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## **Anushilan Samiti and its Influence on The Anti-British Movement in Raiganj Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur District (1905-1942 AD)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Anushilan Samiti gave a new lease of life to the revolutionary era. While the Anushilan Samiti played a significant role in shaping the broader militant nationalist movement in Bengal, its specific influence on the socio-political environment of Raiganj remains comparatively unexplored. This paper aims to investigate how the organisation's ideology, training systems, and underground networks reached Raiganj; how local youths, students, and community groups became involved with or inspired by the Samiti, and how these connections strengthened Anti-British activities in the Raiganj Subdivision. During the Swadeshi Movement, a native school named 'Raiganj Coronation High School' was established on the soil of Raiganj. This School later became the base of the revolutionaries. Many students and teachers of this School were involved with the 'Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti'. From this school, the Mantra of revolution spread throughout Raiganj. This Raiganj Subdivision played an undeniable role in the history of India's freedom movement from 1905 AD to 1942 AD. Saroj Kumar Bose was an important member of this Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti.

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**Introduction :** Before India's independence, Raiganj Subdivision was part of the undivided Dinajpur district. This historical information highlights the regional divisions of India. Now, Raiganj is an



important city that has gained its own identity. The early twentieth century witnessed the rise of several revolutionary organisation in Bengal, among which the Anushilan Samiti played a decisive role in shaping militant nationalism against British rule. Though its Central activities were concentrated in Kolkata, Dhaka, and other major urban centres, the ideological influence and organisational network of the Samiti gradually spread to different parts of Bengal, including the northern districts. The Raiganj Subdivision of present-day Uttar Dinajpur district, despite being geographically distant from the nucleus of revolutionary operations, became an important space where nationalist ideas began to take root through students, educated youths, Akharas, and informal discussion groups. This paper aims to explore how the Anushilan Samiti's principals- such as, physical training, discipline, patriotism, and revolutionary consciousness- penetrated the socio-political environment of Raiganj Subdivision. It also seeks to understand the specific ways in which local individuals and groups, inspired either directly or indirectly by the Samiti, participated in Anti-British activities. Raiganj Coronation High school became the symbol of the Anushilan Samiti on the soil of Raiganj. It was a native school. Contacting the Anushilan Samiti created new training opportunities for the teacher of this school. Many students of this school developed contacts with the Anushilan Samiti and jumped into the Indian independence movement.

**Anushilan Samiti And Its Functions :** Swami Vivekananda awakened patriotic feelings among Indian youth and Rishi Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay gave birth to revolutionary ideas through his novel 'Anandamath'. These two Bengali luminaries paved the way for revolution through their writings and speeches. Later, Satish Chandra Bose took the responsibility of building the Bengali nation. After returning from the Chicago World's Parliament of religions in 1893 AD, Swami Vivekananda made a profound contribution to inspiring nationalism among the people of India. Rishi Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote 'Anandamath' in the form of a novel and signaled the organisation of the future revolution by beaking the chains of Banga Janani and in the worship of the motherland 'Vandemataram' seed mantras spread the radiance and strength in the entire nation. Swami Vivekananda prayed to Mother Earth to humanize the Bengali nation and Satish Chandra Bose took up the task.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to 1900, revolutionary ideas were not fully developed among the Bengali nation. Bengalis then lived a life of cowardice, due to which they were regarded as objects of hatred by other people. In order to remove this timid cowardice of the Bengali nation, several eminent persons of Kolkata took the initiative. Akharas were set up at different places in Kolkata. In these Akharas exercises were mainly taught such as Don, Baithak, Mugur, wrestling etc.<sup>2</sup> Satish Chandra Bose opened a gymnasium in the premises of the 'General Assembly's Institution' collage and arranged various types of strength sports



