

**Labour Movement In Bengal From
Community Consciousness To Class
Consciousness : A Case Study Of
The Jute Mill Workers (1881-1909)**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled
"LABOUR MOVEMENT IN BENGAL: FROM COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS
TO CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: ^{THE} A CASE STUDY OF JUTE MILL WORKERS,
(1881 to 1909)", submitted by Mr. SUBHO BASU in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) degree of this University,
has not been previously submitted for any degree of this
or any other University and this is his own work.

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C_O_N_T_E_N_T_S

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New Delhi,
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Subho Basu.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IFC	Indian Factory Commission
IFLC	Indian Factory Labour Commission
RCLI	Royal Commission on Labour in India
RNP	
(Beng.)	Report on native place Bengal.
LCA	Labour Catchment area
EPW	Economic and Political Weekly
IESHR	Indian Economic and Social History Review
IHR	Indian History Review
CSSS	Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives
NAI	National Archives of India

INTRODUCTION

The development of modern factories, mines, transport, plantations and engineering concerns during the second half of the 19th century resulted in the emergence of a new class in India, namely the industrial working class. Bengal in the second half of the 19th century witnessed such industrial development around Calcutta and its neighbouring districts. The jute industry formed its nucleus. Jute workers constituted the core of this industrial work force. This dissertation is an attempt to study the process of the formation of the jute working class in Bengal from 1881 to 1909.

These two years do not suggest a water-tight division in the process of the formation of the jute working class, but have their own significance. In 1881 the first act to curtail the working hours of the Indian workers was introduced. This was the first official recognition of the emergence of a new social force in India. In 1909 the first politically organized labour movement in Bengal collapsed. Thus the period between 1881 and 1909 suggests a process of social transformation of a section of society into a working class. The period covers the rise of the Indian working class and its transformation into a political force during the nationalist movement.

. The historical context of the development of capitalist industrial organisations in India was marked by an arrested growth of industrial capitalism. The structural constraints imposed on the capitalist development by the colonial social development stood in the way of total industrialization. As a result the most important sector of Indian economy remained outside the development of capitalist growth, namely the agrarian sector. Thus in India, as well as in Bengal, the major socio-economic formation remained pre-capitalist with an enclaved growth of capitalism around the colonial metropolitan centres.

The process of transformation of a peasant or an artisan into a worker involves interaction between earlier social institutions, traditional values, social ties and new industrial situation, work pattern and industrial circumstances. In Bengal the emergence of industrial working class was marked by certain features specific to India's colonial situation. Firstly, in the jute industry the technological development had not come out of an indigenous social transformation. Secondly, the capital in the jute industry was controlled by the white official class in India. Thirdly, the labour force due to certain socio-economic reasons from the mid-1890's became predominantly migrant, coming from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.'

The migrant peasants, mostly illiterate, came from highly custom bound society and thus suffered from an

identity crisis in the new social circumstances., They tried to stick to their traditional values, community organization and earlier social ties. But in a new industrial situation this led to two important developments: (i) Instability in working class life and the erosion of traditional values and the family system, ~~this~~, paradoxically, reinforced community consciousness. (ii) Community organizations tried to air the girevances of the working class as a whole and acted as a rudimentary form of trade union organization. .

In this period we also notice the crystallization of a new social group in Bengal known as bhadralok. These bhadraloks coming mainly from intermediary land tenure holders and government servants or professional men championed the nationalist cause. , They became the intellectual representatives of the Indian masses. However, they had little knowledge of the workers' condition. They were more concerned with the industrial development in India. They viewed the regulations to improve the work situation in India as the conspiracy of the British mercantile lobby.

The gradual development of the nationalist movement changed the perception of the nationalists to a large extent. In Calcutta the conflict between white capital and Indian labour was linked up with the main social

contradiction between Indian masses and the British ruling class. This new situation led towards the political struggle of the working class with the colonial rulers. It was during the Swadeshi era that workers' community consciousness developed into an expression of protest that was more political and unionized.

The swadeshi movement failed due to the lack of a firm political and ideological outlook of the bhadra-lok leadership. On the other hand because of their social hegemony, the working class movement became dependent on them. But there is no doubt that the movement itself represented a transition in working class consciousness, from community to class consciousness.

In the first chapter we study the evolution and emergence of the jute industry and the process of the formation of the working class, its social composition and the migration pattern of the workers. In the second chapter we try to analyse the structuring of the labour-capital relationship in the factory at the point of production, with a focus on the development of managerial system. In the third chapter we study the workers' life outside the factory, in the slums, the evolution of town polity, landlord-mahajan exploiters' nexus, and rural-urban relationship in workers' life. ✓ In the fourth chapter we notice the development of workers' struggle, from the indirect spontaneous unorganized resistance to

organized strikes. In the fifth chapter we deal with the bhadralok's perception of industrial development. In the sixth chapter we focus our attention on the evolution of a political struggle and the trade union movement.

The sources for the labour movement are scattered and most of the evidence is to be found in official accounts and the Factory Commission Reports. The Royal Commission on Labour, 1929 (vol.V, Pt.1 and 2) provides us with detailed information.

CHAPTER I
THE EMERGENCE OF THE JUTE WORKING CLASS:
ITS MIGRATION PATTERN

In eastern India in the 19th century we notice the growth of modern industrial enterprises like jute and cotton mills, engineering concerns, coal mines and the tea plantation industry. With the growth of these industries, there emerged a completely new class, the working class of India.

The jute industry formed the nucleus of modern industrial production in Bengal. The working class of the jute industry constituted the core of the growing work force. But it should be noted that jute industry in India did not come out of an indigenous socio-economic transformation, rather it was an imported technology.

The jute industry in the 18th century was basically a cottage industry. Traditional weavers used to weave sacks. The traditional sack weaver caste in Bengal was the Kapali caste². In the late 18th century jute emerged

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1. Eastern India here covers the area comprising Bihar, Bengal and Assam. The most important industries in this region were: (i) coal mining, (ii) tea plantation, (iii) jute.
 2. See D.H. Buchanan, Development of Capitalistic enterprise in India (New York, 1934), p.240

as a profitable trading material. From 1795, a considerable quantity of woven material of jute was exported. In 1850, the export was 900,000 jute cloth pieces, worth over Rs.2,000,000.³

From 1795, European traders made constant efforts to weave gunny bags in the factories. After much experiment pure jute yarn was procured in 1835 in a factory. From 1838 power weaving started in Dundee in Scotland. Jute weaving thus became a part of the British industrial economy. In 1855, a Scottish entrepreneur Auckland, started a jute mill at Rishra near Calcutta. The jute industry enjoyed a relatively stable growth in the initial stages. It went through four definite stages of expansion in the 19th century, viz. 1860s, 1872-73, 1882-85, and 1895-1900⁴. Indian jute industry had certain advantages in comparison to its Scottish counterpart. The steady supply of raw material from Bengal's countryside, cheap labour and the existence of a friendly colonial government helped the Calcutta based industries outstrip its Dundee competitors.

3. Ibid., p.241.

4. See Ranajit Dasgupta, "Material Conditions and Behavioral Aspects of Calcutta Working Class, 1875-1899", CSSS, Calcutta, 1979, p.7.

Indian jute industry was dominated by the British, particularly Scottish manufacturers, from the beginning. Only one jute mill, Soorah jute company, had an Indian director Lachmilal Kahoria. All jute mills were controlled by European managing agency houses in Calcutta. The capital of these jute industries came mostly from British businessmen and from officials stationed in or connected with India.⁵

The entire jute trade was controlled by various types of European trading associations. From the purchasing of raw jute in the countryside to its selling to factories in Calcutta, the entire business was organized by various European trading associations.

The Indian Jute Manufacturers Association came into existence in the 1880s to control the manufacturing side of the jute trade, known, from 1882, as the Indian Jute Mill Association.⁶

The ^{Indian} Jute Mill Association ~~in India~~ had a definite rapport with the Bengal Government. In fact, in the 19th century, the senior officers of the Government of Bengal viewed the first two factory acts as 'needlessly harassing'

5. See A.K. Bagchi, Private Investment in India, 1900-1939 (London, 1972), p.263.

6. Ibid., p.263.

to the managers.⁷ Thus, the jute industry had certain distinct features. Firstly, it was a white capitalist dominated industry where the factory owners enjoyed a quasi-monopolistic control over the production and operation of the industry. Secondly, the owners had the support and cooperation of the Bengal Government and the bureaucracy. Finally, the coming of raw jute from the villages and the transport of the finished products from the industry were also controlled by a friendly European trading organization. Thus, from the beginning, the jute working force had to face a strong enemy.

The process of the formation of the jute labour force in Bengal had certain basic features specific to India's colonial economy. It had undergone a distinct shift from 1885 to mid-1890, from local workers to non-local workers migrating from distant areas.⁸ The number of average daily workers employed in the jute industry in 1879-80 was 27,494. In 1910-11, the number of average daily workers in the industry increased to 214,507.⁹

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7. See Dipesh Chakraborty, "Conditions for Knowledge of Working Class Conditions, Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890-1940" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, vol.II (Delhi, 1983), pp.259-311.
 8. Ranajit Dasgupta, in his article, "Factory Labour in Eastern India: Sources of supply, 1865-1947", Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol.XIII, No.3, July-Sept., 1976, pp.277-327, analysed this transformation in great detail.
 9. Government of India, Financial and Commercial Statistics of British India, gives a detailed break-up of
contd...

In 1890, most of these workers were from local areas adjoining the jute mill or were short distance migrants from other districts of South Bengal.

In 1888, Dufferin ordered an inquiry into the conditions of the lower class and poor Indians. This inquiry led to a report of the district collector of Hooghly that local weavers found jobs in the jute factories. The district magistrate of Howrah also mentioned that many of the workers came from neighbouring villages.¹⁰ The report of the 1890 Factory Commission contained the eye witness account of 26 workers. Most of these workers came from the adjoining areas of the jute mills in Howrah. The Bengalees constituted 17 of these witnesses.¹¹

In July, 1895 Pratt, a high police official conducted an inquiry into 14 jute mills, and found that nearly 53% of the labour force was from neighbouring areas. In these 14 jute mills nearly 49,729 (more than 60% of the then jute labour force of 77,618) workers were employed.

contd...

average workers daily employed in jute factories and from 1912-1913 Labour Investigation Committee (1946) and also the Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India.

10. Report on Condition of Lower Classes in India, NAI Famine (Nos.1-24, Dec. 1888), No.2 of Para 25.
11. India Factory Commission Report, pp.77-88. Witness Accounts of Bengal Workers (see Table-4).

Out of this 23,096 persons nearly 46.4% of the labour force came from Bihar and U.P. Bengalees numbering 26,633 thus constituted only a little more than 53% of the labour force.¹² In 1906 B. Foley also remarked in his Report on labour in Bengal that twenty years ago all the hands were Bengalees.¹³

The presence of a large number of migrant labourers can also be noticed in Pratt's survey data which constituted nearly 46.4% of the labour force he surveyed. In fact, from the 1880s the jute companies attempted to locate their source of labour supply in the densely populated districts of Bihar and U.P. In 1881, Finlay Muir and Co. on behalf of Champdⁿay Jute Mills sought assistance of the Bengal Government in recruiting labour in the densely populated Bihar and U.P. districts.¹⁴

The Indian Jute Mill Association preferred migrant labourers for various reasons. Due to subsistence oriented work, the local workers did not respond to cash stimuli.

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12. Report on police supervision in the Riverine Municipalities, West Bengal ¹³⁴ ~~134~~ ^{Archives} ~~Archives~~ ^{Police Nos.6-11} of January, 1896. Table-42 shows the detail mill-wise break-up of migrant workers.
 13. B. Foley, Report on labour in Bengal (Calcutta, 1906), p.12.
 14. National Archives of India, Revenue & Agriculture Emigration, February, 1882.

In 1888, the magistrate of Howrah remarked that many of the workers who came from neighbouring villages were content to do 21 days work in a month saying that they could earn sufficient money in that time and did not care to work on the remaining days.¹⁵ The non-Bengalee immigrant workers who were moving into the industry in the closing decade of the last century were more steady in work and were regular in attendance than the Bengalee workers.

This factor leads us to deeper problems regarding the operation of labour market created by the British owned capital for the industry. Lalita Chakraborty has drawn our attention to the problems of the emergence of the working class in a dual economy. In fact this migration pattern suggests a typical colonial form of migration of unskilled labourers who had migrated from certain areas in Bihar and U.P. The plantation workers of the Assam tea gardens and the unskilled labourers working in the overseas colonies came from the same source. People who migrated under the contract system to the overseas destination were exactly the same as those who came as "free labourers" to the jute mill gates.

15. Report on Condition of Lower Classes in India, NAI, Famine Nos.1-24, December, 1888, Para 25.

The agricultural stagnation, adverse ecological change and the virtual disappearance of non-agricultural sources of livelihood like cottage industries, made the condition of the rural poor desperate. The socially exploited, like widows, also wanted an alternative source of earning. The jute mill authorities prefer such migrant labourers because they were out of their known world in the industrial areas of Bengal.

Table-1: Showing the districts that supplied workers to the Calcutta industrial belt in 1911

Area of Origin Bihar Districts	Number of immigrants (area of new settlement)			
	Hughly	Howrah	24 Parganas	Calcutta
Patna	5,013	6,160	12,333	19,989
Gaya	4,802	5,612	13,986	38,083
Shahabad	3,407	7,324	20,672	16,068
Monghyr	3,506	3,862	15,458	15,947
Saran	10,477	6,562	24,768	10,331
Muzaffarpur	4,677	4,018	11,682	14,686
Darbhanga	1,908	2,572	5,436	7,793
<u>United Provinces Districts</u>				
Ballia	3,204	9,082	9,712	3,491
Ghazipur	2,779	4,586	16,631	7,065
Benaras	1,992	3,179	8,515	10,948
Azamgarh	2,115	3,598	12,458	15,753
<u>Orissa Districts</u>				
Cuttack	8,995	16,571	37,472	31,720
Balasore	3,864	6,134	13,785	12,131

Source: Royal Commission on Labour in India,
vol.V, Pt.I, pp.8-12.

Table-2: Showing the proportion of migrant workers from Bihar and U.P. in Jute industry 1895-96

Name of the mill	No. of workers employed	No. of up-country hand	No. of workers provided in the lines
Gouri pore Jute mill and oil mill	3,000	1,000	1,500
Kakinarah Jute	3,300	Totally upcountry	1,200
Kakinarah paper	750		600
Dunbar Samnagar cotton	1,800	-	None
Dunbar Samnagar Cotton			
Dunbar Samnagar Jute	4,500	3,000	None
Titagarh paper	600	-	200
Titagarh Jute	3,000	-	None
Kamarhati Jute	2,500	Not many	1,000
Baranagar Jute (North and South)	7,000	500	None
Lower Hughly Jute	2,500	1,260	300
Empress of India cotton mill	1,000	200	150
Budge Budge Jute	3,700	-	300
Victoria Jute	2,768	1,380	None
Chanpdami Jute	3,000	1,500	1,000
India Jute (Sreerampore)	2,358	1,200	180
Wellington Jute	2,325	826	Not stated
Hastings Jute	6,902	3,926	2,902
Bally Paper	820	400	150
Ghoosrey Victoria Cotton	440	140	70
contd...			

