</sup> Claims of success by agitators themselves in hyperbolic terms suffer from exaggeration. To prove the widespread and penetrating impact of the swadeshi movement, let us hear what Surendranath recorded in his memoirs:

"A grand-daughter of mine, then only five years old, returned a pair of shoes that had been sent to her by a relative, because they were of



foreign make. The air was surcharged with the Swadeshi spirit, and it is no exaggeration to say that our young men were the creators of this stupendous moral change.”<sup>6</sup>

Equal exaggerating the success of boycott for imported goods, the *rasthtraguru* further recorded:

“A strange atmosphere is created. Young and old, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, all breathe it, and all are swayed and moved and even transported by the invisible influence that is felt. Reason halts; judgment is held in suspense; it is one mighty impulse that moves the heart of the community and carries everything before it. An eminent doctor told me that in the height of the Swadeshi movement a girl-patient of his, not more than six years old, cried out in her delirium that she would not take any foreign medicine.”<sup>7</sup>

We get an eyewitness account from Surendranath of how the political movement was soaked in deepest religiosity, perhaps a first of its kind in Bengal, if not in India. The *Bengalee*, an English journal he edited, commented on October 3, 1905.

“Stamped with the seal of probationary ministers of religion, sanctified by the holiest ceremony in the most sacred temple and affirmed by solemn vow of the thousands of Indians, the swadeshi movement went forth as a sacred cause.”<sup>8</sup>

Those interested in searching or researching a cocktail of religion with political motivation must or should look into the role of leaders of the swadeshi movement. Their labours would, I have little doubt, be richly rewarded. To make anti-partition agitation, which soon started losing its steam, it was cocktail with swadeshi to infuse energies and enthusiasm to its propagandists. Surendranath's close friend, Kali Prasanna Kabyavisarad, who, endowed with tons of whims, belonged to the Halder family of Kalighat, who were keepers of Kalighat temple. Anti-partition agitators and swadeshi leaders usually, attended such meetings robed in the “habiliments of Hindu orthodoxy. It was not a mere whim, there was a reason for it. That dress was the symbol of priestly and brahminical influence, and he naturally wanted to enlist on his side all the sources of power that he possessed. He was without a shirt, in a plain dhoti and chaddar, with the brahminical thread in striking evidence on his bare body.”<sup>9</sup> Needless to state the exhibition of orthodoxy was marketed to strike people with brahminical supremacy on the mind and imagination of Hindus. So, thread on the bare body of Kabyavisarad, expecting to make a striking impression on the public was used as a trick in a purely political affair. Swadeshi, needless to say, was undeniably an exclusive Hindu upper-caste affair. Bengal had 37 untouchable castes, who in 1911 aggregated at 1,14,93,467. While claiming success of the boycott movement, the intellectual class forgot usually, if not conveniently, to take

note of such facts integral to mass mobilization. Could those 37 castes, e. g., [1] Bagdi, Baishnab, [3] Bauri, [4] Bhumali, [5] Bhuiya, [6] Bhumij, [7] Chakma, [8] Chamar, [9] Chasa Dhoba/Dhopa, [11] Dom, [12] Hari, [13] Jogi or Jugi, [14] Kaibartta [Jalia], [15] Kalu, [16] Kamar, [17] Kaora, [18] Kapali, [19] Koch, [20] Kora, [21] Mal, [22] Malo, [23] Muchi, [24] Munda, [25] Namasudra, [26] Oraon, [27] Patni, [28] Pod, [29] Rajbanshi, [30] Santal, [31] Saha, [32] Sonar, [33] Subarnabanik, [34] Sunri, [35] Sutradhar, [36] Tipara, and [37] Tiyara get access to Kalighat temple? The exhibition of bare-bodies Kali Prosanna Kavyavisarad with "habiliments of Hindu orthodoxy" would be a miscarriage to the untouchables, who were denied access to 'the most sacred temple' by Bengali Hindu upper castes to appease the beneficiaries of revenue earned in Kalighat Temple! Comprising thirty-seven castes and tribes, they numbered 1,14,93,467 persons.