education in it, under the leadership of Gourhari Mukherjee, many Colleges at that time established such exercise practice arrangements, which helped students physical well-being. Satish Chandra Bose was Gaurhari Mukherjee's exercise disciple. Subsequently, Satish Chandra Bose's byamagar(Gymnasium) later transformed into the 'Anushilan Samiti'.<sup>3</sup> This Samiti played an important role in the Anti-British Movement. In 24 march, 1902 AD, the first Anushilan Samiti was established in Kolkata. The Samiti's byayamsala(Gymnasium) was located on Madan Mitra lene, 21 (now 24), near Hedua, and its office was in a small house nearby. Mr. Narendra Chandra Bhattacharya, the headmaster of New Indian School, named this organisation 'Bharat Anushilan Samiti '. Later Mr. Pramathanath Mitra shortened this Samiti to 'Anushilan Samiti'.<sup>4</sup> Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was a renowned Bengali writer, journalist, and novelist. Also, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's contribution to the establishment of the Anushilan Samiti was immense. Based on Anushilan theory - that ideal human formation integrated with physical, mental, moral, and spiritual excellence - the Anushilan Samiti was established. This Samiti played a crucial role in the contemporary Indian independence movement. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's final teaching in Dharmatatta is, 'Above all religions is patriotism; do not forget this'.<sup>5</sup> Every member of the Anushilan Samiti accepted Bankim Chandra's advice with reverence and devotion.

Jatindar Upadhyay (Jatindranath Bandyopadhyay) of Burdwan district especially helped the Bengali Youth to attain Kshatriya Shakti. His patriotism inspired him to join the military department for military strategy training in the state of Baroda. Shri Aurobindo Ghosh's revolutionary philosophy deeply influenced him. Returning to Kolkata, he secretly began revolutionary activities. Jatinder himself would ride in the guise of a Soldier on the streets of Kolkata city encouraging the youth for military training and preaching that freedom is not possible without Kshatriya Shakti. Subsequently, this work of his brought him much fame. Later, Jatindranath Bandyopadhyay took Sannyas and became known as Niralamba Swami.<sup>6</sup>

Overtime, various branches of this Anushilan Samiti were established in different parts of India, becoming focal point for revolutionary activities. The objective of this Samiti was to create ideal people and free the motherland from foreign rule. Regular exercise is essential for physical improvement and this Samiti plays an important role in promoting health awareness. For physical improvement, various types of exercises-don, sitting, wrestling etc. were done. Apart from this, the native games of India were prevalent, in which physical exertion is required, such as- Kabaddi.<sup>7</sup> People with different skills were assigned different tasks to develop the members of the Anushilan Samiti physically and mentally. Shailendra Nath Mitra was extremely dedicated to teaching stick fighting, according to this formula,



Martaza Saheb's method of teaching sword, Atul Ghosh's method of teaching big sticks, Jadu Gopal of small sticks for swordsmanship, Nagen Dutta, Surdas etc. are notable in fist fighting. Japanese masters taught gijin or Japanese swordplay. Also, military drills and mufights were conducted.<sup>8</sup>

Also, the members of the Anushilan Samiti followed various mythological and religious ideals. In a word it can be said that the members of the Samiti believed in spirituality. It was made compulsory for every members of this Samiti to recite Geeta. Traditionally, religious texts are recited and discussed every Sunday afternoon, such as - Ramayana, Mahabharata, Geeta, Chandi path etc.<sup>9</sup> Mythology and religious scriptures were discussed for the moral upliftment of the members of the Samiti. The significance of Devi Kali is undeniable not only from a religious perspective but also from a cultural and historical one. Devi Kali was very important in Anushilan Samiti. Members of the Anushilan Samiti were initiated in the Devi Kali temple when they were involved in any secret work. This ensured their loyalty. Members of the Samiti had to sign the pledge with the blood of their fingers in front of Devi Kali. They had a pledge not to divulge any of the Samiti's teaching or information, not to accept British government spy scholarship, not to betray the Samiti etc.<sup>10</sup> Besides, one of the parts of the Samiti was music. The members of the Samiti used to sing different songs together in the same tune. Mr Amritlal Gupta would sing beautifully, and everyone would sing along with him. <sup>11</sup> Also, the song 'Vandemataram' from Bankim Chandra chattopadhyay's Anandamath novel was the seed Mantra of the members of the Anushilan Samiti. His novel Anandamath had a profound impact on Indian nationalism and the song Vandemataram greatly inspired freedom fighters. This song is-