Table-2..contd...

Name of the mill	No. of workers employed	Up- country	Provided mill line
Ganges Jute	3,492	3,000	None
Central Jute Howrah	2,050	1,550	50
Sibpur Jute	795	220	75
Howrah Jute	3,313	1,018	700
Fort Gloster Jute	2,600	650	A...
Fort Gloster Cotton	1,800	600	40

Source: Report on Police supervision in the
Riverine Municipalities in Bengal,
Judicial - Police Nos.6-11, p.28
W.B. S.A.

It was linguistically and culturally a completely different area and the geographic distance also isolated the migrant workers from their areas of origin.¹⁶ As a result these workers would have no extra resources in the nearby villages to fall back upon and would have no advantage in terms of food and shelter (which the local workers had) and thus the management expected them to be more submissive to the managerial disciplines.

From the 1870s people came to Calcutta from Bihar districts and they found jobs in the construction works. These workers came from the rural areas. Gradually they started to move into the jute factories.¹⁷ In fact, the most rapid expansion in the jute industrial force took place between 1891-1911, which corresponds to that of an enormous flow of people from Bihar, Orissa and United Provinces¹⁸ to Calcutta and the adjoining industrial belt.

In jute industries, we notice the dominance of the migrant workers from 1897 onward. In 1895 the migrant

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16. Lalita Chakraborty, "Emergence of an Industrial Labour force in a Dual Economy, British India, 1880-1920", IESHR, vol.XV, No.3, July, 1978, pp.249-329.
 17. Ranajit Dasgupta, "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India", EPW, Special No., November, 1981, pp.1781-1806.
 18. Ranajit Dasgupta, Factory Labour in Eastern India, op. cit., p.283.

workers in Pratt's survey constituted 46.4%. But a mill wise survey in 1897 suggests a rise in the number of non-local workers.¹⁹ This was the result of gradual increase in the number of non-local workers. The other sources of information also suggest a similar picture. The civil medical officer of Sreerampore stated in the 1898 report that most of the mill workers belonged to the 'low class', 'U.P. countrymen'. In the same report District Magistrate of Howrah also made a statement that the operatives came mainly from Bihar and North Western Provinces.²⁰

In the mills south of Calcutta the majority of the workers were Bengalees till 1930s. In fact, the Manager of Fort Gloster Jute Mill, in his evidence before IFLC

19. Table-3:

	<u>U.P.</u> 1895	<u>Country</u> 1897	<u>Local</u> 1895	<u>Local</u> 1897
Shamnagar	3,000	4,020	1,500	500
Baranagar	500	5,000	6,500	1,890
Lower Hughly	1,250	1,820	1,250	640
Gouripur	1,000	1,640	2,000	1,440
Hastings	3,925	4,470	2,977	2,370
Wellington	825	1,820	1,500	900

Ibid., p.281.

20. NAI Home-Judicial No.130, November, 1899.

of 1908 stated that 5,000 of 8,000 workers were Bengalees.²¹ Budge Budge Jute Mill was also the centre of activities of A.C. Banerjee during the Swadeshi Movement because of the dominance of the Bengalee workers. In 1929 R.C.L.I. also had reported that in some mills south of Calcutta Bengalees constituted the majority of the working force.²²

The jute industry from the beginning attracted the attention of the rural poor. In the Annual Administrative Report of 1875-76 of Bengal the Commissioner of Burdwan division pointed out that the weavers from Chandra Kona and Ghatal Thana (Medinipur district)²³ were migrating to Calcutta. Bharat Shramajibi also pointed out that Juggis and Tantis who were displaced due to competition from British industrial products found jobs in the jute mill of the Borneo Company at Baranagar.²⁴ Dufferin Inquiry of 1888 also reported that weavers gradually started coming to the jute mills in 1880s.²⁵ Most of the 25 workers examined by

21. Indian Factory Labour Commission, 1908, Witness No.187, vol.2.

22. RCLI, vol.V, Pt.1, p.426.

23. Divisional Commissioner's Annual Administration Report for the Burdwan Division for 1875-76, W.B. - S.A. General Miscellaneous Nos.1-2, October, 1876.

24. Jaistha 2nd Issue 1287, Bangabda (Bengalee era).

25. See Report on condition of Lower classes in India, NAI Famine, Nos.1-24, No.2 of Para 25.

the 1890 Factory Commission belonged to the low caste groups. (See, for details, Table-4) Of the 8 women workers examined 6 were widows.²⁶ In fact, all the labour commission reports suggest that most of the women workers were Bengalee widows. The weavers who lost jobs due to the introduction of British industrial goods in India and also a section of land-less labourers already existing in Indian society tried to seek jobs in the jute factories. This was also true of other emerging industrial centres in India. In Ahmedabad the wagris who were traditionally beggars, formed a part of the working force.²⁷ The Muslim weavers of Delhi who gradually lost traditional jobs emigrated to Bombay and formed a substantial part of the working population there in the 1920s. These industries from the beginning offered an alternative source of livelihood to the socially displaced rural population.

In the Jute Industry, Sardars or 'Foremen' acted as the kingpins of recruitment system. They recruited on the basis of caste and community relationships.²⁸ As a result

26. See Table-4. Indian factory Commission Report, 1890, pp.77-88.

27. Partha Sarathi Gupta, "Notes on Origin and Structuring of the Industrial Labour Force in India, 1880-1920" in R.C. Sharma (ed.); Indian Society: historical probings (in memory of D.D. Kosambi), New Delhi, 1974, p.426.

28. Dipesh Chakraborty, "Communal riots and Labour: ^{hanks} Jute mill ~~workers~~ ^{in Bengal} in 1890s", Past and Present, No. 91. May, 1981, pp.140-149

Table-4: Showing the caste and area of origin of the witnesses examined by the 1890 factory commission including the ages of the operative

Name of the Mill	Name of the worker	Age	Adult		Child		Area of Origin		Caste/Religion
			Male	Female	Boy	Girl	District	Province	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Union Jute Mill	Rajoni	23		Female			Nuddea	Bengal	Tanti
Baranagar Jute Mill	Taroni	20		Female			Medinipur	Bengal	Bagdi
Baranagar branch Mill	Majoo Maithi	25	Male				Cuttack	Orissa	Bagdi
Budge Budge Jute Mill	Sama Charan Samuth	34	Male				24 Parganas	Bengal	Bagdi
Union Jute Mill	Shamma	10			Boy		Calcutta	Bengal	Muslim
Bengal Cotton Mill	Kedar Dass	32	Male				Calcutta	Bengal	Muchi
Ghoosrey Old Cotton Mill	Ganpat	24	Male				Gaya	Bihar	Teli
Bally Bone & Paper Mill	Jungikhan	45	Male				Bhagalpur	Bihar	Muslim
	Durga	40		Female			Bankura	Bengal	Bagdi
	Benimadhab	25	Male				Howrah	Bengal	Kaibarta

contd...

Table-4...cont

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Empress of India Cotton Mill	Hemchundar	24	Male				24 Parganas	Bengal	Boiragee
	Fakir Dollie	13			Boy		24 Parganas	Bengal	Bagdi
Budge Budge Jute Mill	Bepin	11			Boy		24 Parganas	Bengal	Tanti
	Degambari	28		Female			24 Parganas	Bengal	Bairagee
Barranagar Jute Mill	Sookmaria	25		Female			Chaprah	Bihar	Tanti
	Sukni	8				Girl	Patna	Bihar	Tanti
	Noderchand	40	Male				Hugli	Bengal	Tanti
Victoria Cotton Mill	Abdul Barik	23	Male				24 Parganas	Bengal	Muslim
	Jagoo	25		Female			Medinipur	Bengal	Kaibarta
	Jaffer	12			Bo		Gaya	Bihar	Muslim
Cossipure Gun factory & Shell factory	Omerdoodee	42	Male				*Calcutta	Bengal	Muslim
	Kamasi Midoo	14			Bo		*Calcutta	Bengal	Bagdi
	Boiragee	25	Male				Cuttack	Orissa	Kandickorya
	Suckram	24	Male				Jaunpore	U. P.	Jaiswala

* They told the commission that they belonged to area surrounding the mill. So the name of the Districts of the mills were given.

We have prepared this table on the basis of witnesses account of 1890 Indian Factory Commission, pp.77-88.

we notice the development of community consciousness among the workers which was the outcome of two factors:

- i) The emphasis of the Sardars (while recruiting new workers) on caste and community ties; and
- ii) In new social circumstances, (linguistic and cultural), workers of the same region and caste group often flocked together.

Thus in the bastee settlement also we notice the domination of a bastee by a particular linguistic social group coming from a certain area.²⁹

In the Calcutta industrial belt in 1911, 604 people per thousand were from outside Bengal.³⁰ In Bengal, Medinipur was the only district which sent a large number of workers to the industrial belt around Calcutta. Medinipur sent 44,958 workers in 1891 which increased to 67,665 in 1901 and 96,743 in 1911.³¹

The migration of the industrial workers could be categorised into two types: (1) Semi-permanent migration when the workers resided and earned their living in one place but retained their home and family connections in

29. See Table-1.

30. RCLI, vol.V, Pt.1, pp.4-18.

31. Ibid.

another place; (2) Permanent migration, when for various reasons workers with their families settled in permanent areas (around Howrah, Calcutta industrial belt) other than their home districts.³²

The first type of migrant workers outnumbered the second type of migrant workers. This suggests a peculiar pattern of living style where there had not emerged a working force permanently attached to the jute industries. To resist this type of seasonal migration industrialists allowed the debt bondage system to develop in the bastees.

The jute mill authorities in the initial stages encouraged the migrants to come to the mills. The sardars were sent to the villages to recruit the workers. In the later stages immigrant workers themselves came directly to the factory gates and the recruitment was done there.³³

There was also propaganda of a crude style in the Bihar villages to urge the lower class peasants to join the jute industry. These workers were often paid the cost of the travel as an advance to come to the jute industry. But when the workers often found that industries did not offer what they promised, then a section of them always

32. Ibid.

33. B. Foley, Report on Labour in Bengal, op. cit., Para 31.

wanted to go back. To resist the free flow of workers' backward towards the villages, the jute mill authorities created a chain of intermediary network and promoted indirectly the debt bondage system to curtail this free flow towards the villages.³⁴

A settlement-wise study would suggest the clear picture of geographic area-wise division in the settlements of migrant workers in Bengal. For example, 2,240 out of total 14,092 immigrants from Ballia district, were found in Howrah, but out of a total number 12,562 immigrants from the adjoining districts of Azamgarh, Howrah had only 2,593 people. Similarly in other mill towns the tendency was for men from the same area to congregate together. For example, 27.3% of the total population of Titagarh or a total number of 14,330 persons were born in the five adjoining districts of Patna, Gaya, Shahabad, in Bihar and Ballia and Ghazipur in United Provinces while 22.7% of the population of Bhatpara and 19.6% of that of Bhadreswar came from the same areas. On the other hand 12.3% of the population of Titagarh, 7.1% of that of Bhatpara, 7.3% of that of Sreerampore and 6.7% of that of Bhadreswar came from Cuttack and Balasore.³⁵ Foley

34. The next two chapters will provide a detailed analysis of the process of the development of these two debt bondage Systems.

35. RCLI, vol.V, Pt.1, pp.9-18.

in 1905 commented that "...If recruits from a new district are imported, it is necessary as a rule to put them up in separate lines. The information ~~I~~ have received shows for instance, that Ganjam coolies will not stay in a mill unless provided with separate lines. Separate lines also are advisable for men obtained from Orissa and Central Provinces."³⁶

The first change that could be felt by the workers was in their family structure. The migrant workers in most cases were single migrants. The census report of 1891 points out that the sex ratio among the migrants was in favour of male migrants. In Howrah proper male migrants from Bihar in that year were 11,629 and female migrants were 3,652. In Bally, male migrants were 953, while the females were 192. From Orissa the number of male migrants to Howrah town were 2,240 and the female migrants were 189. In Bally, the number of male Oriya migrants were 165, whereas the number of female migrants were 8.³⁷ A detailed mill-wise survey of family life of the migrant workers and gradual decline in the number of female population in relation to male population will be taken up when we will study the life of the workers in a bastee in detail.

36. B. Foley, op. cit., p.12.

37. Census 1891, District Hooghly Migration, vol.I, p.112.

Thus the process of the formation of jute working class had certain specific features. Firstly, there was a switch over in the composition of the jute workers from the local workers to non-local workers in the mid-1890s. Secondly, the overwhelming majority of jute workers were from the lower strata of traditional rural society. Particularly, a section of them came from displaced artisans who could not compete with the British industrial goods. Thirdly, most of the workers were semi-permanent migrant workers and there was a definite area-wise distribution in the settlements of jute workers and the people coming from same geographic area often flocked together. Finally, the overwhelming majority of the workers were single migrant workers.

The growth of migrant labour system suggests another feature: that they came from a small tract of Bihar and the eastern U.P. districts, along with the two districts of Orissa. We have already observed that the growth of this labour catchment area was connected with the transformation of the agrarian situation in Bihar, U.P. and Orissa districts. This transformation of an area into a labour catchment area and the growth of migrant labour system was the result of a colonial agrarian transformation and enclaved growth of industrial capitalism in India.

There emerge two pictures of industrial relation. On the one hand, the capital of jute industry remained

highly organised and retained a monopolistic control over the industry. The European trading agencies aided the industry and the government remained pro-capital. On the other hand, the workers were overwhelmingly migrant workers. They were isolated from their known world and came to unknown areas - linguistically, socially and geographically. Moreover, they had little idea about metropolitan life and the vast market machinery on which their jobs depended. They experienced a total transformation of their lives, from a slow moving life style into a fast changing one. Their working hours which was compulsory, occupied the whole day. Their dwelling places were turned into mere sleeping - quarters, while family life became almost non-existent. Traditional amusements and forms of entertainments suffered erosion. Thus there developed an unequal battle from the very beginning, between organised capital and an unorganised first generation of peasants turned workers.

CHAPTER II

FACTORY

In the initial stages, i.e. up to the early decades of the 20th century, the jute factories used to operate for 15 hours.¹ The workers usually spent more than half a day inside the factory. Thus the jute factory was a place where the workers spent a major portion of the day, earned their livelihood and developed a reaction towards the work situation.