With the first venue for the inauguration of the swadeshi movement in the forecourt of the Kalighat temple, Calcutta it was destined to flop as millions of untouchables were denied access to 'the most sacred temple' by orthodox Bengali Hindu. These castes and tribes, numbering 1,14,93,467 persons of 2,09,45,379 Hindus, accounted for 54.87 (55%) of Bengali Hindus.<sup>10</sup> The Hindu politician counted those 37 castes and tribes as Hindus when the upper castes faced political opposition, hostility, and uncertainties, threatening their safety and privileges. The Hindus in social life, make no mistake, treated Bagdi, Bauri, Chamar, Chandal, Dom, Hari, Rajbanshi, and Santal as semi-Hinduised aboriginals.<sup>11</sup>

The fact does not substantiate that any members of these castes were a part of the thousands of Indians who thronged Kalighat temple at Calcutta or Kali temples elsewhere in the province. Claims of Surendranath or his cheering followers should or must be taken with tons of salt. Surendranath addressed a letter urging Guruchand Thakur, the Namasudra leader of socio-religious reform, to reply to him as follows:

"Namasudras are a poor people. They do not indulge in luxury nor do they know it. The only foreign goods they use are cheap imported cloth. It is the high castes who are wont to use imported goods. This [boycott] agitation, therefore, should remain confine exclusively amongst themselves. The Namasudras are still bereft of political rights and are oppressed and exploited ruthlessly in their own homeland. High caste Hindus are deadly opposed to grant of any political rights to them. They must, therefore, inculcate a feeling of brotherhood for the low castes, else, the degraded and low castes will never join the High caste Hindus in any agitation against the British."<sup>12</sup>

We do not know if, ever or at all, any socioeconomic cost-benefit analysis of anti-partition of Bengal or swadeshi between 1905-11 was attempted or carried out. There can be hardly any doubt the cost would outmatch the benefits harvested by a tiny minority, who waged political movement.

### **The pecuniary implication of swadeshi**

I have not come across a volume devoted to this area. It surprises me why such a delicious field had evaded the interests of research scholars and academicians. But in my eagerness to hunt for source materials whomever I approached, none of them though highly respectable in their field of studies could help me. Analysis of imports and exports during 190-1911 demonstrates a wild gulf between urban and rural Bengal. Educated people and those dependent on agriculture were divided as also marked unbridgeable into two pugnacious camps. The educated Bengalis were sorely inimical to the camp and dependent on agriculture, i. e. primary sector of the economy. Exports of raw jute from Bengal to Europe brought stupendous financial fortunes for the jute farmers and the people involved in trade, industry, and transportation, besides jute mill owners and labourers. In his seminal work, Prof. George Watt, Department of Botany, Calcutta University, wrote that "an amount of Rs. 33,00,00,000, or say, £22,000,000 was the contribution of European manufacturing enterprise paid in 1905-06 to agriculturists and traders of Bengal for raw jute."<sup>13</sup> The pecuniary gains in a single year accruing to the cultivators of jute fondly known as "golden fibre" was inestimable. In colonial India, jute and jute goods were the largest earner of foreign exchange.

In 1906-07 exports of raw jute, valued at Rs. 24,12,50,000 crashed to Rs. 16,92,64,000 in 1910-11. Total losses, aggregating at Rs. 7,19,86,000 impacted most severely the jute growers in districts, e. g., Mymensingh, Rangpur, Dacca, Tippera, Bogra, Faridpur, Pabna, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, and Jessore, which boasted of about 39,41,910 acres under the plough.<sup>14</sup> Prominent jute growing districts than in West Bengal, e. g. Murshidabad, Nadia, 24-Parganas and Nadia on the contrary, had placed 3,39,000 acres which were less than 4,55,000 acres of district Rangpur alone in East Bengal. Mymensingh growing "the golden fibre" in 8,47,110 acres was the leader in the whole of Bengal.<sup>15</sup>

### **The jute farmers of East Bengal and Assam**

Muslims and Namasudras represented practically the whole Bengal peasantry. This was an appraisal of the Chief Secretary about the cultivating population of the newly created Eastern Bengal and Assam Province. His report said that "the Muhammadans and Namasudras practically represented almost the whole of the peasantry."<sup>16</sup> Needless to say, the anti-partition agitation and swadeshi movement had hit and hurt the pecuniary interest of the jute growers, who were Muslims and Namasudras in the main. The agitators were careless about the lifeblood of the jute cultivators. In the given circumstances, leaders and intellectual class were focused on the impact of imports from England due to anti-partition agitation and the swadeshi movement. They were callous, if not blind to its impact on exports from Bengal. Constant media and intellectual hype or brouhaha have created a general impression that imports had suffered enormously due to the swadeshi movement. None talked about exports of jute from Bengal during the period.

