INTRODUCTION

The present work attempts a detailed study of a five-year period in Bengal’s history which despite its brief duration has come to occupy a very notable place in the historiography of nationalism and in the collective memory of our people. Apart from the abundant literature of biographies and memoirs, thus we have the autobiographical writings of Surendranath Banerji, Bepinchandra Pal, Krishnakumar Mitra, Aurobindo Ghosh, Barindra-kumar Ghosh, Hemchandra Kanungo, Bhupendranath Dutta and Upendranath Banerji; a life of Motilal Ghosh, and no less than four biographies of Aswinikumar Dutta.

2 Cf. particularly the numerous books of Haridas and Uma Mukherji listed in the bibliography.

3 Cf. for instance Haridas and Uma Mukherji, India’s Fight for Freedom (1958); R. C. Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement in India, Volume II (1962); R. C. Majumdar (ed), British Paramountcy and the Indian Renaissance, Part II (1965); B. B. Majumdar, Militant Nationalism in India (1966); Daniel Argov, Moderates and Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement 1883-1920 (1967); and A. Tripathi, The Extremist Challenge (1967).

4 Extracts from the private papers of top officials have been printed in Morley’s Recollections (1917), in Lady Minto’s counterblast of India, Minto and Morley 1905-1910 (1934), and more recently in Martin Gilbert’s Servant of India (1966). Three major works dealing with official policies during 1905-10 have been published of late—M. N. Das, India under Morley and Minto (1964); S. R. Wasti, Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement 1905-1910 (1964); and S. A. Wolpert, Morley and India 1906-1910 (1967). Cf. also S. Gopal, British Policy in India 1858-1905 (1965), Chapter V, and A. Tripathi, op. cit., Chapter VI.
and the evolution of the partition plan in particular. I have therefore avoided the tedium of a purely chronological narration, and felt free to follow my personal interests in focusing on the streets of Calcutta or the villages of Barisal rather than the somewhat rarefied heights of Darjeeling, Simla or the India Office. The reader might still ask why a new book was needed at all on such a well-worn subject, and what relevance it can have for us today. An explanation may help to clarify also the precise themes chosen by the author, their arrangement, and maybe the preferences implied therein.

Historians in our country still occasionally claim for themselves the impartiality of judges (itself, one would feel, hardly an unquestionable absolute); that historical reconstruction at both popular and academic levels is rather a dialogue between present and past generations, inevitably time-bound and selective, is amply borne out by the existing literature on the swadeshi movement. What has fascinated most the imagination of educated bhadralok Bengal and her historians is undoubtedly the saga of individual terrorism beginning with Kshudiram and the Maniktala conspiracy—so-called militant

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7 Cf. for instance R. C. Majumdar’s formulation—“The purpose of the historian is the ascertainment of the Truth. His only duty is to determine guilt or innocence in the fashion of a judge in a law court”—"Bharat-itiliasher Nutan Sanskaran". Itihās, Volume VI (Old Series) No. 2, Agrahayan-Magh 1362 (1955-56).
nationalism for example is evidently Dr R. C. Majumdar's first love, the heroic climax to which all earlier endeavours inevitably lead. The upsurge of 1905-7 is also remembered, of course, but often in a romanticised version which exaggerates it into a 'Great Bengali Revolution', while at the same time strangely neglects aspects like labour unrest or quiet constructive work in villages, and slurs over uncomfortable things like peasant passivity and the probable role of Hindu revivalist ideology in sharpening communal tensions. Such attitudes not unoften betray traces of Bengali and Hindu chauvinism. They also leave unanswered and even unasked the crucial question as to why 1905 was succeeded by 1908, why techniques of open mass struggle (meetings and demonstrations, boycott of foreign goods and schools, 'passive resistance' anticipating much of Gandhism, labour unions and strikes) had to give place so quickly to methods of individual terror. The conventional explanation in terms of police repression alone, I feel, is not really sufficient; what we need is a study in depth of the tensions within the swadeshi movement as it evolved out of and wrestled with the socio-economic structure, political challenges and cultural and religious traditions of Bengal.