In this chapter we will try to take into account two questions: (i) how did the labour market develop in the jute industry? Was it a perfect market where the owner of money must meet with the free labourer, free in the sense that as a freeman he can dispose of his labour as his own commodity? (ii) How did the industrial technology, management and new work situation influence the behaviour of the early generation of workers?

The process of the formation of the labour market and the evolution of the consciousness of the workers inside the factory were interrelated in the jute industry. These factors played the most important role in structuring

1. IFLC, 1908, Report gives details of working hours, a factory worked from 4.30 a.m. to 8.30 p.m., Para 11.

the labour market and also in shaping the workers' attitude towards discipline, fellow workers and the management. The technology of the jute industry, the recruitment pattern and the management system, and the wage distribution pattern in relation to work discipline were the basic factors that influenced workers' behaviour, as also the formation of a labour market.

The workers' consciousness, however, was not the product of the operation of the production system of the industry alone. While analysing the impact of the factory work discipline we have to make an assessment of the socio-economic and cultural background of jute industrial workers. For that purpose we shall endeavour to keep this enquiry to the framing declarations of E.P. Thompson about the English working class:

"Class consciousness is the way in which experiences are handled in cultural terms, embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional terms."²

In the context of this basic formulation of working class history we will attempt a comprehension of the material and social factors which impinged on the development of workers' consciousness leading to action and the forms it assumed inside the jute factories in the

2. E.P. Thompson, The Making of English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 9.

initial stages.

In the earlier chapter we have noticed how large number of migrant workers started coming to the jute mill gates. Most of these workers were illiterate, poor peasants coming from the rural areas of Bihar, United Province and Bengal. To co-opt masses of unskilled but cheap labourers the capital in jute industry had to create labour intensive technology with a pre-capitalist recruitment and management system to maximise the profit. Moreover, the market of the jute industry often witnessed sharp fluctuations and the Indian jute factories manufactured more or less coarse clothes which did not require any sophisticated technology.

In the jute industry technology played an important role in shaping workers' consciousness.³ Let us first look

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3. Technology often played an important role in shaping the workers' attitude towards his work place. Foster in his, Class struggle and industrial revolution: Early capitalism in three English towns, points out the impact of the operation of an industrial method on the workers, from the cotton workers of Oldham to the shoe-makers of Northampton and the ship builders of Sheilds and how it moulded their behavioral aspects in different ways. See John Foster, Class struggle and industrial revolution: Early capitalism in three English towns (London, 1974).

into the physical structure and numerical composition of jute workers in a factory in the late 19th and early 20th century.

A jute factory was divided into various departments. Each department was interdependent which in practice meant that strike in any department would lead towards the closure of the entire factory. In fact, all the departments of a jute mill from the raw state up to the preparation of the hessians were housed under one roof.⁴ Therefore physical operations of the workers were closely co-ordinated.

According to an official estimate in 1893 an average jute mill employed 2,542 operatives.⁵ According to a later estimate (in 1930s) an average jute factory employed about 4,000 workers. Some time three or four factories were situated in one jute mill complex which meant nearly 15,000 workers were employed in the same concern. In the

4. This was based on a statement of Syed Suhrawardy who was the Labour Minister of the first Coalition Ministry in Bengal (1937-41). The statement was published in Star of India, 20 April 1937.

5. Report on the Working of 1891 Factory Act, Walsh Special Inspector to the Secretary of Government of India, August 1893. W.B. S.A. General Miscellaneous Nos.1-33.

19th century such cases were rare. "A typical jute mill employed 15 and 20 European to every two hundred or three hundred Indians. The Europeans were almost invariably Scotsman, poor boys from farms and towns about Dundee."⁶ However, this estimate was made in 1930s when both the number of mills and workers had increased. But this estimate does suggest the proportion of white supervisors to jute factory workers.

From the early stage of the industry women and children constituted a substantial number of factory workers. The following table (Table-5) gives us a picture of the break-up of jute workers into women, children, and adult male workers. It does not cover the total number of workers employed in all the factories in Bengal which was 66,333 in 1892-93.⁷ This table covers 57,781 workers. However, this suggests a near total picture of the composition of jute labour force of which adult women numbered 11,284 and the number of child workers was 6,234.

The jute factory departments were arranged according to production stages. The main stages were batching,

6. D.H. Buchanan, Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India (New York W, 1934), p.246.

7. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, p.8.

Table-5: The Average Number of workers employed in Jute Factories in Bengal, in 1893

Name and Locali- ty of Factory	Adults			Children			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Hastings Jute Mill, Rishra	2,434	758	3,192	290	22	312	3,509
Wellington Jute Mill, Rishra	1,885	347	2,232	243	12	255	2,487
India Jute Mill	1,516	546	2,062	272	11	283	2,395
Champdany Jute Mill, Champdany	1,891	808	2,699	179	12	191	2,890
Victoria Jute Mill, Telenipara	1,124	353	1,477	181	9	190	

District 24 Parganas:

	Average daily adult Adult			No. of operatives employed			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Baranagar branch mill, Baranagar	878	440	1,318	230	1	231	1,549
*Alipore Jail, Jute Mill	293	-	-	-	-	-	293
Kakinaran Jute Mill, Kakinaran	2,217	535	2,751	356	48	404	3,155
Soorah Jute Mill, Narkol Danga	452	153	605	78	11	89	694
Budge Budge Jute Mill	2,792	277	-	696	16	712	3,771
Baranagar Jute factory, Southern Division	1,148	371	1,519	-	-	-	1,519
Kamarhaty Jute Mill, Kamarhaty	1,741	530	3,271	181	50	231	2,502

contd...

contd...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Clive Jute Mill, Garden Reach		843	257	1,094	247	6	253	1,347
Hugly Jute Mill, Garden Reach		2,325	574	2,899	398	20	368	3,267
Shamnagar Jute Works, Shamnagar		3,742	947		392	50	442	5,131
Titagarh Jute Mill, Titagarh		2,052	720	2,772	285	13	298	3,070
Gouripur Jute Mill, Gauripur		1,724	307	2,031	186	13	199	2,230
Union Jute Mill Sealdah, Calcutta		1,175	101	1,776	160	-	160	1,736
<u>District Howrah:</u>								
Fort Gloster Jute Mill, Fort Gloster		1,589	238	-	179	9	178	2,003
Ganges Jute Mill, Shibpur		2,080	781		205	293	498	3,109
Central Jute Mill, Ghusury		1,380	374		143	30	173	1,927
Howrah Jute Mill, Ram Kishorpur		2,303	770		419	101	520	3,593
Shibpur Jute Mills		217	797		230	67	297	1,311

Sources: The data on Hugly was taken from Annual Report on the Working of the Factory Act (XV of 1881 and XI of 1891) in the sub-District of 'Surerampore', in 1892, W.B.S.A. General Miscellaneous, Nos.1-5, 28 February 1893.
 For 24 Parganas, Annual Report of the Working of the Factory Act in 1892, dated 29 April 1895.
 From E.V. Wesmacott, Commissioner Presidency Division to the Government of Bengal, Nos.12-13.
 For Howrah, ibid.

preparing, spinning, weaving and finishing. The batching of the jute involves tearing apart of the raw jute mainly by machinery and at the same time it was soaked in an oily preparation to make it pliable. In the preparation stage there were three distinct operations, carding, drawing and roving. "The material is first put through cards, the even feeding of which is very important for upon this depends the evenness of strand which after drawing, combining and redrawing is to be spun into single thread."

In the spinning section yarns were made by spinning frames which further drew out the rope, spun it and finally wound it on spinning bobbins. This process would bring out a warp yarn which would be brought to the winding department. In the winding department "the yarn forming the warp of the cloth (was) wound round bobbins into the form of comparatively longer rolls, thereby attaining a greater continuity in length." The yarn for the weft in the cloth was wound into cops' fitting exactly into ^{sh}uttles employed in weaving, warp yarn ~~st~~aturated with a starchy material to prevent breakage in weaving, was then drawn on to large beams and placed at the back ^{of} ~~for~~ the loom for weaving. In the next and final stage, the woven cloth was passed through heavy rollers of a calendering machine for ironing and eventually ^cut and sown

into bags which again were made into 35 or 30 bundles and packed by a hydraulic press.⁸

This technology of jute industry was time consuming, slow and involved more manual work than technical skill. However, Calcutta based jute industries (specialised in producing coarse cloth) had a monopoly of market. The main purpose of employing such primitive technology was based on the idea of utilization of the cheap labour.

If we look into the division of work between men and women workers, then we will find that mainly in sewing bags and in winding departments women were generally employed. Women were also employed in feeding jute softener and carding machine along with men. However, roving, spinning, weaving departments were monopolised by men. Sometimes in the spinning department healthy women workers were employed. Children generally used to shift the bobbins. They worked in gangs of ten or twelve shifting a set of about 72 bobbins in one or two minutes. However, there was much more sophisticated technology used by German firms to shift bobbins but Indian jute mills preferred children because it was less costly.⁹

8. Divesh Chakraborty, *op. cit.*, vol.II, p.282. subaltern studies

9. D.H. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p.298.

The atmosphere inside the factories was also not very healthy. As one factory inspector put it, "regarding the ventilation of the large jute mills in Bengal on the whole it may be considered fairly good, but in the sorting, carding and near jute spinning machines there is an amount of fluff flying about which is not noticeable in Dundee mills to the same extent."¹⁰

In 1906 chairman of Indian Jute Mill Association gave a list of the time taken by the workers to learn their work.

Coolie('s) work	(one) week
Women('s) work mainly preparing and hand sewing	(one) week
shifter('s) work	week
Spinner('s) work	Graduate from shifters may be a year or more on shifting
Weaver('s) work	a year to be first class workmen ₁₁

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10. Report on the Working of Factory Act in Bengal, W.B.S.A., General Miscellaneous, Nos.1-33, August 1893. Regarding the operatives' health, see the chapter where we deal with the life of the workers outside the factory.
11. Dipesh Chakraborty uses this chart to explain the technology of the Jute Mill, (op. cit.), Subaltern Studies, vol.II, p.288. From B. Foiley, Report on Labour in Bengal, op. cit., Appendix.

Jute mills did not have an apprentice system. In their testimonial to Royal Commission of Labour Indian Jute Mill Association said that the mill required mainly unskilled work and where training was necessary, it was offered in the course of actual employment, by the efforts of the worker himself. However, there were other factors involved in the operation of primitive technology where the main concern of jute mill owners was to maintain the supply of cheap labour. In 1946 a labour investigation committee report said that 'industrial training presupposes a sound basis of universal literacy and this problem is really too vast to be tackled by any particular employer or group of employers'.¹² But even when the colonial government made efforts to impart rudimentary education to the workers' children, the jute mill owners resisted, in fear that educated children would not prefer factory jobs.¹³ Their preference always lay in the supply of a vast uneducated, unskilled labour population preferably immigrant workers from other provinces.

The results of the lack of training was reflected in the nature of the accidents that occurred in the jute industry. The Commissioner of Burdwan division in his

12. Labour Investigation Committee Report, op. cit.,
p.389.

13. Dipesh Chakraborty, op. cit., p.287.
Subaltern studies vol II
4.

Report on the working of the Factories Act on 20 April 1893 commented that accidents occurred due to negligence on the part of the workers while "feeding" or otherwise attending to "running gears", allowing the finger to get drawn in.

The entire operation of the jute industry reflected a careless attitude on the part of the management. Unfiltered water was supplied directly from the Ganges. C.A. Walsh, a special inspector of factories, reported on 6 April 1894 that "many factories on the banks of the Hughly still continue to supply water for drinking, direct from the river although allowed to settle in large Gherras, this at least when no arrangement is made for filtering must be during the rainy season extremely muddy and dirty..."¹⁴

The working hours of jute factories in the initial stage require a thorough examination. H.J. Reynolds, officiating secretary to the Bengal Government, pointed out that the hours of work of labourers appear long enough, nearly nine to ten hours a day, exclusive of intervals for rest and meal.¹⁵ A Cobbe, the manager of Champdany

14. The Report on the working of the Factory Act, W.B.S.A., General Miscellaneous, Nos.1-25, 6 April 1894.

15. NAI Legislative, No.1-26, April 1881.

Mill also admitted in his statement in 1879 "...this mill along with the other runs over average for about twelve hours all the year round..." In 1890 the Indian factory Commission reported, "...it is the rule for nearly all Indian factories to work from daylight to dusk, that is taking extreme limits in summer of 5 a.m. to 7. p.m. or 14 hours with half an hour's interval..."¹⁶

This was the situation before the introduction of electricity in the factories. In 1895 eight of the twenty-seven jute mills and by the end of 1896 almost all the mills were electrically lighted.¹⁷ The 1908 factory commission reported that¹⁸ all the mills (Jute Mill of Calcutta) work nominally from 5 a.m. to 8. p.m. without stoppage but it is admitted that in certain mills constant endeavours are made when the conditions of market permitted of this to "crib time" and in such cases the factory may run from 4.30 a.m. to 8.30 p.m. However, the commission also pointed out that the jute mills worked up a system peculiar to Calcutta and somewhat difficult to explain. The workers except in the weaving and sewing departments were divided into a number

16. IFC Report, 1890, para 13.

17. Bengal Annual Administration Report, for 1896-97, Pt.II, W.B.S.A., p.148.

18. IFLC 1908, Report, para 11.

of shifts. The hours of each shift was arranged so that each worker had an interval of at least two hours and the working hours did not exceed in the case of an individual worker not more than 11 hours a day. The commission also reported that time cribbing was resorted to by some mills, particularly in the case of weavers.¹⁹

In the case of the weavers the 1908 commission presented a picture which not only reflects the plight of the weavers but a peculiar management system of the jute factories; "The weavers... are invariably on duty for the full number of hours during which the mill runs. It is the custom, however, to arrange that in the case of broad looms there shall be 5 weavers for each set of 4 looms, the extra hand is in some cases engaged by the mill, in others he is engaged by 4 weavers themselves, who pay him a monthly wage... The weavers must, however, all be present at the opening and closing of the mill, and they are therefore on duty ordinarily for 15 hours a day or "where cribbing is resorted to their actual employment may extend to 16 hours a day."²⁰

In this case we notice the typical pre-capitalist method to persist in capitalist organization. The

19. Ibid., vol.1, pp.8-10.

20. Ibid.

workers themselves could hire a man to run the machines. It also reflected the heavy nature of work that the workers themselves were forced to employ a man from their meagre wages.

The nature of factory work was monotonous which the factory officials often admitted. The factory work involved a man to stand for 15 hours in an atmosphere where a 'quantity of fluff' always floated in the air and 'whirr of machines' created a continuous noise pollution.

The condition of women workers employed in the factory was worse than men. Hobsbawm's remarks about the early women and children workers of getting less than subsistence²¹ in the early stage of industrialization was true also of jute industries. First we shall take up the working hours of women with a reference to the factory acts.