In September 1905, Surendranath addressed a meeting at Kumartuli, Calcutta, attended by 15 thousand comprising merchants, traders, shopkeepers and zamindars. He announced there also "as a Brahmin, a Kulin Brahmin to boot" and in that capacity, he insisted upon his audience in the front of the temple that which was situated there to use country-made goods."<sup>17</sup> Surendranath Banerjea had gathered around him "paid agitators" who included Liaqat Hossain (Calcutta), Din Mohamed, Abdul Kasim and Deedar Bux. Din Mohamed, by birth, was a high caste Brahmin, son of Govinda Chandra Ganguli of Bakarganj District, Eastern Bengal. Poor education. He is said on one occasion to have shot a calf, mistaking it for a boar; he applied for advice on the religious point raised first to the Hindu pandits, but failing to get satisfaction from them turned to the Mohamedan Maulvis. Was persuaded by them to embrace Islam and took the name of Din Mohamed. After the partition [of Bengal] he was made use of as a swadeshi lecturer, and in 1907 was being paid Rs. 30 a month by a Calcutta society. Has frequently delivered speeches at meetings presided over by Surendranath.<sup>18</sup> Paid agitators or supporters, we are confident, sheer the paymaster and jeer his opponents on signals emanating from him. We may precisely concede to this view without hesitation.

An agitator himself, all of Surendra Nath's claims of success of anti-partition agitation and swadeshi movement should be taken with due caution and evaluation. There is little doubt that the anti-partition agitation of Bengal had lost its steam for want of mass support. Valentine Chirol, a correspondent of The Times, London wrote in 1910 of a "propaganda that has been carried on by Brahmans amongst the Namasudras, a large and mainly agricultural caste, chiefly located in the Jessore district of Bengal and the Faridpur district of Eastern Bengal." The sole purpose of the propaganda was political, but the inducement offered to the Namasudras to stimulate their Nationalism was that the Brahmans would relax the rigour of caste in favour of those who took the Swadeshi vow, and it is stated that, in several villages where they succeeded in making a large number of converts. In the end, the crafty and deceitful allurements succeeded in converting some Namasudras into swadeshi agitators by the Brahman propagandists, who said Chirol, "marked their approval by condescending to have their twice-born heads shaved by the village barber." To the Times Correspondent, this was an act "absolutely revolutionary breach with a 3,000-year-old past."<sup>19</sup>

On January 21, 1929, a combined deputation from the All-Bengal Depressed Classes Association and the All-Bengal Namasudra Association waited on the Members of the Simon Commission, of the Central Committee (except Dr. Suhrarawardy, and of the Bengal Provincial Committee which recorded their deposition. The delegates were asked by the Commission, "Do barbers shave you?"

"No, the barbers that shave the high caste Hindus do not shave us," pat

came the reply from Mukunda Behary Mallick, who, as President of the All-Bengal Namasudra Association, led the nine-member deputation to the Simon Commission.<sup>20</sup> This seems without any shadow of doubt, a blatant lie, marketed by the propaganda machine of the swadeshi leaders.

We have referred, beforehand how, according to William Hunter, the upper classes trampled with utter disregard the educational aspiration and dreams of the lower orders. "The Brahmans and Kayasthas deem education to be strictly their inheritance..." The real implication of such megalomania of a tiny minority against the majority is pregnant with disastrous consequences in the life of any nation. From their ill-conceived and motivated notion, Brahmans and Kayasthas and their co-travellers opposed the establishment of a university at Dhaka, which has also been noted earlier. No human society is known to have nursed and practised ignoble viciousness or depravity of such dimension towards any other section, that too who are majority, in their efforts of accessing education, the basic ingredient for human right, progress, prosperity and happiness. I strongly feel and genuinely believe the behaviour of a microscopic section of Hindus sowed the first seed to bear poisonous fruits of distrust, strife and disharmony as evidenced in Bengal, resulting ultimately in her partition in 1947.