#### Vande Mataram

Sujalang Sufalang Malayaja Shitalang

Shasya Shyamalang Mataram

Bahubaladharining Namami Training

Ripudala Barining Mataram<sup>12</sup>

This song was not just a tune; it was an inerhaustible source of inspiration for freedom fighters. During the Anti-British movement, this song instilled new courage in the hearts of revolutionaries. It the pages of history, this song will forever shine as a symbol of patriotism and sacrifice. Also, this song was a source of motivation for every members of the Anushilan Samiti.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, members of the Anushilan Samiti were involved in various social activities and their initiative played crucial role in the



development of society. Furthermore, their contribution to solving various local problems are undeniable. Members of the Anushilan Samiti dedicated themselves to the service of Narayana, as per the instructions of Rama Krishna Paramhansa, and through this service, they aimed to improve society. To help poor families, the members of the Samiti went door to door begging and distributed the collected rice, pulses, Orphans and widows. This section of Anushilan Samiti was engaged in public service under the name of 'Daridra Bandhab Bhandar'. Responsible members were sent in groups to flood or famine-stricken areas to arrange for relief work and medical treatment. The Anushilan Samiti was the first to introduce the volunteer system in Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup> Their volunteer system inspired many young people to join the movement.

Later, branches of this Samiti started to develop in different places. In 1905, the 'Dhaka Anushilan Samiti' was a significant part of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. In 1905, Pramathanath Mitra and Bipin Chandra Pal went to Dhaka. They established a branch of the Anushilan Samiti there and Pulin Bihari Das was entrusted with the responsibility of managing this branch.<sup>15</sup> There was a great need for money to conduct revolutionary activities. Buying arms and ammunition are essential for national security. Although it is an illegal act, under special circumstances, robbery was adopted as a means of collecting this money. Rishi Aurobindo Ghosh gave a detailed account of this robbery at a conference in Kolkata. This information was found in the book 'Biplobi Pulin Das' written by Shri Bhabatosh Roy. Aurobindo Ghosh made a speech in front of the delegates from different districts and explained that if the country is to be made independent, a secret movement is to be carried out and if the movement is to be carried out, weapons and ammunition are needed. And to work for this, a lot of money is needed, and the rich people of the country will not give that money, the government money will have to be stolen. He firmly believes that robbery is a heinous crime, but if committed for the greater good of the country, it will not be considered a crime'.<sup>16</sup> It was not the intention of the members of the Anushilan Samiti that they would rob and embezzle all the money. It is said that they had planned to spend this robbery money for the liberation of their motherland. They would make a list of Indians from whom they would rob and return their money to them after independence. This proposal was made by a representative from Rangapur, and it was ultimately accepted unanimously. Which proves that their intention was to free the country from British rule. 'After Aurobindo Ghosh's speech, a representative from Rangapur proposed that a proper account should be kept of all the places from which money was taken by robbery and the money should be returned to all those persons after independence. The motion was seconded by Aurobindo Ghosh and thus the motion to commit robbery was finally adopted unanimously'.<sup>17</sup> His role in expanding the branches of the Anushilan Samiti in East and North Bengal was undeniable. About 600



branches were established in East and North Bengal under the leadership of Pulin Bihari Das. Jibantara Haldar mentions this in his book 'Anushilan Samitir Itihas'. In 1908, when various Samities including the Anushilan Samiti were declared illegal in East and North Bengal, about 600 branch Samities of the Anushilan Samiti existed in various places under the leadership of Pulin Babu'.<sup>18</sup>

**The Influence Of Anushilan Samiti In The Raiganj Subdivision:** The present Raiganj Subdivision was part of the undivided Dinajpur district before independence. The history of the undivided Dinajpur district is rich and traditional. Many people from Raiganj Subdivision were directly and indirectly involved with the 'Dinajpur anushilan Samiti'. It was a revolutionary organisation that supported armed struggle against British rule. According to historical records, the activities of this Samiti played a significant role in Bengal's independence movement. Raiganj Coronation High School in present-day Raiganj City was an indigenous School. According to historical data, this School supplied resources for the revolutionaries' struggle. Many teachers and students of this school were directly involved with the 'Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti'.