The act of 1881 primarily deals with the problem of child labour and fixed the minimum age of employment of children at 7 years. Children between 7 and 12 years were not allowed to work for more than 9 hours and 4 holidays were to be given a month. In 1891 the amendment act reduced the working hours of women to 11 hours per

21. E.J. Hobsbawm, "Custom Wages and Work Load in 19th Century Industry" in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), Essays in Labour History (London, 1960), p.115.

day including 1.1/2 hours for rest. The minimum age for children were also raised to 9 and the maximum to 14 years. Their hours of work were reduced to 7 in any day. This act applied only to those factories which were using power employing 50 or more persons and working for 120 or more days in a year. The act also provided for a weekly holiday for all workers.²²

After the 1891 act was passed a factory inspector reported that as soon as these children were old enough to hold a needle they were made to increase the earnings of their mothers.²³ But the inspector also with ease pointed out that this was not a harmful practice. Another girl Sukhni (a married girl of eight years) a worker of Baranagar Jute Mill in her testimonial to 1890 Factory Commission said that "on working days she comes when the whistle sounds before day light and leaves at 9 and comes again at 12, and goes away finally at 6 in the evening."²⁴ Another worker Noder Chand of the same mill said before the Commission that children of 7, 8 and 9 years often came to work.²⁵ This was the situation 9 years after the

22. Bipan Chandra, The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905 (New Delhi, 1982, reprinted), p.329.

23. ~~see p. 37~~ Report on the working of Factory act W.B.S.A. General Miscellaneous Nos 4-25, 6 April 1899.

24. IFC Report 1890, pp.77-88 (witness accounts Bengal).

25. Ibid.

promulgation of the 1881 act.

The women suffered most in the jute mills. They were lowly paid, physically exploited and even though they were allowed to come with the infants to the factories they did not have any place to keep them. C.A. Walsh, a Special Inspector of Factories, in his report in 1894 said that 'Regarding the very young children (infants), they may at times be found in these rooms, it is difficult to know how to deal with them in order to act for the best, it cannot be healthy for them to be surrounded by the floating particles and the noise and confusion of mill. Yet unless the manager could provide some quarters where they might be left safely it would be hard to deprive the mother of their earnings as these babies could not be left at their home alone.'²⁶ Rajoni, a woman worker pointed out that she used to wake up at 4 a.m. and went to the mill at 5.30 a.m. She would sleep after 10 p.m. Moreover, she had to walk half a mile. There were no regular intervals and women with the children would have to come out, when they could manage the time to feed the children. Taroni, another woman pointed out that she also worked on Sundays though she usually preferred a six day week.²⁷ Most of the women maintained that they used to work for

26. n237.

27. IFC 1890 Report, pp.77-88.

9 hours in any case, whereas the factory act²⁸ excluding the rest period fixed the working hours as $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Actually the factory act had no direct effect in controlling the working hours of women.

The factory acts in India were introduced not to standardise the working hours of labour for the capital to provide an efficient working class for the owners, but these were also promulgated due to some extent because of the pressure of Manchester and Lancashire capital to destroy the rise of Indian nascent capitalist class in Bombay cotton industries.²⁹ However, the factory acts for the jute industrialists did not create much pressure. As we have observed they continued their practice of compelling children of 8/9 years to work for 11 hours even after 1881 acts. The second act was not at all effective for the women workers. They were already working for $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

Now we will come back to our first two questions that if the worker (as in the case of developed capitalist countries) was able to sell his labour freely then why

28. Ibid.

29. Most of the contemporary newspapers suspected this evil intention behind the act. Bipan Chandra provides us with a detailed explanation of the background of the introduction of the act in Rise and Growth of economic nationalism in India, op. cit., Ch. VIII, pp. 329-45.

after facing the gruelling nature of work he was not leaving the factory. The answer was that the labour market was not free from non-economic pressures. Rather the Jute mill authorities developed a management system in which the labour became dependent (because of non-economic coercions) on the 'Labour Lords' or Sardars who usually maintained the work discipline.³⁰ We will see how the creation of a pre-capitalist management system forced the labourer to become attached to the factories despite the gruelling nature of the work.

However, we have to analyse the reaction of the labourers to this new work situation to understand the first question.

The workers in the late 19th century were the first generation of industrial workers in India. Industry with its monotonous work discipline, heavy nature of work, long compulsory working hours had created an aversion in the mind of the peasant turned industrial worker to factory work. There was always a tendency among the workers to return to their villages. All the factory commission reports mention this particular behavioural aspect of Indian workers. There were two factors involved

30. The term 'Labour Lord' in this context has been used first by Lalita Chakraborty in her article, op. cit.

in this migration backward towards villages. Much later, in 1940s All India Trade Union Congress has observed that "we consider that the only way of securing a stabilised labour force and for the protection of the interests of the industrial workers is firstly to provide adequate housing accommodation for them in industrial centres and secondly to make provision for their maintenance during illness, unemployment and old age."³¹ The Labour investigation committee of government of India, 1946 discussed the problem from two angles: "Firstly, the village may be looked upon as a place where the industrial worker can seek relaxation for short periods. Secondly, it can be regarded as a source of security."³² In fact, as commission claimed that the landless labourers who became workers during the period of unemployment, illness and old age could fall back upon villages. In the initial stages when newly arrived workers' primary illusions over the factory works were shattered (he might have joined factory work also because sardar gave him money to come) he always tried to return to his old work place. Sometimes the fall out was permanent, sometimes it was temporary for two months or three months.

31. Quoted in Labour Investigation Committee Report, 1946, p.77.

32. Ibid., p.78.

The workers like in agricultural work did their work in factories in a slow manner. They even often took rest for an hour. They would go out to smoke bidis or to have a 'chat'. A Government officer in 1879 reported that "Indian workmen must have his accustomed smoke, and sometimes even his sleep and his bath during the hours of work".³³ This was also supported by the remarks of A.M. Downs of Bowreah Cotton Mill who also complained about the workers going to the tanks to wash their feet to have a bath or to gather in the compound to smoke bidi during the working hours. The children who worked in the factories were allowed to play during shifts in the factory compound. Sukhni, girl employed in the Union Jute Mill, mentioned before the 1890 Factory Commission that she played during the interval in the factory compound.³⁴ The workers also (though in small number) migrated from factory to factory to dictate their own work terms when it was not accepted in the factories in which they were employed.³⁵

33. Communication from Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to Govt. of India, dated May 13, 1879, NAI, General No.31 of January 1880.

34. IFC 1890 Report, pp.77-88.

35. Correspondence relating to Meade King's proposal Amendment to Indian Factories Act of 1881, NAI, Home Judicial, No.218 of September 1883.

Actually the loose work discipline was allowed to persist to ensure a steady supply of unskilled labour. Jute factories were using a kind of technology which did not require an efficient skilled labouring population. However, while creating such loose work discipline on the one hand, they had developed a system to tie the labourers to the factories on the other.

The problem of supply of labourers in all Indian industries in eastern India in the 19th century was met by permitting pre-capitalist methods to operate on the supply side. The market for unskilled labour was infested with the practices like bribery and usury. So that an individual labour was bonded to the 'labour lords' or sardar. However, the methods differed from industry to industry. In the coal mines the oldest recruitment system was the zamindari system under which labourers were tempted to the mines with offers of plots of land either free of cost or at minimal rents.³⁶ In the tea plantation there persisted the contract system which virtually led to the creation of a class of indentured labourers.³⁷ In the jute mills the sardars (foremen) performed the job of labour lords.

36. Labour Investigation Committee Report, 1946, p.79.

37. Ibid., p.83.

In the initial stages of the industry, sardars were sent to the villages to recruit the workers. In the later period, when the labourers started coming from certain districts of Bihar and U.P., they were recruited at the factory gate. But the sardar remained the king pin of the recruitment system. He recruited on the basis of the often overlapping networks of community, village and kinship ties. These links became extremely valuable to an individual worker. The basis of the sardars' social control of the work force lay in manoeuvring these relationships.³⁸

The Royal Commission of Labour summarised the role of the sardars in a clear cut manner "The temptations of the jobbers position was manifold and it would be surprising if these men failed to take advantage of their opportunities. There are a few factories where a worker's security is not, to some extent, in the hands of the jobbers, in a number of factories the latter has in practice the power to engage and to dismiss a worker. We are satisfied that it is a fairly general practice for the jobber to profit financially by the exercise of this power. The evil varies in intensity from industry to industry and

38. Dipesh Chakraborty provides us with an excellent account of sardars' recruitment pattern in this article "Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill Hands in the 1890s", Past and Present, No. 91, May 1981, pp.140-9.

from centre to centre. It is usual for a fee to be exacted as the price of engagement or of reemployment after a period of absence. In many cases a smaller or regular payment has to be made out of each month's wages. In other cases workers have to supply the jobbers with drink or other periodical offerings in kind. The jobber subsidises the head jobber and it is said even members of supervising staff share the bribe."³⁹

This picture needs no clarification. The sardars often financed the migrant workers to come to the jute mills. There were various types of sardars. Line sardars, for instance, controlled the mill quarters. But the supreme boss was the head sardar. Each department had a head sardar. The sardar's power rested on ~~two~~ two factors. One was his individual position as a leader of the sub-caste or caste Panchayat or particular socio-religious group and second~~ly~~^{ly} his utilization of muscle power. Chandravarkar makes it clear in the context of the Bombay Mills where the sardar controlled an army of unemployed labourers and local hooligans.⁴⁰

39. RCLI Report, p.24.

40. Raj Narayan Chandravarkar, "Workers Politics and Mill Districts of Bombay between the Wars", Modern Asian Studies, vol.15, No.3, 1981, pp.603-47.

The sardars were assisted in their operations by the office clerks of babus who used to maintain the register of attendance and used to assist in the distribution of wages. These basus did not care to maintain a regular attendance register. They, in connivance with the sardars, often created a group of ghost workers whose name existed only in the list. The wages of these workers were earned by them in addition to the fees (Nazaranas, purbanis) they exacted systematically from the workers. The Royal Commission, during its inspection, questioned the manager of Caledonian Jute Mill that where the extra wages of 10% workers whose only existence was confined to the lists would usually go. The manager ~~replied~~ replied that it was divided between the sardars and the babu and the worker who was doing two men's jobs.⁴¹ The jute mills, in fact, always kept more hands than necessary. A portion of these workers were ghost workers.

The prevalence of this type of recruitment system led to the emergence of a community conscious work force. There was a tendency among the workers of the same caste or community to cluster together in a factory department. This was actually the example of the reinforcement of all the old bonds. The 1921 census shows that chamars and

41. RCLI Report, vol.V, Pt.2, pp.144-45.

muchis who constituted 17% of unskilled workers formed only 5% of the skilled workers. Moreover, the Muslim weavers, sheikhas and tantis were employed only in weaving departments of the Calcutta based industries. In the machinery and maintenance department Chasi Kaibartas and Jali Kaibartas were predominant among the workers.⁴²

This type of concentration of a linguistic community or sub-caste group in certain branches of the industry continued its existence for more than 40 years. In fact, this led to the dominance of a generation of workers belonging to one subcaste group or linguistic group in one particular branch of the industry. In fact, the peasant turned industrial worker coming to a city life for the first time would get lost in the tempo of city life with its accompanying traits of individualist materialisms, indirect contacts and impersonal ways and indifference. Naturally he would seek refuge in a sub-caste group which had come from his own area. The monotonous dull industrial life would regenerate his memory of agricultural life and social customs. Particularly, these social customs provided him, for generation after generation relief from the monotony of life. Thus this recruitment system would reinforce the earlier social

42. Census of India, 1921, vol.V, Bengal, Pt.II, Table XXII, Pt. IV and V.

bond and would create a fractured consciousness of the workers where primordial loyalties and kinship ties were dominant factors. This would create riots within the factories and this would lead to the first action of the workers demanding religious holidays. This would also lead to the formation of the first working class trade union organization in a rudimentary form, the Kakinarah Mohameddan Association of Kazi Zahir-ud-din Ahmed.

The technology of the jute industry also helped the workers to develop a kind of religious perception of workers towards the tools. Without any formal working of industrial craftsmanship the workers tended to accept the tools as a manifestation of viswakarma or God of industrial creation of Hindu mythology. In fact, in India the craftsmen's attachment to the ancient usages was reinforced by a marriage of myth and crafts. Religion formed the basis of the institutional operation of every craft in traditional Indian society. Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya had shown that in ^{se}agriculture industry the religious taboos of the artisans (of not eating meat, observing certain norms of behaviour) during the period of silk worm breeding were similar to the restrictions observed by European craftsmen.⁴³ As a result in the

43. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "Cultural and Social Constraints on Technological Innovation and Economic Development: Some Case Studies", IESHR, vol. 11, 1966.

jute industry, as Dipesh Chakraborty has put it, "in fact the workers relationship to the machine, instead of being mediated through technical knowledge, was mediated through north Indian peasant's conception of his tools where the tools often took on magical and Godly qualities."⁴⁴ Again we have to notice that the alien circumstances, the new work situation, heavy nature of work and lack of technical skill reinforced the peasant turned workers' old perception of social items. This also helped in the re-emergence of fragmented (old social) consciousness of the workers with some dominant traits of communal loyalties.

However, we have now come across the role of the sardars, the precapitalist recruitment system but we have not yet examined the other side of the picture, the fees, fines and wage cuts imposed by the management along with corporal punishments inflicted on the workers. In fact, here we will observe how the labour suffered from a debt bondage to the sardars. This debt bondage was, of course, not limited within the factories but was related to the housing of the workers and day to day life of the workers outside the factory.

Dipesh Chakraborty draws our attention to another aspect of the management of the jute industries.⁴⁵ This

44. Dipesh Chakraborty, op. cit., Subaltern Studies, vol.2, p.285.

45. Dipesh Chakraborty, '~~Communal Riots~~', op. cit., pp 145-149.

Deifying and deifying jute mill authorities: managers and workers in the jute mills of Bengal circa 1890-1940.
Past and Present Number 107
 August 1983

had also profoundly influenced a worker's perception of factory work. The British management officials like manager and skilled technician, often suffered from a colonial megalomania of a superior race. As we have earlier observed the typical mill had 15 to 20 European assistants, one to every 200 or 300 Indians. In India these 'poor boys', from the towns and farms of Scotland, by virtue of their white skin and English language, became members of ruling elite. They suddenly began to enjoy tremendous prestige among Indians. Moreover, in the factories the managers executed all vital decisions regarding workers' life like wages, wage cuts and sanction of the holidays. They also sought to establish a firm control over workers through organised violence. The use of abusive language, harsh treatment and even rough handling constituted a regular feature of the system to keep the labour force under control.⁴⁶ Sometimes they interfered in the family problems of the workers and in some cases solved family disputes. They wanted to perform the role of the ideal paternalistic administrator in the jute industries. They tried to become 'ma-baap' to the workers. This tendency was dominant in the entire

46. RCLI, vol.V, Pt.1, written evidence, Letter from the Government of Bengal, 16 December, 1929. p-24

British administrative circle in the 19th century. As a result in the initial stages the workers took the managers as their only enemy who appeared to them as the controller of jute industries. The violent action of an individual worker in a factory was often directed against the manager.