A look at the population of Faridpur, returned by the 1911 census, may be delicious. The population of Faridpur aggregated at 21,21,914 of whom Muslims accounted for 63% and Hindus, for 37%. Of the Hindus, the Namasudras with 3,57,357 was the largest caste; Kayastha, 81,051 and Brahman, 50,051. <sup>21</sup> The Namasudras accounted for 16.8%; Kayastha, 3.8%; and Brahman, 2.4% of the district population. Of the total population of Faridpur, thus Kayasthas and Brahmans were 5.12% against 16-8% Namasudras whose initiative for establishing a High School in 1908 was resisted by Kayasthas. Official records pointed out that the Namasudras were "46% per cent of all Hindus in the district. Faridpur contains more Namasudras than any other district in the province and 18% per cent of the total Namasudra population in the province." <sup>22</sup>

Educational destitute, the Chandals launched a sustained movement for light under the leadership of sagacious Harichand Thakur and his equally prodigious son Guruchand. The foresighted son harnessed Australian Baptist Christian Missionary patronage in his venture for establishing a High English School in the village of Orakandi. The proposed high school to spread light amongst the untouchables and others equally backwards were viewed, strangely by the Kayasthas of Faridpur as an undesirable development. The landlords and moneylenders felt threatened that their hegemony over the illiterate peasants and working classes encountered thereby a serious challenge. The prospect of literacy in the Namasudras was apprehended to expose deception, chicanery, forgery and falsification of rent and debt-payment receipts which hitherto was nonchalantly indulged by the feudal

servants, both habitually to benefit the landlords. So, the “high caste Kayasthas” offered “stiff opposition” against the foundation of the high school at Orakandi as they were “afraid that their sharecropper and servants would no longer work for them if they became educated.”<sup>23</sup> The Hindu intelligentsia, who went about tirelessly tomtom their contribution as patrons for education, remained mute spectators.

The Mahomedans with the largest district population, I am afraid, stood on no footing better than the Namasudras in the eyes of the Kayasthas, not to speak of Brahmans. The Kayasthas offered the stiffest opposition to the establishment of the high school at Orakandi. To the bhadralok, the initiative of self-development for Namasudras was an unwelcome development, which they targeted to nip in the bud. In the Bengali bhadralok culture, such behaviour has neither been considered blameable nor a crime against the human right of the illiterate masses. Voices from their caste and class could certainly have helped neutralize caste hatred and animosity living and kicking till today in the society. They have not yet shown any sign of eagerness to bring down the monumental hatred and to bridge the gulf between them and the underdogs. We may, with benefit, refer to the thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore on elementary education for the masses. In 1906 the poet expressed his perception of colonial education policy in an article captioned প্রাইমারি শিক্ষা i. e., primary education.

“যে-চাষা তাহার ছেলেকে প্রাইমারি স্কুলে পাঠায়, তাহার একটি মাত্র উদ্দেশ্য এই যে, তাহার ছেলে নিতান্ত চাষা না থাকিয়া কিঞ্চিৎ পরিমাণ ভদ্রসমাজ-সেঁবা হইবার যোগ্য হয়। চিঠিটা পত্রটা লিখিতে পারে, পড়িতেও পারে, জমিদারের কাছারিতে দাঁড়াইয়া কতকটা ভদ্রছাঁদে মোজারি করিতে পারে, গ্রামের মোড়লি করিবার যোগ্য হয়, ভদ্রলোকের মুখে শুনিতে পায় যে, “তাই তো রে, তোর ছেলেটা তো বলিতে-কহিতে বেশ।”

The cultivator wants his ward to admit to school to learn the three Rs, hoping that the child would acquire the skill to speak and imitate the manner of speaking like bhadralok to receive attention in the community.

“শিক্ষা জিনিসটাকে একদিকে একবার শুরু করিয়া দিলে তার পরে তাহাকে গণ্ডি টানিয়া কমানো শক্ত। বিদেশী রাজার পক্ষে সেটা একটা বিষম ভাবনা। প্রজা বাঁচিয়া বর্তিয়া থাকে, এটা তাঁহার একান্ত প্রয়োজন, কিন্তু বাঁচার চেয়েও যদি বেশী অগ্রসর হইয়া পড়ে, তবে সেটা তাঁহার প্রয়োজনের সঙ্গে ঠিক খাপ খায়না।”

He further uttered a caution that education once begun, cannot be limited by drawing an artificial dividing line. When a boy advances in his mission of learning, he may become a source of anxiety for the authority.