Lord Curzon was the main architect of the partitions of Bengal. In 1905, Lord Curzon decided to divide Bengal, his decision sparked widespread protests. When Lord Curzon decided to partition Bengal, the people of Dinajpur decided to unite and protest against it. A large public meeting was held under the chairmanship of Maharaja Girija Nath Roy Bahadur of Dinajpur. All eminent personalities of Dinajpur were present at that public meeting. 'On July 21, 1905, a large public meeting was organised in Dinajpur town, presided over Maharaja Girija Nath Bahadur of Dinajpur, to protest the government's decision on the partition of Bengal'.<sup>19</sup> When the partition of Bengal took effect on 16 October, 1905, a massive Anti-Partition movement started in Balurghat and Raiganj. Under the leadership of Kuloda Kanta Ghosh, the people of this region actively participated in the anti-partition movement. Arandhan Diwas is primary a protest event observed in response to specific incidents. On that day 'Arandhan Diwas' was observed in Raiganj at the initiative of Kuloda Kanta Ghosh. On that day, 'Arandhan Diwas' was also observed at Kuloda Kanta Ghosh's house. Then looms were also installed in his house for the purpose of banning foreign cloth. The girls of his house used to make cloth of coars thread. Moreover, they encouraged others to make clothes."<sup>20</sup> Kuloda Kanta Ghosh was the president of undivided Dinajpur district Congress and a renowned lawyer. In 1904, Kuloda Kanta Ghosh joined the Bombay Congress session as the sole representative of Raiganj and divided Dinajpur district.<sup>21</sup>

Kuloda Kanta Ghosh's contribution to Raiganj's education sector is unforgettable. Raiganj Coronation High school was established on January 17, 1911, by the initiative of Kuloda Kanta Ghosh. Kuloda



Kanta Ghosh, Kul Chandra Guha, Kul Chandra Mitra and some other educated people established 'Raiganj Coronation High School' in discussion and meeting with some rich people of Adi Bandar. Kuloda Kanta Ghosh was the founder editor of Coronation High School.<sup>22</sup> Arun Chandra Ghosh studied at Raiganj Coronation High School and later joined the teaching profession in that School. During his teaching tenure, he not only imparted academic knowledge to his students but also taught them other essential life skills. While teaching, he used to teach students exercises (Byayam), martial arts, swordsmanship, stick games etc. Arun Chandra Ghosh was one of the gym warriors and fist fighters of the undivided Dinajpur district.<sup>23</sup> His life as a strong man and boxer was an inspiration for the youths. Many of his students were active members of the Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti. They were arrested for being involved with the revolutionary movement.

Sukumar Guha was influenced by revolutionary activities while studying at Coronation High School. Because many revolutionaries studied in Coronation High School who were directly involved with Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti. In 1928, two police stations in Balurghat Subdivision experienced a famine. To help the famine stricken people financially, money, clothes, and Aadhar necessities were collected by playing harmonium and singing on the streets of town and villages. Sukumar Guha also helped these famine stricken people.<sup>24</sup> Saroj Kumar Basu became actively involved with the 'Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti' while studying at Coronation High School. According to Historical records, Saroj Kumar Basu was a dedicated member. Inspired by revolutionary Bibhuti Guha and lawyer Baroda Kanta Chakraborty, he become an active member of the Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti and began working for the country. Later he took charge of the management (In-charge) of Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti.<sup>25</sup> Ashwini Kumar Ghosh was deeply influenced by the revolutionaries while studying at while studying at Coronation High School. At that time Sukumar Guha, Shyama Prasad Burman, Banamali Das, Badruddin Ahmed, ahmed etc. studied in Coronation High School. Revolutionariy activities were discussed among them, and they thought about new strategies.<sup>26</sup> Ashok Ranjan Ghosh was an active official of the Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti. He led various activities of the committee and inspired the members. He used to practice stick fighting, knife throwing, horse riding, swimming, boxing and bomb making at the Anushilan Samiti Akhara in Dinajpur City. Ashok Ranjan Ghosh used to help the Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti, which played an important role in the freedom movement. Sometimes he would hide the revolutionaries revolvers and pistols in his house, risking his own life.<sup>27</sup>