Regarding the wage question, we find that the management indirectly promoted the most important bondage of the workers to the sardars. The gradual emergence of the debt bondage system took place during the last decade of the 19th century and this system continued till the 1930s. The Royal Commission on Labour gives us a detailed picture of the operation of this debt bondage system.

The wages were distributed in a manner so that authorities had a control over workers' action. Till the early years of the 20th century, it was usual for the authorities to keep a week's wages in hand. Rajoni, a female worker of Union jute mill in Calcutta informed the factory commission of 1890 that she used to get her payment on Thursday but the mill used to keep one week's wages in hand. Taroni, another female worker from the same mill confirmed Rajoni's statement that the mill used to keep wages in the hand. Sama Charan Samuth, the spinner from the same mill also pointed out that the mill owners kept one week's wages in hand. Sookwaria, another woman worker of Baranagar jute mill, pointed out

before the commission that she used to get the wages on the last working day and the mill used to keep one week's wages in the hand.⁴⁷ This was the first method to prevent drop-out from the mills by the workers.

The sardars and time Baboos or the clerks also had other ways of exercising 'control'. They would impose a series of fines on the workers for petty offences like negligence of duty, damage or wastage of materials.⁴⁸ They would also exact their Nazaranas and Parbanis at the time of pooja or Id.⁴⁹

On the other hand these labourers were often in debt to the sardars and the mill Darwans. In fact, when the worker used to come to the mill for work, he had to borrow from the sardars or local moneylenders: the result would be his debt bondage.⁵⁰ Systematic exactions prevented him from getting freedom from debt bondage. The

47. IFC Report 1890, pp.77-88.

48. Report on an enquiry into conditions of labour in the jute mills in India, S.R. Deshpande (Delhi, 1946), p.24.

49. The letter written by operative of Budge Budge jute mill in December 1906 Aswini Kumar Banerjee Private Papers, Teen Murti Library.

50. Asampta Chatabda ~~an account of personal experience~~ ^{A novel on jute mill workers by} ~~of a statistical survey of India, Officer Mohanlal~~ ^{Ganga-padhyay} ~~Chattopadhyay~~

slums where the workers lived were often owned by the sardars.

Moreover, the amount of wages were also not high and the real wages remained stagnant for years. S.H. Fremantle, in his report in 1905, mentioned that between 1896 and 1905, "there has been very little advance in wages. The increase is estimated, by one of the mill managers who was questioned on the subject, at 10% in eight years. Others say there has been no general increase. Only small adjustments which have, of course, an upward tendency, and any small rise there is, can probably be accounted for increased efficiency."⁵¹

In 1893, in his report on working factories act in Hughly district, a factory inspector wrote that "it is difficult to ascertain the exact wages of the employees as the managers of the jute factories are less communicative than employer of labour elsewhere. From circumstances, come to my knowledge, I believe that mill hands are better off in his respect than similar classes engaged in other works." Even R.C. Dutt, the first Indian Economic Historian in his report as Commissioner of Burdwan District, claimed

51. S.H. Fremantle, Report on the Supply of Labour in the United Provinces and Bengal, 1906, Nainital, Para 14.

that "the mill operatives in all the districts are well paid and are better off than the ordinary labouring classes of the community. The skilled workmen employed in the industries in Burdwan are paid Rs.20 to Rs.30 a month and the mechanics such as fitters... get as much as Rs.40 or more a month."⁵² But again we lack precise empirical data. However, the British officials presented a golden picture of the work situation in the mills, that "mill industry appears to be popular... the work is continuous, wages are weekly received, the work though monotonous is not arduous, a sufficient amount of rest is given."⁵³

But the picture that emerges from the workers' own testimonials before the 1890 factory commission is something different from the official picture.

"She only works four days in the week. This has been the case since the jute mill association has started short time work." "She would prefer to work six days because of the extra pay."^{53(a)} (Rajoni, a worker of Union Jute Mill.) "He only works four days in the week now under the new rules." "He is suffering loss of income by this present arrangement and would prefer to work six days."

52. Report on Working Factory Act, 1892, W.B.S.A., Govt. General Misc., 28 February 1893.

53. Ibid.

53. Indian Factory Commission report PP 77-88

"He works at home in his fields on the day the mill is not at work and often goes out as a hired labourer (Sama Charan Samuth, a weaver who worked for 18 years in Union Jute Mill)." "He is never absent (there are only four day week)" (Bepin, a boy of 12 who worked in Empress of India Cotton Mill).⁵⁴

Here we notice that the migrant workers were dependent on the loans from the beginning of their arrival in the jute industry. In the initial stages the sardars themselves went to the villages and recruited workers. In early 1896 when the number of the migrant workers were less than local workers they were more dependent on the sardars and looked upon the sardars as their community leaders. In the period of decline in real wages, between 1890 to 1895, the influence of the sardars increased among the workers, particularly among the migrant workers. In this period we also notice the gradual increase in the number of migrant workers in jute industry. These workers (the first generation peasant turned workers) in a new work situation and alien circumstances became the most important social base for the sardari system.⁵⁵

54. IFC Report, 1890, pp.77-78.

55. Ibid.

Table-6: Statement showing the rates of wages of different Classes of employees in the mills of Sreerampore during the year 1893

Report on the working of factory Act of 1891,
May 1894, General Miscellaneous File No.21 GF,
W.B.S.A.

Names of Mill	Rates of wages of workers paid monthly	Rates of paid weekly	Class of operatives
	Rs.12 to 28	Rs.1-9 to Rs.10	Males
Wellington	Rs. Not available	Rs.1-6 to Rs.3	Females
Jute mill	Rs.4 to 10	Rs.1 to Rs.3	Boys
	Rs. Nil	Re.1 - Rs.1-6	Girls
	Rs.11 - Rs.50	Re.1 - Rs.5-8	Male
Hastings	Rs. Nil	Rs.1.4 to Rs.30	Female
Jute	Rs.3 - to Rs.4	Anna 12 to Rs.1-6	Boys
Mill	-	Anna 12 to Rs.1-6	Girls
India	Rs.12	Rs.1-15	Male
Jute	Rs.8	Rs.1-7	Female
Mill	Re.1	Re.1-1	Boys
Sreerampore	Nil	Nil	Girls
Champdany	Rs.6	Rs.1-14	Male
Mill		Rs.1-4	Female
	Rs.5	Rs.1-12	Boys
Victoria	Nil	Annas 12	Girls
Jute mills.	Rs.52.2	Rs.4-4 week	Male
	Rs.18	Rs.1-6	Female
	Nil	Rs.1-3	Boys
	Nil	Rs.1-3	Girls
			Male
			Female
			Boys
			Girls

The table shows the wages of monthly employed workers and weekly employed workers and also the wage differentiations between male, female, boy and girl operatives.

This was the period when the jute mill suffered from depression. There was a tremendous uncertainty of getting work. The workers again became dependent on the loans of the sardars. So the picture of regular work did not reflect the reality. In fact, the real income of the jute mill workers fluctuated to a great extent in the last decade of the 19th century.

Table-7: Index Numbers of Average Monthly Real Wages in Jute Industry

(Average of 1890-94 = 100)⁵⁶

1890 - 100	1895 - 106
1891 - 100	1896 - 107
1892 - 99	1897 - 95
1893 - 97	1898 - 106
1894 - 104	

However, there were two factors that make the scientific study of the wages impossible. First of all wages varied from mill to mill. Table-6 illustrates this. Secondly, as we have earlier noticed in the factory inspector's report in 1893, the employers were secretive

56. K.L. Dutta, Report on the enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India, vol.III, pp.194-5.
Ranajit Dasgupta used this data in this material conditions and behavioral aspects of Calcutta working class, 1875-1899, Occasional Paper No.22, CSSS, p.4.

Table-8: Average wage (in Rs.) in a Jute Mill in Bengal in Selected Years

	1890	1895	1899	1900	Per cent increase in			
					1895 over 1890	1899 over 1890	1899 over 1895	1900 over 1895
Carding	1.31	1.37	1.41	1.44	9.58	7.63	2.91	5.10
Rovers	2.00	2.06	2.19	2.25	3.00	9.50	6.31	9.22
Spinners)	2.25	2.50	2.75	3.00	11.11	22.22	10.00	20.00
Shifters) per week	0.75	0.87	1.00	1.00	16.00	33.33	14.94	14.94
Winders	2.00	2.50	2.75	3.00	25.00	37.50	10.00	20.00
Beaners	2.50	2.75	2.75	3.00	10.00	10.00	-	9.09
Weavers	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.55	11.11	5.25	10.52
Mistries	0.62	0.75	0.87	0.87	20.96	90.32	16.00	16.00
Coolies	0.28	0.30	0.31	0.31	7.19	10.71	3.33	3.33

source: For 1890 Annual Report on the Working of Indian Factories for 1910, para 2, and for the other years Prices and Wages in India, 35th Issue Table 23(17). This Table has been used by Ranajit Dasgupta in his 'Calcutta Workers' (op. cit.), p.48.

about the wages of the operatives. Table-8 gives us a picture of wages in the 1890s in a primary form.

The wage distribution pattern suggests that the real wages of the operatives were not large enough. The operatives had to depend on the loans of the sardars or other people related with the factory directly or indirectly to continue their day-to-day life. They would become bonded to this group of 'labour lords' through usury. The result would be the creation of an unfree labour market where the labour was subjected to non-economic coercion. The sardars and the time baboos would exact nazaranas and parbanis. They would again impose fees for negligence in duties from this small amount of wages. The debt burden of the workers would increase.

We find while studying the living conditions of the workers how capital reinforced its control there,⁵⁷ how

57. In fact, what has happened in India was not a particular incident. While discussing the wages and work load in European industries Hobsbawm pointed out that "most early works were small and where this was so... entrepreneurs might think it good policy to utilise the abundant factors, labour ...even at the cost of labour inefficiency per workers". This was also true of jute industries in Bengal. In early 18th century slave labour was used in Scotland also. Regarding wages it is also from Hobsbawm, we like to quote "The point is, that the wage structure of a developed capitalist economy was not formed in a void. It began as a modification or distortion of the pre-industrial wage hierarchy and only gradually came to approximate to the new pattern." E.J. Hobsbawm, "Custom, Wages and Work Load in Industry" in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), Essays in Labour History (London, 1960), pp.113-39.

the capital in an direct way was sucking the rural economy for maintaining a regular labour force and how the isolation of workers led to social frustration and regenerated pre-capitalist ideologies which culminated in communal riots and robberies and drunkenness. But that would also be the beginning of the primary forms of protests from which there would emerge the working 'class' movements.

contd...

But what was a transient feature in the development of capitalist economy in Indian case, it became near permanent feature. This was the result of an enclaved growth of capitalism in a colonial country where the industrial development became stagnant because of the existing relationship between metropolitan country and the colony. This was also the experience of African historians. Mahmoud Hussain identified an incomplete proletariat class in Egypt because they were in an 'obstructed transitional stage'. (Mahmoud Hussain, Class conflict in Egypt, 1945-50, New York, 1973, p.39.) Chesneaux also referred to the existence of a Pao-King process of recruitment where an intermediary under the contract system recruited workers and exercised tremendous amount of control over them. (Jean Chesneaux, The Chinese Labour movement, 1919-1927, Stanford, 1968, pp.54-64.)

CHAPTER III

SLUM

The factories played an important role in structuring the consciousness of the workers. There emerged a working force controlled by the management through the pre-capitalist forms of non-economic coercion. They also remained in debt bondage to the labour lords created by the management to tie the labourers to the industry. The jute working force on the one hand developed a fractured consciousness of their existence with primordial loyalties dominating their action. They clustered in different, linguistic, sub-caste or religious groups in various departments of the industry. They often migrated back to the villages, and if given a free choice a large section of them would have left factory jobs. On the other hand, these labouring men came from a labour catchment area with an adverse agrarian situation, ecological imbalance and gradual shrinkage of the traditional sources of income. The question that often comes to mind is: how did the labourers mostly coming from the lower strata of the cultivating community react to this new situation? Nearly forty years after the establishment of the industry there had not emerged a permanent labour force entirely attached to the industry. How did the labourers regard their jobs and their status as day labourers employed in an industry

whose mode of operation was, continually, a new experience to them? How far did community consciousness and debt bondage affect their actions outside the factory?

To answer these questions one has to take into account the life of the workers outside the factory. The life of the factory workers outside the factory was related to, and to some extent, was identical with the life style of the common labouring poor of the urban sector in Calcutta-Howrah industrial belt. The picture of a worker staying in the slum reflects a desperate situation where a worker was isolated from all sections of town life except the common labouring poor like rickshaw pullers, palki bearers and hawkers of small articles. They always remained in an insanitary ghetto called basti. The threat of unemployment, tensions of urban life, lack of open space and fresh air, and virtual absence of leisure hours led to tremendous mental agony. The anger and resistance of the workers was expressed through crimes, communal riots and drinking. Even family relationships underwent a change from a rigidly structured custom-bound family life of a typically north Indian peasant towards a fluid sexual relationship between single migrant male and female worker. Women workers were often sexually exploited. Prostitution became a common practice in these bastees. But crime

constituted, as Engels has put it "the earliest, crudest and least fruitful form of this rebellion... The working-man lived in poverty and want, and saw that others were better off than he. It was not clear to his mind why he, who did more for society than the rich idler, should be the one to suffer under these conditions. ^{an} ~~What~~ it conquered his inherited respect for the sacredness of property and he stole".¹

The pattern of communal riots often reflected a 'crowd' action of urban poor in transition from the older pre-capitalist mob moving towards newer form of an organized working class action. In this context we try to put forward a 'Rudean' form of analysis of crowd action.²

The slum life of the workers reflected the common life pattern of the urban poor, but in factories they were part of the production process on the basis of which we can term them as 'urban proletariat class' in formation.

The development of the jute industrial towns requires a discussion before we present the picture of the bastees,

1. F. Engels, The condition of Working class in England (Moscow, 1973 reprinted), p.250.

2. George Rude, The crowd in the French Revolution (London, 1959); The crowd in history... (London, New York 1964); and Paris & London in the eighteenth century (Suffolk, 1952).

London.

their physical structures and the life of the people living there.

The first jute factory came into existence in 1855. Most of the workers then were drawn from the villages situated around the factories. From 1870's there occurred a gradual shift in the composition of workers with the inflow of the workers from Bihar, United Province and Orissa. Upto 1895-96 we notice that the Bengalees constituted the majority of the working force, however they became the minority by 1897.³ The industrial towns appeared on the maps of Bengal between 1850 and 1900 (see Table-9).

