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Role of Students and Women of Barak Valley in the Swadeshi Movement

Dr. Sahabuddin Ahmed

Associate Professor, Department of History
Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Abstract:

The partition of Bengal came as a rule shake and an eye opener of patriotic Bengalees of Barak Valley of Assam. The role of students and women of Barak Valley in the Swadeshi movement through in limited scale. The students' community joined the movement with great enthusiasm. It was the students who worked to make the boycott and Swadeshi successful. They enrolled themselves as members of the various volunteer groups. This movement encouraged national education. In this movement the women balk of Barak Valley also participated. They became active with their male counterpart and encouraged the Swadeshi goods by boycotting foreign goods. That was immense on the part of the women of the valley.

Key words: Swadeshi, boycott, ignominy, national education, enthusiasm

1. Introduction

For a successful movement, it requires a large scale participation of youth. In each and every movement of India, students and women played a commendable role and so also in the Case of *Swadeshi* Movement. The present Barak Valley was also no exception in this regard.

2. Role of Students

Like Bengal, in Barak Valley students spearheaded the *Swadeshi* and boycott movement. The spirit of movement engendered in the young minds a sense of hatred against the British. Bipin Chandra Pal's visit to Barak Valley created enthusiasm among the Bengali speaking people for the movement. At that time, there were five M.E. Schools and one High School in Silchar. Bipin Chandra Pal and Kamini Kumar Chandra Visited Katigorah, Barkhola and Lakshimpur and urged the students to boycott the school. Some of the students responded to the call and left the school and joined boycott movement to suppress student's participation in the movement. They were beaten and tortured, they were expelled form schools. On 10th October, 1905; the Chief Secretary of Bengal Presidency Mr. Carlyle issued a Circular prohibiting the students' participation in the *Swadeshi* Movement added fuel to the Fire (Biswas, 1997).

Like Bengal sign of hatred and agitation became visible among the students of Cachar. Student openly picketed the shops selling foreign liquor. Bon fire was made of foreign cloths. The students of Silchar Government High School, which was the premier institution of Cachar, started taking part in the agitation. Babu Abhoya Charan, Head Master of the institution, although a government servant, inspired the students with patriotic ideals and encouraged them to use *Swadeshi* goods. A Negro servant of an English military officer was assaulted by a student of the school for his attempt to manhandle some boys of tender age. The military officer lodged a complaint in the court and the incident created a great sensation in the town. But the Head Master defended the student so strongly that the case had to be ultimately withdrawn. On another occasion a student of the school alone come to blows with four *Feringhis* for their misbehavior with a Bengal peon of the Telegraph Officer. Three other boys noticed the sense, but took to their heels. Abhoya Charan appreciated the boy who came to blows with the *Feringhis* and rebuked the escapist for their cowardice.

Thus, the students become gradually conscious of the ignominy of foreign yoke and learned to protest against anything that injured their national prestige. The new spirit played so high that when the students were asked to contribute for decoration on the occasion of the visit of Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor, the students refused to pay. Disregarding the Carlyle and Risby Circular the students continued to attend public meetings and take part in the demonstrations. A volunteer party was raised with the students of the school and the second anniversary of the *Banga Vanga Andolon* was colorfully observed in the valley. Consequently, Director of Public Instruction of Eastern Bengal and Assam suspended 39 students of the Silchar Government High School. Of them, 38 joined the school after offering apology. But Apurba Kumar Chanda, son of Kamini Kumar Chanda did not submit to the humiliation. Kamini Kumar Chanda did not allow his son to offer an apology and instead sent him to Tagore's *Santiniketan* at Bolpur (Bhattacharjee, 1977).

But the activities of the students of Silchar Government High School were not only confirmed to this. When Bipin Chandra Pal visited Barak Valley students of the Silchar Government High School ignoring Government order attended the meeting of Bipin Chandra Pal. Surendra Mohan Endow, a student of Silchar Government High School read welcome address to Bipin Chandra Pal on behalf of the student community of Cachar.

Immediately after the first conference of the *Surma Valley Political Conference* at Sylhet on August, 1906 Bipin Chandra Pal, the harbinger of the National Movement addressed the students to boycott Government School. In response to the clarion call of Bipin Chandra Pal forty schools (Guha, 1977). To cater the needs of such students on 21st June 1907, the Sylhet National School was established on voluntary contributions by *Zamindar* of Gauripur Rs. 500/-, Ramani Mohan Das Rs. 500/- and Basanta Bairagi Rs. 300/-. The local pleaders and milk tears who had taken keen interest in these institutions moved from place to place to raise funds for this school. A donation of rupees two handed was made by the *Surma Valley Association* (Reports on the National School in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam). So as an offshoot of Boycott Movement, national school sprang up all over the valley.