This act of the Dacoity Anushilan Samiti was an important step for resistance against British rule. Historians believe that such activities of the Dacoity Anushilan Samiti were part of their freedom



struggle. In the evening of 28 October 1933, Saroj Kumar Basu, Ramakrishna Chakraborty, Hrishikesh Bhattacharya, Satyabrata Chakraborty, Ashok Ranjan Ghosh, and others (members of the Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti) looted the Darjeeling Mail train at Hili railway station. Jatindra Chandra Sengupta in his West Bengal gazetteer noted that-"on the 28th October, 1933, the railway station of Hili was raided by a group of young men dressed in military uniform. The station staff offered strong resistance, and there was an exchange of fire as a result of which the night guard of the railway station sustained serious injury and died in the hospital. The raiders who belonged to the Anushilan Samiti hoisted the National Flag on the station building and decamped with a large amount of money. Subsequently, all the young men who raided the railway station were arrested and brought to trial, and most of them were sentenced to undergo imprisonment for various terms including transportation for life."<sup>28</sup> The youths of the Anushilan Samiti set out for Dinajpur with the looted goods from the Darjeeling Mail in bullock carts, symbolising their bravery. The special tribunal convicted the revolutionaries, many of them were sentenced to death and several were sent to the Andaman Jail.<sup>29</sup>

The members of this Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti strengthened the Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement in Raiganj and Balurghat. Anadi Kumar Roy organised the Anti-British Movement by forming small assemblies in Jagadishpur region. Jatra and kirtan music sessions used to be held in many places in the villages. In those gatherings, he would perform his self composed Anti-British songs. 'Chal Chal Dilhi Chal/ Dushman ke mere Bhagao' were his favourite songs. Many youths were inspired by his songs and he used to interact with revolutionaries in Dinajpur to strengthen the party organisation.<sup>30</sup> Anil Chandra Nag, Rabindra Kumar Bhowmik, Sukumar Guha, Sucharu Guha, Kamal Bhowmik and Avinash Das took up the plan to lift the railway line at Sona Dangi near Raiganj. So, on 11 October, 1942, Anil Chandra Nag was arrested by the British police and subsequently others were also arrested.<sup>31</sup> In 1942, Ashwini Kumar Ghosh went to Dinajpur city and along with several young people, cut telegraph wires and roads. This incident was a protest against British rule.<sup>32</sup> Nani Gopal Acharya of Mahishbathan, Itahar police station, used to exchange letters with the revolutionaries and keep their secret information secure. On September 14, 1942, the Quit India Movement took a fierce turn in Balurghat. The police caught him and beat him badly and his hand and nose were cut due to the beating.<sup>33</sup> On August 15, 1947, India gained independence. The independence flag of India was hoisted in various parts of India. A few regions including Balurghat, Malda, and Raiganj were declared to be part of Pakistan. Muslims hoisted Pakistan flags at police stations and Courts in those areas. On August 17, Raiganj and those regions were incorporated into India. On August 18, Anil Chandra Nag, Rabindra



Kumar Bhowmik, Sukumar Guha, Kamal Bhowmik, and some other leaders marched in a huge procession to Raiganj court, took down the Pakistani flag, and hoisted the Indian National flag.<sup>34</sup>

**Conclusion:** Finally it can be said that the freedom fighters of Raiganj Subdivision were directly and indirectly involved with Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti. The historic Raiganj Coronation High School was an important centre of the Anti-British Movement. Students of this school actively participated in the country's freedom struggle, where they prepared physically and mentally for the freedom of the country. In the contemporary political context, it can and undoubtedly be said that most revolutionaries of Raiganj Subdivision were closely associated with the 'Dinajpur Anushilan Samiti', which was reflected in their activities. Therefore, the mark of the Anushilan Samiti was observed in every activity of the revolutionaries.

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