In 1895, Sitanath Roy, the Honorary Secretary of Bengal National Chamber of Commerce wrote that the places which were formerly covered with 'marshes and jungles' were soon transformed into busy and beautiful towns by the establishment of mills and factories 'teeming with prosperous population'.^{3a}

Many of the mill towns such as Titagarh, Kamarhati and Budge-Budge were mere villages as late as 1872 when the first systematic census was undertaken. Naturally

3. See first chapter.

3a. IJMA Report of the Committee for 1895, Appendix F.

Table-9: Showing the date and locations of the emergence of industrial municipalities in Bengal between 1865-1899

Division	District	Municipality	Date and year	% of the rate payers in total town population
Burdwan	Hughly	Sreerampore	1865	19.1
-do-	-do-	Uttarpara	1865	21.5
-do-	-do-	Badyabati	1 April 1869	21.5
-do-	-do-	Bhadreswar	-do-	21.2
-do-	Howrah	Howrah	1862	15.01
-do-	-do-	Bally	1 April 1883	18.98
Presidency	24 Parganas	Chitpur	1 April 1889	16.7
-do-	-do-	Maniktola	1 April 1889	20.5
-do-	-do-	Baranagar	1 April 1869	14.4
-do-	-do-	South Suburban	1 April 1869	18.2
-do-	-do-	Garden Reach	23 March 1897	11.8
-do-	-do-	South Dum Dum	1 Sept. 1870	22.00
-do-	-do-	North Dum Dum	1 Sept. 1870	22.00
-do-	-do-	South Barrackpur	11 April 1869	22.1
-do-	-do-	Titagarh	1 April 1895	13.9
-do-	-do-	North Barrackpur	1 April 1860	14.1
-do-	-do-	Garulia	1 May 1896	14.5
-do-	-do-	Naihati	25 May 1869	24.5
-do-	-do-	Bhatpara	1 July 1899	24.1

Source: NAI Home Political records, Municipal Dept. Resolution No.3383 M, Calcutta.

most of the mill towns, expanded in the decades of the highest growth of labour force. For example, between 1891 and 1911, the population more than tripled in Bhatpara and more than doubled in Bhadreswar. Within the single decade of 1901-11 Garulia added 57% and Titagarh 181% to their respective population. The striking growth of the mill towns reflects the sudden influx of jute and cotton mill workers in this region. In fact, the number of the workers employed in the jute industry increased from 66,000 in 1892-93 to 201,000 in 1912.⁴ Besides these, there were other factories like cotton mills and small paper mills at Bally, gun factory and sugar factories at Cossipore, shipping yard and port at Garden Reach and Kidderpore, and seasonal factories like jute balling centres all over Calcutta. The railway workshop at Lilooah near Howrah also employed a large number of workers, mostly from United Provinces. Thus, there emerged a sizable number of working population employed in the factories in the towns of Howrah, Hughly, 24 Parganas and the entire Calcutta industrial belt.⁵

Though we will try to confine our discussion to jute mill workers while discussing the slum life in the Calcutta

4. Census of India, vol.V, Bengal, Pt.II, Table 5, 1921.

5. See Table-9.

industrial belt, it is difficult to portray the picture of a single group of workers.

The earliest description of a Calcutta slum can be traced in the Administrative Report of 1868 of the Corporation of Calcutta,

"... (the) bastees, or native village generally consists of a mass of huts constructed without any plan or arrangement, without road, without drains, ill ventilated, and never cleaned, most of these villages are the abodes of misery, vice and filth and the nurseries of sickness and disease. In these bastees are found green and slimy stagnant ponds, full of putrid vegetable and animal matter in a state of decomposition and whose bubbling surfaces exhale, under a tropical sun, noxious gases poisoning the atmosphere and spreading around disease and death. These ponds supply the native with water for domestic purposes and are very often the receptacle of filth. The articles which feed these tanks are the drains that ramify over the village, and carry the sewage of the huts into them, ...The entrances to these bastees are many, but are not easily discoverable, whilst paths are so narrow and tortuous that it is difficult for a stranger to find his way through them. The huts are huddled together in masses, and pushed to the very edge of the ponds, the projecting lanes often meeting one another, whilst the intervening spaces, impervious to the rays of the sun are converted into urinals and used by both sexes in common."5a

Government versions often contradicted their own reports. Indian Factory Commission Report of 1890 and

5a. Labour Investigation Committee (Main report) 1946, Delhi, pp.302-3. Cited from Administrative report of the Corporation of Calcutta, 1868.

Indian Factory Labour Commission Report of 1908 maintain that the living conditions of 'coolie lines' were satisfactory and large 'coolie lines' with good sanitary arrangements were built up within the factory complexes. But most of the witnesses in the factory commission's report mentioned that they were living in the nearby villages. We have already narrated a picture of these villages. The municipality report of Bengal, 1900 mentions that Sreerampore, Rishra, Uttarpara, Baidyabati, Bhadreswar, Baranagar and Titagarh, did not have regular water supply lines. In Uttarpara the entire population of 35,982 people got water from 89 tanks, and 115 unwholesome tanks and 50 wells. In mill bazar of Titagarh which was a densely populated working class area, there were 30 tanks and one well. In Chatra Sreerampore, there were 4 wholesome and 85 unwholesome tanks with 12 wells for 23,753 people.⁶ All these towns were industrial centres with jute mills and the main employer of the labourers.

In Noapara and Garulia (the villages situated north of Barrackpore) where the majority of the workers of Shamnagar jute mill and cotton mill lived, drew water from dirty tanks. Thick jungles surrounded the bastee of Garulia bazar, which came into existence after the

6. Home political records, NAI Municipal Dept., Resolution No. 3383, Calcutta, 30 November, 1900.

establishment of mills in Shamnagar, and which had a settlement of four thousand workers. They were packed in a few hundred huts.

The lanes which divided the bastee were full of mud and due to the lack of sanitary facilities people used to 'pass water' by roadside. The latrines were composed of five or six earthen pots known as 'gunlah' and always full to the brim and in rainy season water over-flooded these latrines and contents of earthen pots came out.⁷

The housing provided by the jute mills were described by the jute mill authorities in 1929 in great detail: "The size of the rooms vary from 8 ft. by 8 ft. to 10 ft. by 10 ft. In nearly all cases the rooms are made back to back and in most pucca floors and tiled floorings have been provided with a narrow barandah generally 4 ft. used for cooking purposes by workers. No electric light is provided inside the rooms and very often the rooms were dark and in none of them sunlight can penetrate through."⁸ However,

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7. Bengal Chamber of Commerce Report from 1st February 1894 to 31st January 1895, vol.II, Documents and Correspondence Riverine Municipalities, Statement H., pp.276-77. Also see B. Foley, Report on Labour in Bengal, 1905, p.12.

In 1905 regarding the condition of the Howrah bastees Foley commended that "the housing problem is not one which I am competent to discuss. I may merely remark that present conditions under which some of the coolies, not merely the mill hands, are housed leave every thing to be desired and it would be perfectly impossible for conscientious district
contd...

according to an estimate made in 1897 by Inspector General of Police, only 10,296 out of 74,498 employed in the jute mills lived in the mill quarters.⁹

Regarding the medical facilities available to the bastees there is no precise data. In the Indian Factory Commission Report 1890, Maju Maithi, a worker from Rowreah cotton mill, said that there was a dispensary attached to the mill with a doctor in attendance and medicines were available from that dispensary.¹⁰ In Budge Budge jute mill also a worker, Samacharan Samuth said that they had a dispensary and could get free medicine. Most of the doctors in these dispensaries were unregistered medical practitioners while the bastees did not have any doctor.

The disease that workers suffered from were of various types. Dr. Nair (a noted civil surgeon) spoke in 1908 of a particular type of skin disease. He pointed out that these skin eruptions were well known to medical men as 'trade dermatitis'. They were caused by external

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officers to publish the advantages to be derived from employment in industrial and commercial centres, if the employee is to live in some of the bustis which exist in Howrah."

8. RCLI evidence, vol.V, Pt.1, p.264.

9. Bengal Chamber of Commerce Report, op. cit.

10. IFC Report, pp.77-88. RCLI, vol.V, Pt. , p.264.

irritation from jute or other materials that workers had to handle.¹¹

Epidemics were quite common in the working class areas. In 1892, Dr. Baker of Sreerampore wrote that the workers suffered from malarial fever and outbreak of cholera within preventive measure.¹² In April 1894, Dr. Leahy the Civil Surgeon of 24 Parganas noted that "there were 56 deaths from cholera, during the last two months in the bastee surrounding Dunbur cotton mills."¹³ In 1897 there occurred a small-pox epidemic among the Shamnagar jute mill workers.¹⁴ In 1905 Foley while commenting on the reasons behind the exodus of labour from Bengal commented that "one of the mills which suffered from plague was situated up the river, plagues starting from an insanitary ^ub~~a~~sti close-by."¹⁵

In this context, we must also emphasize how the workers were chained to the factories through debt bondage

11. IFLC 1908, vol.1, p.81.

12. W.B.S.A. General Miscellaneous, Nos.1-33, Aug. 1893.

13. Working Factories Act, 1891, Report for 1898, W.B.S.A. General Miscellaneous No.25, Aug. 1899.

14. W.B.S.A. General Miscellaneous, Nos.26-27, Sept. 1898.

15. B. Foley, op. cit., p.12.

to the outside elements like the sardars, Kabuliwalahs, local shopkeepers and also how the management through its income distribution pattern allowed this debt bondage to operate. In the mill areas there appeared a nexus between the exploiters - the local mahajans, shopkeepers and the bastee owners (in most cases the sardars) and the local landlords.

Foley pointed out in 1905 in his Report on Labour in Bengal that "most of the mills which are situated in the towns have no lines of their own or very few for their employees. It is a common thing for the Sardars, however, who are working in these mills, to rent land on which they build houses, where they lodge operatives working in the mill. The mill thus obtains labour without any trouble, since it is the interest of the Sardars to keep their houses full and in some of the bustis thus formed there is overcrowding and a serious neglect of sanitation."¹⁶ Thus to ensure the steady labour supply the Sardars were allowed to control the bastees. In fact, this control of the Sardars over the bastees enabled them to control the workers more effectively inside the factory also. The Sardars acted as a buffer management between the owners and the workers. In fact, there was a huge cost involved in the construction of the mill lines that prevented, to a

16. Ibid., p.11.

great extent, the mills from constructing the 'coolie lines'.

Regarding the improvement of the bastees there always emerged a tussle between the company and the local landlords. In 1897 in a strongly worded letter addressed to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, the Indian Jute Mill Association observed that "the committee ventures to ask on what ground mills should spend a few thousand rupees' to improve and render more valuable the property of landlords, who will not improve their bastees, but who are so alive to the effect of the existence of the mills as to resolutely refuse to allow the mills to purchase the neighbouring land."¹⁷ The landlords without doubt enjoyed the development in their rental assets with the growth of the industrial towns in their area.

The earlier information regarding the debts of the workers was scanty, particularly for 1890s. However, the information obtained from the K.L. Dutta series indicates a steady increase in the income of the workers. But the real wages from the same series indicate a fluctuation in the wages of the workers (See Table-10).

The prices of foodgrains in certain mill districts also increased (Table-11) and as Foley observed, the wages

17. IJMA Report of the Committee for 1896, Calcutta, 1897, Appendix A.

Table-10: Index Number of Monthly Real Wages in Jute Industry (Average of 1890 - 94=100)

	Year										
	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901
Calcutta	101	101	99	97	102	105	97	109	113	116	112
South West Bengal	98	99	100	97	106	108	91	102	110	101	101
Average	100	100	99	97	104	106	95	106	112	110	108
	Year										
	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912
Calcutta	116	117	118		107	102	99	105	109	113	107
South West Bengal	108	122	114		102	96	97	106	109	114	104
Average	113	120	116		105	100	98	103	109	113	106

Source: K.L. Dutta, Report on the Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India, vol.III, pp.194-95.

Table-11: Quinquennial Average numbers of prices of common Rice and Wheat (1871-75 = 100)

Districts	1881-85		1886-90	
	Rice	Wheat	Rice	Wheat
24 Parganas	97	103	101	102
Calcutta	110	96	102	102
Hughly	102	94	114	105
<hr/>				
	1891-95		1896-1900	
	Rice	Wheat	Rice	Wheat
24 Parganas	122	118	139	-
Calcutta	137	115	149	135
Hughly	145	113	155	133

Source: Prices and Wages in India, 21st Issue, Table No.23, pp.129, 134.

of the workers witnessed little increase of 10% "in the last 20 years".¹⁸

But, regarding the debt bondage of the workers, we obtain a clear picture from a much later source, though it could be applicable to the earlier workers. The Indian Factory Commission Report, 1890, also observed that a large number of workers remained in debt.¹⁹ The practice of paying by piece rate (which meant the workers were paid their wages according to the length by yard produced by

18. B. Foley, op. cit., p.10.

19. Indian Factory Commission Report, 1890, pp.77-88.

them in a day) increased the uncertainty of income. Often the amount of the cloth produced by weavers depended on the quality of raw jute.²⁰

Regarding the debts of the workers R.C.L.I. supply us with a large amount of information. According to J.M. Mitra, Registrar of the Cooperative Societies, Bengal, 75% to 90% of the labourers of Calcutta were in debt. The rate of interest on borrowing was between 72% to 150%. Generally speaking loans upto the extent of four weeks' wages were given by the Kabuliwalah or money lenders and mill durwans without any additional security, but when a large amount of money was taken, personal security were insisted on by creditors. The average debt per head of a labourer among 30,000 was found on rough calculation to be Rs.18.9 per month where most of the workers in 1928-29 earned not more than Rs.5 per week. Thus a common worker was also tied to Sardar, mill durwans and external elements like Kabuliwalah.²¹

The collection of debt also involved physical threat to the workers. As the RCLI report mentions, "the lathi was the only court to which they (the mahajan) appeal and they may be seen waiting outside the factory

20. A Sampta Chatabda (a novel in Bengalee on Jute workers by Mohan Lal Gangopadhaya), Calcutta, 1954, p.29.

21. RCLI, vol.V, evidence Bengal, Pt.1, pp.294-96.

gate on pay-days ready to pounce on their debtors as they emerge."²²

The RCL report points out that there prevailed a practice of making the worker pay for the cost of his own recruitment. In fact, the employer or his agent sardar often paid the workers the actual travelling expenses from his home district to Calcutta. This induced the latter to join the industry. It provided the former with a weapon to control the workers. The result, as the RCL has put it, "is to saddle the worker with an additional burden of debt at the outset of his industrial career, if not on each occasion when necessity drives him back from the villages to industry."²³

The jute industry promoted this debt bondage system as an effective method of labour control. The instability in the daily life of the labourers increased their vulnerability towards overtures made by the authorities. This was a system of bondage that developed outside the production relation but structured the labour capital relationship in a different manner. It helped to create an unfree labour market. It also reduced the number of the labourers who wanted to migrate back to their villages.