“এই জন্য প্রাইমারি শিক্ষার প্রস্তাবে কর্তৃপক্ষের নানারকম দুশ্চিন্তার লক্ষণ দেখা যাইতেছে। তাহারা ভাবিতেছেন, খাল কাটিয়া বেনো জল ঢেকানো কাজটা ভালো নয়— শিক্ষার সুযোগে দেশের ভদ্রলোকের চেউটা যদি চাষার মধ্যে প্রবেশ করে, তবে সেটা একটা বিষম জঞ্জালের সৃষ্টি করা হবে।”

The expansion of primary education has undesirable effects. If the new learners start behaving like the bhadralok, it would be like inviting voluntarily avoidable hazards. Tagore went further to focus on the ultimate stage where education of the farmers' ward could become a source of a headache for the government who encouraged them voluntarily to learn the three R's. He also was of the view that

“এতএব চাষাদের শিক্ষাকে এমন শিক্ষা করা চাই, যাহাতে মোটের উপর তাহারা চাষাই থাকিয়া যায়। তাহারা যেন গ্রামের ম্যাপটা বোঝে, পৃথিবীর ম্যাপটা চুলায় যাক, ভারতবর্ষের ম্যাপটাও তাহাদের বুঝিবার প্রয়োজন নাই। তা ছাড়া শিক্ষাটা প্রাদেশিক উপভাষার বেড়া ডিসাইয়া না যায়, সেটাও দেখা দরকার। অতএব প্রথমেই দেখিতেছি, আমরা চাষাদের শিক্ষালাভ হইতে যে-সুবিধাটা আশা করিতেছি, কর্তৃপক্ষ স্বভাবতই সেটাকে আনন্দের বিষয় বলিয়া মনে করিতে পারেন না। আমাদের দেশহিতৈষীরা যদি মনে করেন, সরকারের কর্তব্য দেশের সাধারণ লোকদের শিক্ষার ব্যবস্থা করা এবং আমাদের কর্তব্য রেজেলুশন পাশ করা, তবে এ কথাটা আমাদের মনে রাখিতে হইবে যে, সরকারের হাতে শিক্ষার ভার দিলে, সে-শিক্ষার দ্বারা তাঁহারা তাঁহাদের উদ্দেশ্য সাধনেরই চেষ্টা করিবেন, আমাদের উদ্দেশ্য দেখিবেন না। তাঁহারা চাষাকে গ্রামের চাষা রাখিবার ব্যবস্থা করিবেন, তাহাকে ভারতবর্ষের অধিবাসী করিয়া তুলিবার জন্য ব্যস্ত হইবেন না। এই জন্য প্রাইমারি শিক্ষার প্রস্তাবে কর্তৃপক্ষের নানারকম দুশ্চিন্তার লক্ষণ দেখা যাইতেছে। তাহারা ভাবিতেছেন, খাল কাটিয়া বেনো জল ঢোকানো কাজটা ভালো নয়---শিক্ষার সুযোগে দেশের ভদ্রলোকের চেউটা যদি চাষার মধ্যে প্রবেশ করে, তবে সেটা একটা বিষম জঞ্জালের সৃষ্টি করা হবে।”

Though Rabindranath targeted the colonial authorities if his observations are paraphrased and educationists from upper castes are substituted, we get perspective and objective behind fierce Hindu opposition in suppressing educational aspiration of the untouchables or chotalok in Bengali. The partition of Bengal was annulled in 1911. Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal. The capital of the Indian Empire was transferred to Delhi from Calcutta. Bengal was the seat of power under the British for over two centuries. The shift of capital from Calcutta, strangely, did not shock the Bengali anti-partition agitation leaders though the meaning and socio-political and economic implications were too enormous to comprehend with equanimity. They did not utter a word against the move for shifting the capital as the agitators had no face to raise their voices such demands at all.

The tyrannical attitude made the bhadralok fraternity believe that they represent the entire Bengali-speaking people including those they opposed and humiliated, resulting in fissiparous ramifications in social, economic and political spheres. At the cost of the state exchequer, the pampered Babus became the weapon of mass destruction without parallel under the educational and cultural horizon nursed by the British. Their increased knowledge indeed made them inveterate enemies not only of the illiterate Bengalis but also people in the neighbourhood wherever they migrated and/or settled or lived. The treatment the natives of Bihar, Orissa and Assam

received [and continue to receive] in their respective provinces and above all East Bengal to which they belonged corroborate the truth of the assertion. Today descendants of the tyrannized Bengalis have been paying price for the boorish Babus of the last century.