The Sylhet National School was affiliated with National Council of Education, Bengal. Abinash Chandra Datta of village Lakhai was the first Head Master of the school. This school was started at the residence of Sachindra Chandra Singh, edited of the *Weekly Chronicle*. It had four buildings and play a ground close to Jinda Bazar. It had Ayurvedic and Carpentry classes following the syllabus and examinations laid down by the National Education Committee, Calcutta. Shrish Chandra Datta of Karimganj, Suresh Chandra Deb of Habuganj and Bhuvan Mohan Vidyarnava of Silchar were the teachers. The Circulars issued by the Government debarring students and teachers from participation in anti British agitation led to the starting of similar schools at Habiganj, Srimangal, Baniachang and Lakhai. These institutions were looked upon by the official circles as the 'hot-bed of seditions' and in their views exercised "most pernicious influence over its students." Teachers and students openly took part in organizing meeting, processions and of picketing of shops selling foreign goods. Political leaflets and pamphlets like *Swadhin Bharat* and *Bande Mataram* were widely and regularly circulated among the students who were also required to commit to memory the patriotic songs of Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath* in an exhibition held at Habiganj National School in 1906 nitric acid and hydrochloric acid prepared by the students were shown by the paintings on Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh and Ajit Singh were exhibited (Barpujari(ed), 1977).

Students of various places of Surma Valley, therefore, took some major steps to popularize the cult of *Swadeshi* and Boycott Movement. The students of the Silchar Government High School formed a strong committee under the guidance of Babu Radha Raman Datta, a pleader. This committee was known by the name of *Suhrid Samiti*. The main object of the *Suhrid Samiti* was to foster a more extended use of the country made goods in preference to British manufactures. The students swear to banish the idea of luxury and not to use as far as practicable foreign articles (Singh, 5th September 1905).

But the Students of Habiganj took a different role. For extensive use of country made articles to popularize the cult of *Swadeshi* they had brought some country-made cloth from Calcutta. Attempts were also made to bring handlooms and trained young men in weaving (Singh, 5th September 1905). Some of the students also participated in the volunteer associations and they also engaged themselves in terrorist activities. Among the terrorist leaders mention maybe made of Hem Sen, Biren Sen and Sushil Sen of Baniachang. Sushil Chandra Sen a student sentenced to fifteen strips in jail for striking a police officer. These activities of the students of the *Surma Valley* had there mild influence upon the students of the Barak Valley. So the students of Silchar, Badarpur, Karimganj and other places took part in the *Swadeshi Movement* in various ways.

3. Participation of Women

Besides the students, women also participated in the *Swadeshi Movement* in the Barak Valley. There are some references of women participation in the anti partition movement. But to understand their participation it is necessary to throw light on the condition of women and there position in society during nineteenth century without which there proper evaluation would not be possible. The Bengal Society was still conservative about women. In Bengal literatures exposed the lamentable condition of the woman in the society and the leaders of the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance agitated for there emancipation. The beginning was made by the abolition of *Sati* system and Window Remarriage Act. Gradually women in the urban areas were allowed in public institutions.

However, in Cachar things took a long time for change towards their participation in the *Swadeshi Movement*. The tour of Bipin Chandra Pal also infused moderation in the social outlook of the people of Barak Valley. The women in the Barak Valley could not think of attending a public meeting in 1906. In the meeting at Malugram no women was found to appear before the public meeting. By that time Bipin Chandra Pal had assumed a legendary name and there reflected some change in the attitude of women when a section of women expressed their desire to listen to him (Bhattacharjee, 1977).

Ultimately an arrangement was made in the house of Mahesh Chandra Datta where the women from the up stair families of the town listen to his address but from behind the screen. The meeting was inaugurated by singing the song "*Na jagile sab Bharat lalana ai Bharat ar jage na*" by two or three women but that from behind the screen that women can participate and should participate for the welfare of the country was felt through the discussion and women of a remote place like Silchar also took pledge for boycott of foreign goods and the service of the country (Biswas, 1997). They preferred coarser and dearer *Swadeshi* cloths than the finer and cheaper Manchester cloths. That was immense on the part of the women of the valley.

4. Conclusion

From the above discussion it is clear that like Bengal and other parts of India, the Students spearheaded the anti partition movement in the Surma-Barak Valley. When the programme of boycott was adopted, it was the students who worked to make the *Swadeshi* and boycott successful. Whatever success the National Education Programme achieved was due to the enthusiasm of

students. It was the students who championed the cause of *Swadeshi* and made it popular. Besides this, the participation of women in the boycott and *Swadeshi Movement* is a land mark in history of the national movement of India. This participation if not an event yet it generate new enthusiasm for the later movement in the valley.

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