22. Ibid., pp.229-42.

23. Ibid., p.236.

The system of operation of the municipalities effectively isolated the working population from the urban middle class. In fact, the colonial set-up of government provided little scope for self-government for the people of India. However, municipalities within its limited power structure provided such opportunity. But in the case of industrial towns the workers who constituted the majority of town population were effectively kept away from power. Besides, the town administration was controlled by the mahajan-landlord nexus. This group of town people had a direct interest in workers' slums and often prevented their improvement so that over crowding and extra rent could fill their coffers.

If we look into the composition of the municipality boards in the Presidency Division (where most of the industrial towns were located, see Table-9), at the turn of the century we find that out of 590 members of the municipality boards 40 were Europeans and 555 were Indians out of which 171 were zamindars, 76 were merchants and money lenders, 78 were pleaders and mukhtars, 137 were medical practitioners and 37 were pension holders. The workers had no representation.²⁴

24. NAI Home Political records, Municipal Dept. Resolution No.3383 M, November 30, 1900.

The zamindars were often hostile to any improvement in the bastees. Even much later in 1927-28, the chairman of Bhatpara municipality complained that the chief difficulty in improving sanitary conditions of the bastees was the zamindars' claim to most of the bastee roads and drains as his private property and his objection to any improvement that the municipality commissioner proposed to make on them.²⁵

On the other hand, the resources of the municipalities were limited and the raising of fresh taxation for the housing of the workers was not a simple task. The ~~election~~^{men} took usually little interest in municipality affairs but this apathy without doubt would assume active opposition, if taxes were raised for a matter where they had no direct interest particularly for the dirty 'pash-chima coolies'.²⁶

Thus, if we examine closely, there emerges a situation where workers were confined to ghetto isolated from the outside world. This situation increased his mental instability. There developed insanitary living condition and inhuman dwelling places often invaded by the epidemics. The workers had minimum wages with a fluctuating real income.

25. RCLI, vol.V, Pt.I, pp.264-67.

26. Ibid., pp.285-88.

If we examine the reactions from below to this situation, we will come across an identity-crisis engulfing the workers, particularly the immigrant new workers' consciousness. This identity-crisis was the result of three types of alienation and their interaction with a completely new living condition. There was firstly an alienation from the traditional rural social set-up which shaped their outlook for centuries. Secondly, these artisans or cultivators-turned-workers had lost direct possession of the means of production and the products as well in a very near past. Finally, in an isolated overcrowded ghetto of urban bastees in Bengal they were alienated from the other sections of society, i.e. the lower middle class and middle class, and from the mainstream of socio-cultural life of the town. They lived in a new world where their traditional beliefs suffered erosion, their life was under the cultural hegemony of the urban middle class and their economic life was under the hegemony of a mahajan (an old enemy), the agent of capital, the sardar, the overseer and the clerk (a new factor some time with linkages with pre-capitalist society).

The peasant-workers formed caste associations and set up bastees.²⁷ They brought with them their ideas

27. Ibid., pp.4-18.

regarding social life, socio-religious customs, their own mechanism of organizing social structure in a new situation. With the gradual change in their traditional form of life, with the growing instability in the job situation, these workers developed a peculiar community consciousness and crime habits which led to the emergence in the long run a rudimentary form of trade unionism in the work place.

Table-12 provides us with a detailed picture of the migration pattern in the mills. The last column, dependents, indicates only the dependents who accompanied the immigrants. The table-12 shows, that an Oriya most readily separates from his family. Only 79 dependents per one thousand Oriya workers came to Calcutta and only 62 women per one thousand Oriya male workers on an average came to Calcutta. Probably a small number of females accompanied the better class of Oriyas who were engaged in trade and white collar professions, so that the Oriya cook or coolie never brought their family with them. The RCLI report points out that from Medinipur more dependents came with the workers and half of the females earned their own living. Of this half, one female of every three, took to prostitution. Even among the workers born in Calcutta out of every four women one admitted to having adopted

Table-12: Gives an analysis of migration to Calcutta and its suburbs by sex and age in 1971

Birth Place	Female per 1000 male	Number per mill each sex and age group per thousand of each sex of workers					
		0-15		15-40		40 & above	
		Male	Fem- ale	Male	Fem- ale	Male	Fem- ale
Medinipur	968	108	109	668	544	224	347
Hughly	497	142	171	569	484	289	345
Dacca	292	125	249	639	525	236	226
Patan Gaya Shahabad, Muzzaf- arpur and Saran in Bihar	218	99	187	621	546	280	267
Cuttack and Balasore in Orissa	62	75	153	699	586	226	259
Azamgarh, Banaras, Ghazipur and Jaipur in the United Pro- vince	371	118	179	590	550	292	271
Bikaner and Jaipur in Rajputana	471	183	224	600	539	217	237
Normal distribu- tion by sex and age in Bengal	932	400	400	412	426	188	175

Source: R.C.L.I., vol.V, Pt.I, pp.4-18.

prostitution as a source of side income.²⁸

Table-13 gives us the number of females per 1,000 males in the average mill town, the average industrial or commercial town, Calcutta city and Bengal as a whole in the decennial periods from 1872 to 1911.²⁹

Table-13: Sex Composition in Bengal Town, 1872-1911

	<u>Number per thousand male</u>				
	<u>1872</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>
The average country town	947	971	903	841	816
The average industrial or commercial town	798	767	685	582	537
Calcutta city	552	556	507	475	470
Bengal	992	994	960	945	932

Source: R.C.L.I., vol.V, Pt.1, pp.4-18.

The table-13 shows a gradual decline in the number of females per 1,000 males for the whole of Bengal, but the greatest disproportion was in the industrial areas and in Calcutta. In 1872, the proportion of the sexes in Calcutta was low, but it was relatively high in the industrial towns. Since then the decline in the ratio in the industrial towns had been very marked. This was

28. Ibid., pp.4-18.

29. Ibid.

due to the steady influx of single male workers who had left their families behind. In Calcutta, the census figures show only 374 married females, per 1,000 males and only 47% of the total number of women were returned as married between 1911-1921.³⁰ Hence it is clear that the pre-dominance of male, involved a great increase in an unstable sexual relationship and this in its turn tended to discourage men from bringing their wives to the towns with them.

The continuous work pressure, unhealthy atmosphere in the bastees and the monotony of life forced the workers to go back to the villages. From the earliest time this migration back towards villages was an essential feature of working class life. Taroni, a woman worker from Medinipur, employed in Baranagar jute mill, told the Indian Factory Commission that her uncle and aunt lived in the country. She went sometimes, once in two years to her home. She went last, about a year ago and stayed there for about four months.³¹ Majumaiti, a worker in Bowreah cotton mill, testified before the commission that 'he goes home after two and half or two years'. He stayed 10 months at home and worked in the field. Sookhwaria,

30. Ibid.

31. Indian Factory Commission Report 1890, pp.77-88.

a worker of Baranagar jute mill, said that during her illness she went back home and spent a year there.^{31a}

Foley pointed out that "there was a general complaint, however, that there had been deficiency of labour during the months of April, May and June... The bulk of the hands, it is said are immigrants from the United Province and Bihar, they make more money than they require, and a larger number can be spared to take a three months' holiday, every year, because it is their cultivation and marriage season and because they wish to avoid the heat. Nothing will prevent them from going away at this time. They would not stay for an increase of wages and the provision of excellent quarters and various kinds of comforts has no effect in restraining them."³²

This explains the need to develop a debt bondage system to have a check over the permanent return of the workers to the villages. Sardars were sent to villages to persuade the workers to return to the factories. He even employed new workers to replace the unwilling one. There was an indirect way of exploitation of rural resources to maintain the existence and steady supply of workers. Capital was not unutilised to reproduce the labour. This

31a. Ibid.

32. Foley, op. cit., p.7.

becomes clear from the fact that women workers during the pregnancy usually went back to the villages. Mr. Johnston, the M.P. from Dundee mentioned that "some women workers have the sense to go home to the mufassil when they are going to give birth to a child."³³ Most of the women workers who worked in the factories went back home to give birth to their babies and returned when these babies became old enough to survive in the bastee life. Some of these returned when they became little older and could participate in factory life.³⁴ The reason behind this particular type of migration was not difficult to imagine. As an old man from Kakinara mentioned to Mr. Johnston, half of the babies in the bastee died every year. To avoid this, the women workers had to go back home. However, most of the women workers did not want her child to become a factory worker particularly in the case of a girl. The birth rate in 1927-1928 in Kakinara Jute Mill areas was 18.2 per thousand and the death rate in the Kakinara working class areas was 18.2 per thousand.³⁵ The 1931 census report mentions the general birth rate in Bengal as 27.9 per thousand male population and death rate

33. RCLI, vol.7, Pt.1, p.264.

34. Ibid., p.52.

35. Ibid., p.265.

25.5 for male and 25.6 for female in 1927-28.³⁶ These statistics show a larger death rate in working class areas in comparison to Bengal in general.

The capital of the jute industry came from the British businessmen and the officials stationed in India or connected with India.³⁷ The capital of the industry came from India which the British officials collected by tapping various resources from trade to illegal brites. The industry therefore came into existence mainly on capital gained in India and the reproduction of a new generation of workers in Bengal was based on indirect exploitation of Indian agrarian resources. The migration of the women to the villages and their coming back to the industry after the child 'became old enough to labour' indicate this basic fact that in Bengal the British industrialists only allowed the workers to maintain a minimum living standard through which they could survive. Thus, the pressure in agrarian society compelled a worker to migrate to the towns to seek jobs in industries from certain labour catchment area.

The instability in family life, erosion in the traditional beliefs along with a crumbling structure of

36. 1931 Census, vol.3, Pt.1, Bengal and Sikkim, pp.154-55.

37. See chapter one, footnote 3.

social norms, the dull monotonous industrial life created in the minds of the workers a nostalgia for their old pattern of life. A Bhojpuri folk song of the time reflects the melancholy and nostalgic picture of a village life.

The watching of cows is gone,
 The bath in the Ganges is gone,
 The gathering under the pakari tree is gone,
 God has taken away all the three.³⁸

In fact, the technology of the jute industry, the management system, and the recruitment pattern reinforced the older ideology of the pre-capitalist society. On the other hand the workers also wanted to retain their old social institutions, like caste panchayat and religious festive gatherings. This had led to the emergence of a community consciousness. The sardars often utilized this community consciousness to enhance his control over the workers. They built up the mosques, the temples and presided over the caste panchayats.³⁹ From the 1890s,

38. Quoted from Ranajit Dasgupta, Material Conditions and Behavioral aspects of Calcutta Working Class, 1875-1899 (hereafter Calcutta Working Class), CSSS, Jan. 1979, p.5.

39. Dipesh Chakraborty has provided us with a detailed discussion of this problem in his, "Communal riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute mill hands in 1890s", Past and Present, May 1983, pp.140-69.

we notice that a substantial portion of the migrant workers were north Indian Muslims. The Muslim workers had a more cohesive social structure through which they had developed a sense of unity. This sense of unity led to the emergence of a struggle for religious holidays, along with demands for higher wages, but it also led to riots.

In Calcutta bastees, like the streets of Paris, the Bazar played an important role in social gathering. The bastees were mere sleeping quarters, overcrowded and had no place for social gathering. Street crossings and bazars were the places where the workers used to gather on their holidays, gossiped and got drunk. The bazar gossip was the news circulating medium in the workers' bastees. The news of the assassination of Lord Mayo reached Calcutta (Sreerampore) bastees earlier than the British ships signalled the news from Andaman.⁴⁰ In late 19th century Hindu-Muslim vested interest elite groups became involved in capturing the trade of Calcutta and eviction of workers from the bastee followed the traders' conflict.⁴¹

These riots have been discussed at a great length by Dipesh Chakraborty and Ranajit Dasgupta and require

40. Ranajit Dasgupta, Calcutta Working Class, op. cit., p.145.

41. Dipesh Chakraborty, Communal riots, op. cit.

no further description here. But there were certain characteristics that made these riots different from other mob violence of earlier type.⁴²

Rude while discussing the features of crowd action in a pre-industrial age has pointed out six features: (1) the prevalence of the rural food riot which gradually became an urban affair, (2) the resort to 'direct action' and violence to property, (3) its spontaneity, (4) its leadership from within the crowd, (5) its mixed composition with an emphasis on small shopkeepers and craftsmen in the town, and (6) its concern for restoration of lost rights.⁴³

42. The main cause for the Tallah riot was the demolition of a masonry construction which was claimed as a mosque by one Himmat Khan a mason on 28 June, 1897. Himmat and his neighbours went to consult Zakaria and leading Muslims of the city who were associated with the Pan-Islamic propaganda in Calcutta. They advised the Tallah Muslims to reconstruct the area of the mansion. The Muslims of the area gathered at the disputed place on 29th June. On 30th June they stopped traffic on Tallah Bridge and according to police report attacked the Europeans on the bridge. Police took action against the rioters and arrested seventy four people. The riot continued till July 2 throughout North Calcutta. The main target of attack was the Europeans. Most of the rioters according to the contemporary newspaper account were upcountry workers employed in Jute mills, construction work, jetty and unemployed lower class youth belonging to both the communities. According to police report 11 people died of police firing and according to unofficial account more than 300 people died in police action.
R. Das Gupta, Calcutta Workers, pp.100-49.

43. George Rude, Paris and London in the 18th century
(Suffolk, 1952), p.23.
London.

In Calcutta the riots started in Chitpore from 28 June, 1897. The cause for the riot was the demolition by the Police of a masonry construction which was claimed as a mosque by one Himmat Khan. The construction was situated on disputed land. The court ordered the demolition of the mansion of Himmat Khan which was executed on 28 June, 1897.

This riot was not an isolated incident. In fact, from 1894 there took place a series of industrial disputes concerning the declaration of holidays on religious festive days.⁴⁴ The Muslim workers led the struggle which gradually took the form of a general workers' unrest. We will discuss these industrial disputes in fourth chapter. These disputes were reflections of migrant workers' search for identity. Their festive occasions were meant to find a relief from the monotony of dull industrial life.

The trade rivalry between Hindu Marwari businessmen and Muslim traders had an impact on working class life. Muslim businessmen had established a rapport with the Muslim workers and helped to create a pan-Islamic sentiment. But the Tallah riot, which occurred on 28-30 June, 1897 in north Calcutta, reflected the features of a 'crowd'

44. Dipesh Chakraborty, op. cit.

in transition. The socio-economic situation was a perfect mixture of pre-capitalist and developed industrial production. The rioters were composed of urban poor ranging from vagabonds to thatchers, coolies, port worker and factory workers.