#### **The crusade against Bengalis domiciled in Bihar**

In 1935 the same babus from Bengal, strangely, found themselves caught in the eye of the crusade in Bihar. Their tyranny had germinated and invited crusaders on them. The story should be focused here. A Member of Bihar Legislative Council, Nanda Kumar Ghosh agitated a demand on behalf of Bihar Domiciled Bengali Association for 5.6% of reservation in (1) promotion in public services; (2) admission to educational institutions; (3) award of scholarship; and (4) contracts of public works. "Bengali officers" according to the aggrieved MLC, were "retrenched first" by any department whenever an opportunity presented itself. Some 40-50 years prior to the crusade staring in their face, the educated Biharis used to beg for jobs in their own province before the educated and tyrannical bhadralok dominated in various departments. This was the beginning of the Bengali babus paying the educated Biharis in their own coins. The entire range of low castes even in Bengal were/are maltreated and deprived by the same arrogant and myopic minority. The bhadralok who constitute 6.5% of the total population [1931 census as a base] are blissfully ignorant of how strongly they are disliked by the majority of Bengalis in their own 'Sonar Bangla.'

The natives of Assam and Orissa were no different in their bitterness against the educated bhadralok even after a century. Outbursts against the Bengali in general in their neighbourhood brings occasionally back the old memories of maltreatment and exploitation of their natives at the hands of the bhadralok. By their opposition to the establishment of the University at Dhaka in 1911, the people of Eastern Bengal were convinced that their fate was ruthlessly crushed and aspiration indignantly ridiculed by educated Hindus, who, though, were in the infinitesimal minority. West Bengal, partitioned as a "Hindu homeland" to meet the need of the same insignificant minority, is now can be called a "degraded east end."

The general perception of Bengalis of West Bengal, as cantankerous and garrulous, by and large, is little better than seekers of favours of the rulers of Delhi. There no denying the truth that the transferred capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911 had dealt a sharp blow to Bengalis and left a long shadow over their fate and fortune. There is an acute scarcity of scholastic research and analysis directed to this area by Bengali intelligentsia.

#### **Orator and Politician**

Paying rich tributes to Surendranath Banerjea, the only Indian delegate to the Imperial Press Conference, London in 1909 as a public speaker, a



discriminating English critic described his powerful oratory:

“Whatever the subject, he strikes fire at once. Fact after fact, argument after argument, all bearing directly on the point in discussion succeed each other and as each fresh view is presented and led forward to a logical conclusion the rounds of applause that greet him prove that his demonstration has told and has been felt by all as legitimate and just.”<sup>28</sup>

No further elaboration of his oratorical ability or effectiveness is warranted. His speeches marked by tempest voice earned him universal acclaim. Shyam Sundar Chakraborty, one of his very ardent disciples, however, held a view which, as below, militates against his image to the common man.

“যদিও সুরেন্দ্রনাথ বক্তৃতায়ই সাধারণের নিকট পরিচিত, আমি কিন্তু বঙ্গ সুরেন্দ্রনাথকে সুরেন্দ্রনাথই বলি না। আমি ব্রাহ্মণ সুরেন্দ্রনাথকে চিনি।”

“Though Surendranath Banerjea is admired by the people for his oratory,” the above statement if translated, “but I do not cheer him as a public speaker at all. I recognize the Brahman in Surendranath aloud.”

This perception concerning Sir Surendranath Banerjea, as a Brahman, is rarely focused in historiography. Nevertheless, the above view contrary or unfamiliar though, cannot be brushed aside without a serious appreciation of his life and activities. On serving several years of sentence of deportation to Burma, when he returned to Calcutta, the rashtraguru warmly embraced him:

“পুত্র তুল্য শ্যাম সুন্দর, তোমাকে আমি অনুরোধ করছি, তুমি বেঙ্গলী পত্রিকার জন্য লেখ।”

“My son, join me and write for The Bangalee.” This was a unique offer and opportunity couched with powerful allurements to work with the prominent leader. He joined accordingly and worked under Surendranath as editorial staff for at least over a decade for The Bangalee, one of the prominent English journals, converted into a daily in 1903.<sup>31</sup> The highly acclaimed 420-page memoir, *A Nation in Making*, published in 1925 at the age of 77, begins an apt introduction of his identity:

“I belong to a Kulin Brahmin family which, since the creation of Kulinism by King Ballal Sen, had maintained their purity with proud and inflexible consistency.”<sup>32</sup>

He familiarised his readers with how the family adhered to the kulinism with inflexible consistency and devotion defying allurements and temptation and led a simple life with high thinking. This was perhaps the last occasion when he played his caste card as he expired in 1925. In one of his earliest speeches delivered in 1877 at Calcutta, a 28 year old Surendra Nath declared publicly that caste sentiment had been extinguished in the educated class.