I have chosen, then, as my central theme the shifts within nationalism in political objectives, methods and social ideals. The antipartition movement, conducted at first on quite conventional lines by established politicians worried mainly over an alleged threat to certain elite privileges, rapidly broadened after 1905 into an awareness of irreconcilable conflict between British and Indian interests which only swaraj could resolve. 'Prayers and petitions' consequently gave place to the first major efforts of the nationalist bhadralok intelligentsia to attain identity with the masses and mobilise them around a programme of 'passive resistance'. But swaraj was never translated into concrete bread-and-butter terms for the masses, or integrated with any real peasant programme; nor

\* A phrase coined by Benoykumar Sarkar, and frequently reiterated in the books of Haridas and Uma Mukherji.
could the swadeshi leaders despite some sincere efforts develop like Gandhi an idiom or style of political activity which could effectively bridge the elite-mass gap. By 1908, therefore, we are faced by the two poles of renewed 'mendicancy' and a cult of individual violence, opposites which still share something in common, twin manifestations of a failure to develop a genuine mass political movement. One is reminded of the history of Russian Narodnism—"However strange it may appear at first sight...we are inevitably led to conclude that the pistol-shot becomes an exact substitute for Serno-Solovevich's appeal to the tsar... It was both an act of extreme lack of confidence in the state and a confession that the revolutionaries themselves were too immature to replace it with an organisation of their own." Lenin's penetrating remarks on the affinity between economism and terrorism seem also not irrelevant here.

My choice of theme has dictated the chronological limits of 1903 and 1908, for the open and at least potentially mass movement sparked off by the announcement of the first draft of the partition plan in December 1903 was clearly giving place to something very different after the Maniktala arrests (May 1908), the deportation of nine leaders (December 1908), and the ban on the principal samitis (January 1909).

As for the arrangement of my material, after a brief discussion of the partition plan and a sketch of conditions in Bengal on the eve of the swadeshi upsurge (Chapter I), I have passed on to the heart of my subject—an analysis of the 'trends' within the movement (Chapter II). Here, in place of the conventional moderate-extremist dichotomy which I think is oversimplified, I have explored the possibilities of a fourfold classification in terms of ideals and techniques. The 'model' of the swadeshi age which I have tried to construct in this chapter includes three other dimensions—the ideological debates between 'modernism' and 'revivalism' which

cut across the political trends, the impact of British policies, and the socio-economic structure of Bengal which ultimately set limits on the freedom of all actors on the political stage. The relevance of this model is tested in three succeeding chapters surveying swadeshi and boycott, national education, and—little-known but highly-interesting and important—labour unrest. Chapters VI and VII attempt a different kind of cross-section of the movement, exploring the communication techniques and organisational forms adopted in the efforts to break through to the masses. The ultimate failure here is obviously closely bound up with the Hindu-Muslim problem, and isolation from the masses—not police repression alone—led to a growing emphasis on revolutionary terrorism; these constitute the themes of Chapters VIII and IX. I should add that while the focus throughout remains on the years from 1903 to 1908, attempts have been made wherever possible to link up the individual facets of the movement with what had preceded and what was to follow it in the life of Bengal, thus reducing, I hope, the myopia which tends to afflict all research workers. A serious limitation, however—for which I can only plead my own ignorance plus reasons of space and time—is the restriction of the entire discussion to Bengal alone, despite the evident interconnections with other parts of our country, particularly Tilak’s Mahaashatra and Laiapat Rai’s Punjab.

Historical parallels are dangerous and seldom really fruitful, and yet to a present-day resident of Calcutta there is surely something almost uncannily familiar about the 1905 upsurge—which in one of its aspects was a movement of educated and idealist youth, reacting against the compromises indulged in by established political groups, seeking in vain an objective correlative to their own fervour among the masses, and turning to the attractive but ultimately frustrating short-cut of individual terrorism, of heroic selfsacrifice by the few in the hope of rousing the many. If the resemblance is not purely a coincidence, the link must be sought in the social contours of the elite-mass relationship in the Bengal of 1905 and of today. My concluding chapter, apart from
offering a brief assessment of the swadeshi age and its cultural achievements, attempts a discussion of the social content and nature of the movement as a whole. In so far as it has gone beyond simple enumeration of patriotic deeds, research on Indian nationalism has tended to follow one of two alternative stereotypes, relating it either to the upthrust of a 'bourgeois' or 'middle' class, or to the status-aspirations of various 'elite' groups—and among the latter the Bengali bhadralok is currently enjoying considerable fame in Western academic circles. The bhadralok concept has its advantages in the swadeshi context—the politically-active groups in 1905 Bengal after all hardly constituted a genuine industrial or commercial bourgeoisie—and as such I have used it fairly frequently. But I am not at all in agreement with some of the methodological assumptions made by present-day theorists of the bhadralok, most notably with their pseudo-Namierite attempts to reduce nationalism to individual material interests virtually divorced from ideological dimensions—and this I have tried to make clear in my last chapter.