“.... it is my pleasing duty to be able to say that the educated sentiment of the country has been marshalled against it, and that it a custom which finds favour now-a-days only with women and ignorant men. That being the case, we may hope for its extinction at no remote distance of time. For by a process of filtration with which you are all familiar, the sentiment of the educated classes becomes in the course of time the sentiment of the entire people. The institution of caste is then doomed. The decree of fate has been pronounced against it.”<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, as his various speeches and utterances reflect, caste has been his inseparable identity which he exhibited consistently in public speeches with pride.

## PART-VII

### The Brahman in Surendranath

Let us explore in earnest the self-evaluation of Surendranath Banerjea through his public utterances and announcements as documented for posterity. In January 1903, he addressed the Social Conference at Ahmedabad. It is a historical fact that annual conferences of the Indian National Congress and Social Conference, for quite some time, were held not only at the same venue but also under the same pandal. In one of his speeches, he dwelt on how Buddhism was exterminated and /or exiled from India, the soil and land of its birth. “When they [forefathers] were confronted with the militant forces of the Buddhist, what did they do? They cajoled, they fraternalized with the Buddhists, they took the principle from Buddha; they installed Lord Buddha as God Jagannath and in this way, the extinction of Buddhism was brought about. There was the principle of adoption, and if you wish to preserve the ancient system which has come to us as a heritage, I think that you follow the principle of adoption. Buddhism was trounced from India by a wave of anti-Buddhist aggression and offensive launched by Brahmanical forces. In elaborating his theme, the speaker continued:

“I have always felt the deepest possible interest in the Social Conference movement. I regard them as being interdependent. I will go further and I confess that I have not been able to actively take part in the furtherance of its objects. Several circumstances in my life have compelled me to devote myself to the prosecution of Political aims, purposes and aspirations. I regard them as being indissolubly linked together. I regard them as being interdependent. I will go further and say that political reform is impossible without social regeneration and moral enfranchisement.”<sup>1</sup>

He drew up a blueprint in clear terms for social reform and presented it before the delegates hailing from all over the Indian subcontinent to attend the Social Conference. He embraced the ancient tradition and principles of

Brahminical philosophy and model for adoption by them for his model of reform. By laying down before the delegates his Brahmanical identity highlighting his lineage as a Kulin, Banerjea argued in favour of his concept:

“We must cleanse the temples of our homes and our hearths. We must purify and elevate the social and moral atmosphere before we can aspire to those political rights which it is the aim of the Congress to secure and promote.... I am not in favour precipitate reform. I call myself a Hindu. (Hear, hear) I am a Brahman. (A voice, come then laughter) I call myself a Hindu, I am a Brahmin. (Hear, hear) I am a class of Kulin Brahmins at heart. I come from the highest class of Kulin Brahmins in Bengal. (‘Oh) I hear a passionate voice of expression of surprise. (Laughter) I have not yet come to the end—to the climax. (A voice, “come then” —laughter) I am a Brahmin, a Brahmin of Brahmins at heart. I come from the highest class of Kulin Brahmins in Bengal. And I venture to tell that I have done nothing or said nothing to disenfranchise me from my Brahminical rights. (Hear, hear) In thought, in action, and in the prosecution of the purposes of my life, I am a Brahmin of Brahmins. (Hear, hear) I am not disenfranchised of my rights. (Hear, hear) I, therefore, feel that, that if any reform is to be carried out, it must be carried out upon the old lines (Hear, hear) in pursuance of the old principles. We must firmly take our stand upon the ancient foundations (Hear, hear). We must look around the examples of our sires and imitate them.”<sup>2</sup>

The social and religious attitude and aspirations of Surendranath Banerjea were exhibited down to rock bottom without any shadow of a doubt to attract his audience to the ancient model. We may as well add:

“What are the Hindu custom and Hindu rights? Are they not the customs and rights which were imposed upon us by the wisdom of the age in which they were framed and formed? Has not law of evolution been in force since then? Have not we progressed? Have we not advanced? Are we not always moving, whether forwards or backwards? Is it not motion a law of human nature and law of laws? If so the custom of the past must be modified to suit the altered circumstances and environments of the present situation. Our forefather appreciated that principle thoroughly.”<sup>3</sup>

The real nature of the reforms he had in mind was presented before the delegates. We now come across what exactly he meant by the above. India's social life, for ages, was marked by horrendous discrimination, abominable customs designed for violation and/or denial of human rights and dignity, liberty, equality and fraternity, besides denial of education was the hallmark of ancient Indian culture. There was no dearth of men who, like Surendranath Banerjea, went gaga over it and eulogized the old manners, practices and behaviour with absolute and unquestionable devotion. Banerjea had

consciously laid down a trap to bound India's future progress, codes of behaviour which was capable to blast forward march down to the orthodox culture in line with brahminical scriptural ordinances. The celebrated speaker was unrivalled in his style and approach concerning his manners and ideas. But some men saw the dark clouds hovering in the skies of India with ideas of social reforms propagating as above. A high-spirited and outspoken scholar Lala Lajpat Rai wrote:

"There are some good people in India who do, now and then, talk of the desirability of their country leading a retired, isolated and self-contained life. They pine for good old days and wish them to come back. They sell books which contain this kind of nonsense. They write poems and songs full of cheap sentimentalities. I do not know whether they are idiots or traitors. I must warn my countrymen most solemnly to beware of them and of that kind of literature...The country must be brought up to the level of the most modern countries....in thought and action."<sup>4</sup>

In the backdrop of Banerjea's loud and unconcealed profession of conviction harking back to Aryan culture, civilization, and social norms, customs and practices we must see his political activities to understand his intentions and discover his objectives. Though eulogized as rashtraguru, he was staunchly uncompromising and tenaciously obstructionist against the right of education for the masses. Imagine he was subverting the educational policy of the British, who were very sympathetic to aspiration and the need for literacy of the masses. They had no hypocrisy as Indian leaders who, like Surendranath Banerjea were unfazed to oppose mass education for his fellow countrymen. The sad chapter of Surendranath that not without the connivance of the intelligentsia, he remained totally beyond academic discourse or focus which left his image unblemished or untarnished. They simply turned blind eye to analyze the social dimension of his myopic, if not subversive, role against mass education. We must understand that Lala Lajpat Rai had crossed the sword not only with Surendranath Banerjea but also with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mohandas Karamchand and all those, big or small, known and unknown people, who travelled in their boat on the issue of literacy of the countrymen irrespective of caste, creed and faith. There was no doubt that they harmed the fundamental interest of the country.

A critical analysis of the activities of Sir Surendranath surely exhibits and demonstrates two distinct traits of his personality—one political and the other, social. In every phase of their life, he pushed the political agenda under social camouflage. A very ardent follower of Shyam Sundar Chakraborty's assertion brings out Surendranath's unknown identity to the fore. The intelligentsia dismissed unflinchingly the rashtraguru's social perspective to highlight his political identity for the perpetuation of his pan-India appeal

across castes and communities. They were very well aware that his caste identity, marked deeply by a parochial approach, would lose universal appeal too soon and he would become, in that situation, a leader of a tiny section. The historiographers, with this end in view, dissected surgically the social perspective of his long life for highlighting exclusively his political façade only. Bengalis or Indians per se know the political Surendranath, only half of him. Damodar Mukhopadhyay, how, let us see, while showering encomia, without parallel, in his self-edited journal (প্রবাহ) Prabaha— 'Current' anointed:

“দেবতা সুরেন্দ্রনাথ! তুমি কৃতি, তুমি ক্ষমতালী, তুমি দেবানুগৃহীত! নারায়ণের কৃপায় তুমি সুদীর্ঘ জীবন লাভ কর। সুরেন্দ্রনাথ! দেশ কাতরভাবে তোমার মুখের দিকে চাহিয়া আছে। দেবতা সুরেন্দ্রনাথ! এখনও আমাদের মনে পূর্ণ পরিভূক্তি হয় নাই, এখনও দেবতা সুরেন্দ্রনাথ, তোমার দেবত্ব সম্পূর্ণ হয় নাই। আমরা এখনও তোমাকে স্বধর্মনিষ্ঠ স্বদেশীয় আচার ব্যবহারানুগত মহাপুরুষরূপে দর্শন করিবার নিমিত্ত ব্যাকুল হইয়াছি। সুরেন্দ্রনাথ! আমাদের এ বাসনা কি মিটিবেনা? আমাদের সনাতন দেবদেবীর মন্দিরসমীপে তোমাকে দন্ডবৎ প্রণত হইতে আমরা কি দেখিব না?”

Loosely translated, Mukhopadhyay wrote: Surendranath, a God on earth! You are the epitome of virtue. We are eager to see your divinity. We would be delighted to see you as a deity with your statue installed in Sanatan Hindu shrines where people would make obeisance as they do before their sacred deities—gods and goddesses. We wonder whether the deification of Surendranath Banerjea has placed a check on the intellectual class to analyse and dissect his activities for evaluation and appraisal of his role in every field of his life.

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