My interest in the popular movement naturally led me to concentrate first of all on the nonofficial sources. Of these, contemporary newspapers are perhaps the most massive, but unfortunately these are not at all well-preserved in our country: only a few stray copies apparently surviving, for instance, of even famous vernacular journals like the Sanjibani, the Yugantar, or the Sandhya. English-language dailies have been more fortunate, and I have made considerable use of three of them in particular—the Bengalee, the Anrita Bazar Patrika and the Bande Mataram, representing broadly speaking the right, the centre, and the left in the national movement of those days. The periodical press—and in particular the Bengali monthlies—have proved to be a rich mine of information as regards the deeper ideological conflicts of the age. Far too many of the contemporary pamphlets have been lost, and the Bengal Library Catalogue

11 Most notably in the recent publications of Anil Seal and J. H. Broomfield.
makes tantalising reading today\textsuperscript{12}—but I have been able to trace and make use of about sixty such tracts dealing with various aspects of the swadeshi movement. The literature of that age, graced as it was by the presence of a veritable galaxy of distinguished Bengali writers—including the very greatest of them all—was deeply influenced, as is well known, by the political upsurge; and I have tried to utilise to the best of my ability the peculiarly rich and fascinating source constituted by the swadeshi songs, plays and ‘jatras’, novels, and other forms of artistic expression. The later literature of biographies and memoirs has its pitfalls, and I have avoided overmuch dependence on such secondary sources—except to some extent in the chapter on revolutionary terrorism where other types of material are relatively scanty.

Most exciting of all have been the collections of private papers which I was fortunate enough to have been able to unearth. The richest of these are the very well-preserved papers of Aswinicoomar Banerji, barrister, swadeshi leader and pioneer labour organiser; they include an autobiographical fragment, voluminous correspondence with many prominent politicians of the swadeshi age (no less than forty-six letters, for instance, from Surendranath Banerji alone), a number of fascinating trade-union documents, and press-cuttings from journals many of which have become extremely rare today. I have also utilised the unpublished diaries of Hemendraprasad Ghosh, Gyanchandra Banerji, Satyakinkar Sahana, and Sukumar Mitra (the son of Krishnakumar)—as well as the relevant microfilms of Curzon, Miuto and Morley papers preserved at the National Archives.

Among official records, by far the most valuable have been the Home Public and Home Political Proceedings of the

\textsuperscript{12} By the terms of the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867, the Bengal Library was supplied with a copy of all books published in the province, and quarterly lists of new acquisitions were printed as supplements to the \textit{Calcutta Gazette}. The whole stock of such publications was later transferred to the Imperial (now the National) Library—but it seems that in the 1920s a committee of ‘experts’ eliminated many ‘unnecessary’ books and pamphlets for reasons of space.
government of India—the files of which include fortnightly reports and police abstracts; detailed surveys of the boycott, national education, and ‘samiti’ movements; much valuable information about labour unrest and communal riots; and the dossiers of many public figures. I was not permitted access to the intelligence branch records of Lord Sinha Road in Calcutta, but judging from the copious extracts from these files which are available at the West Bengal State Archives, much of the material there found its way eventually into the Home Proceedings preserved at New Delhi. The State Archives contain also the reports on the native papers, considerable use of which not entirely reliable source has been made unavoidable by the poor preservation of so many of the vernacular newspapers. Finally, mention should be made of official publications—parliamentary papers, administrative reports and gazetteers, trade returns, and two invaluable surveys made in 1908 by J. G. Cumming and G. N. Gupta of indigenous industrial enterprise in Bengal and in the new province.

13 The extracts were made by a State Committee on the History of the Freedom Movement in Bengal set up in the early 1950s. The committee and the project, like so many good things, seem to have gone the way of all flesh.