There was a spontaneous response from the rioters to a supposed call for action by a leader from without, Kazi Zakariah.⁴⁵ From the beginning the rioters attacked mainly the government properties and put up road blocks. They also later started attacking Europeans.⁴⁶ The rioters also had a dream of gaining freedom from the ferringhees. The liberator would be the Sultan of Turkey.⁴⁷ The entire episode reflects a crowd in action. This was important in the transition of the mentality of the jute workers. From an indirect spontaneous protest like absenteeism they moved towards direct action. In fact, the systematic oppression of the mill hands and the various forms of results, psychological, and physical, along with the extreme hardship of life made these workers a turbulent urban people.

45. Dipesh Chakraborty, op. cit.

46. Ranajit Dasgupta, "Calcutta Worker", pp.100-19.

47. Both Dasgupta and Dipesh Chakraborty provided us with a same point regarding the rioters dream, op. cit.

The Hindu 'bad characters' also participated in this riot and the city life was paralysed for three days followed by bloody Police suppression.⁴⁸ The turmoil covered the entire region of Upper Circular Road, Raja Bazar, Narkoldanga, Gas Street, Balliaghata, Machoa Bazar, Harison Road, Bhabani Dutta Lane, Thananaia, College Street⁴⁹ Chitpur Road and Shyambazar. The riots also created a sensation in Barakpore and Titagarh area among the workers.⁵⁰

This riot was a turning point in working population's action. However, the anger of urban workers towards the existing social situation and propertied class had also been reflected in the crimes and so called anti-social activities in working class area.

Pratt, a high level Police official, who enquired into the causes of labour discontent and the police system in the suburban riverine municipalities has provided us with a detail of the social crimes and insecurity felt by the propertied residents of these areas with the influx of mill coolies.

48. Ranajit Dasgupta, *Calcutta Workers*, pp.100-19.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

On the 19th December 1894, the Inspector General of Police received a petition from the Naihati residence, complaining of the insecurity of life and property and of inadequacy of the Police. They attributed the increase of the crime to the influx of the mill coolies.⁵¹ He also commented on the Dunbar Samnagar Cotton Mill that "no lines, (sic.) so after dark the mills close and workmen are let loose". In fact, regarding the Samnagar jute mill Pratt clearly expressed his fear that there were "no lines, so at dark mill is emptied and the 4,500 coolies, are let loose in one bazar (of which) (sic.) 1985 are Mohameddangs. These 4,500 coolies added to the 750 Dunbar cotton coolies, being turned out in the bazar at dark without any Police on duty to speak of in the bazars, is surely rather dangerous to the peaceful shopkeepers and others of that densely populated mahalla of North Barrackpore."⁵²

These shopkeepers often traded with the workers and these bazars were created by the Zamindars (as Pratt mentioned, one babu Mandalal Gossain had constructed the Garulia Bazar) who were one of the main exploiters in the workers' life. Their attacks and anger were often directed

51. Report on Police supervision in riverine Municipalities, Judicial Police (hereafter Pratt's report), Nos.1-33, W.B.S.A., pp.7-30.

52. Ibid.

naturally against these shopkeepers. Regarding the Titagarh jute mills Pratt commented in the same way about the danger of the gathering of mill coolies in the bazar after dark. In the same report Pratt mentions the increase in the burglary and the petty theft because of the presence of the mill coolies.⁵³ On Saturday afternoon with the pay in their hand the workers in large numbers went to the liquor shops, got drunk and became unruly. The Manager of Fort Gloster jute mill also complained of gambling. Even the police men recruited from the workers who had been turned out of mill for thefts.⁵⁴

These crimes were the reflections of the instability and social insecurity of the workers' life. The thefts and burglaries were the results of poverty of the common workers who made an attempt to reduce the limits of poverty through a very individualistic form of action like theft. But when we observe an entire mill population of 3,000 workers or 7,000 workers got unruly we know it was not an ordinary crime.

The authorities demanded police protection because of riots and strikes, they had not invested in developing the bastees or mill lines though both Pratt and Foley

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

pointed out that the mill quarters increased the efficiency of the workers and they could be controlled easily.⁵⁴ But in the first chapter, we have noticed, that the main interest of the jute capitalist class was not in creating a permanent disciplined work force but rather lay in maintaining a steady supply of unskilled workers through a pre-capitalist form of recruitment system.⁵⁵

From this community consciousness the first rudimentary form of trade union organization appeared. The crowd action gradually gave birth to organized industrial working class politics. The isolation of the workers from the middle class social life broke down with the emergence of nationalist mass movement.

54. B. Foley, Report on Labour in Bengal, p.12.

55. In fact, this extension of earlier social ideology in an advanced mode of production could be seen in capitalism in Britain also. Laczonick has pointed out that in the British working class organisations. "...the integration of pre-capitalist patriarchal culture into the realm of capitalist production and the realm of working class politics served to perpetuate economic inequality between the sexes, keeping the working class women dependent on the wage of the working class man." William Laczonick, "The subjection of labour to capital: The Rise of the capitalist system", The Review of Political Economics, vol.10, No.1, pp.9-10.

CHAPTER IV

TRADITIONALISM AND NON-CONFORMISM AMONG THE WORKERS - LABOUR UNREST IN JUTE MILLS 1881-1897

On 8th July 1892 Babu Raj Kumar Subhadhikary wrote to the Royal Commission on labour regarding the labour-capitalist relationship that "there is usually the greatest good feeling between labourers and masters".¹ On 26th April 1895, S.E.J. Clarker, Secretary of the Indian Jute Manufacturers' Association wrote to Chief Secretary of Bengal Government that "I am directed by the Committee of the Association to draw the special attention of Government to the great need for police supervision in the riverine municipalities stretching from Cossipore-Naihati- a distance of 25 miles which was evidenced a short time ago in connection with a riot which took place around the Titagarh jute mills on Friday, 29th March a report of which appeared in the Englishman of 5th April. On this occasion three hours eclipsed (sic.) before any police assistance could be obtained and during the whole of this time the riotous WORK PEOPLE WERE PRACTICALLY

1. Royal Commission on Labour 1892, second vol., p.146. Letter from Babu Raj Kumar Subadhyakary, Secretary, British Indian Association, to the government of Bengal, General Department.

IN POSSESSION OF THE MILLS.²

These two letters suggest two completely different pictures of workers-capitalist relationship in the jute mill areas, in 1892 and in 1895. Dipesh Chakraborty has even commented that there occurred a dramatic change in the labourers' attitude towards their work conditions between 1892-1895.³ However, Bengal government's report to Royal Commission on Labour mentions that "Individual mills have had trouble when they have tried to reduce the rates of wages in any department in which the wages have been proportionally higher than the others, or higher than in neighbouring mills; and workers have, in a few cases, combined and refused to work under an overseer who has made himself obnoxious to them and in some cases there has been stoppage of work for a week at a time". This indicates that Calcutta jute mill workers had already developed a tradition of protests before the widespread labour unrest of 1895.⁴

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2. Report on Police Supervision in the riverine municipalities, Judicial Police - 1896 - January, West Bengal State Archives, pp.7-12. "A petition from the Indian Jute Manufacturers association, advocating the employment of a police force at Barrackpore and of a civil magistrate either at that station or some other station." (capital letter mine)
 3. Dipesh Chakraborty, "Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute mill hands in 1890's", Past and Present, 1981, p.140.
 4. NAI, Home Judicial, No.280 of September 1892, Pt.A.

Actually we have to study the gradual transformation in the behavioral^u aspect of the workers to trace the origin of the labour unrest of 1895. We have already noticed the process of social transformation of the displaced artisans and peasant communities into a mainly urban work force employed in jute factories. This transformation had not been a total transformation but certain characteristics of urbaniz^{ed}~~ation~~ working class has developed among the Calcutta workers in this period. The inhuman living condition in the working class bastees and the isolation of the workers from the outside world created in the mind of the workers an aversion to the jute mill jobs. But the gradual change in agrarian structure in their area of origin and the emergence of debt bondage between the workers and the local mahajans forced them to stay back in the factory job.⁵ Fluctuations in real wages, insecurity in the job market, and the oppression of the sardars forced these workers to choose the path of confrontation. Community consciousness played an important role in moulding the workers' form of protests and pattern of confrontation.

Their struggle was not limited within the demands for better facilities but they hoped to gain a new identity, an identity which would force the management to accept them

5. See Chapter III, 'Slums'.

as a powerful stratum of society.

The 1890s also constituted a significant stage in terms of transition in the social composition of the workers. In 1895 nearly 45 per cent of working population came from labour catchment areas of Bihar, North-western province and Orissa. Moreover, they constituted a majority in certain pockets of the industrial belt and these areas experienced powerful labour unrest in 1890s.⁶

From the early stages of the industry, workers refused to surrender themselves totally to the newly developing factory discipline. The technology of jute factories required a large army of unskilled labourers. Strict implementation of labour discipline was not necessary for the profit of the industry. Rather more emphasis was laid upon maintaining the labour supply intact so that cheap labour could be utilized. The other reason behind maintaining the large number of unskilled labourers was the refusal of the workers to change their work pattern. The attempt of the mill authorities to produce an efficient working class would definitely lead towards desertion of factory jobs by the workers.

This refusal to adopt new work discipline reflects the spontaneous opposition of the workers to any change in

6. See Chapter II; Table-2. → (Chapter I 'Migration Pattern').

their traditional work pattern. This was the beginning of a rudimentary form of unconscious non-conformism towards factory discipline. The Bengal Chamber of Commerce Secretary remarked in January 1880 that "...it is necessary to employ in a mill in India - at all events in Bengal - about three times the number of hands that are required in a similar establishment in England."⁷

Bengal workers' efficiency was not questioned by these officials. Rather their observations indicate the continuation of earlier traditional working pattern among the workers. H.W.I. Wood, Secretary, Bengal Chamber of Commerce, noted "...the length of time occupied at work is of itself an insufficient test to determine whether the labour is oppressive or otherwise. The intensity with which the effort is applied is an essential factor in such a question. The character and habits of the mill operatives in their country indispose them to earnest endeavour in the prosecution of the work entrusted to them, but the lack of this persistency is partially met by the ease with which they can continue at work for many hours together."⁸ The 1890 factory commission also noted that workers in India often came out of the factory to

7. NAI, Home Judicial No.50 of January 1880.

8. Ibid.

drink water, to take bath or to smoke bidi.⁹ The labourers resisted any change in this work behaviour. Later in 1936 also the workers protested when jute mill gates were closed during the working hours. They complained that this practice of closing gates prevented them attending any 'nature's call' or receive any news from home of important nature during the working hours. This was the first form of opposition of workers in the early stages¹⁰ to the factory discipline.

In the 1880s a section of workers (when the labour market was not overcrowded) started to migrate from one factory to another in search of acceptable job conditions. They, in fact, dictated the terms and conditions of their employment. This was, of course, limited to a certain section of skilled workers who could take this opportunity when the labour market was not overcrowded. In the initial stages industry did suffer from an acute labour shortage. In those situations labourers had much more free and autonomous choice. It should also be remembered that in the 1880s local workers dominated the jute industry and the debt bondage system that chained the migrant workers

9. IFC, 1890 Report, para 26.

10. Dipesh Chakraborty, "On Defying and defying Authorities: managers and workers in the jute mills of Bengal Circa 1890-1940", Past and Present, 1983, p.141.

to the factory had not yet been structured in a permanent fashion. The local workers who came from nearby villages certainly enjoyed many more advantages than migrant workers in terms of food and shelter. The independent spirit of the workers became a fact. We notice comments such as the following in an amendment proposal of the Indian Factory Act of 1881: "here the workers are masters of the situation. So far from the market being overcrowded... the hands command their own terms, are excessively independent and at the least attempt to coercion they migrate at once to another establishment..."¹¹

In this period the pressure of Manchester and Lancashire lobby to promulgate acts to regulate the working hours of the 'mill hands' made these officials over-sensitive to the workers' behaviour.¹²

Gradually collective opposition of the workers surfaced. Strikes also occurred in the factories in a much earlier period too. The Burdwan Division Commissioner in his report in 1875-76 mentioned that "the jute and cotton industries are enlarging, and the coolie population

11. Correspondence relating to Meade-King's proposed amendments to Indian Factories Act of 1881, NAI Home Judicial No. 218 of September 1883.

12. Bipan Chandra, The rise and growth of economic nationalism, op. cit., Chap. VIII 'Labour', pp. 327-28.

is beginning to acquire factory characteristics, and to need the special attention of the police and excise departments. A case of rattening (the word 'rattening' here was used by the Division Commission to indicate disturbance in the industrial peace in the area) occurred at Sreerampore since the close of the (last) year, when the coolies demanded the punishment of a factory Jamadar, and not obtaining that, stopped the spinner boys going into the mills to work."¹³

F.H.B. Skrine, session joint magistrate of 24 Parganas and a factory inspector under the Factories Act of 1881, reported in 1885 that strikes were not unknown to the workers.¹⁴ In 1886 magistrate of 24 Parganas also reported about the strikes in cotton mills against a reduction of 12.5% in wages."¹⁵

We have already quoted from the report of Bengal Government in 1892 which mentions these strikes. According to the same report "Ghoosrey cotton mill witnessed strikes for three days". "The cause of the strikes was a reduction

13. Burdwan Divisional Commissioner's Annual Administration Report for 1875-76, W.B.S.A. General Miscellaneous, Nos.1-2 of October 1876.

14. NAI Home Judicial No.218 of September 1883, Pt.A.

15. Presidency Divisional Commissioner's Annual Administration Report for 1885-86, W.B.S.A., General Miscellaneous, Nos.1-3 of November 1886.

of wages but in both cases employees ultimately accepted the terms offered, though the company states that they lost Rs.2,000 over the two strikes. An organized strike affecting the whole trade or even all the workers in one mill, has never occurred. Whenever the employers have come into collusion with the employees preserved in carrying out whatever alternatives they had determined on, even against a strike of their own workers, they have, it is believed, been uniformly successful."¹⁶

These strikes reflect the early workers' concern over two issues, firstly the oppression of managerial staff and secondly the wage cuts which would actually lead towards decrease in their subsistence income level. However, their reactions were spontaneous and involved in most cases a section of workers, not all the workers. From these early strikes, we notice that spinners emerge as a group of workers who led the protests in most cases. In the later phase in the 1890s also spinners would emerge as the most active participants in the strikes. Thus the worker's actions were limited to certain departments in early 1880s.

In this period, we notice that legal action was also taken up by the workers. They sought redress from

16. NAI Home Judicial No.280 of September 1892, Pt.A.

courts. In September, 1888 in Sealdah court a case was registered against John Miller of Sealdah Jute mill by a worker of the same mill for assaulting him. According to a contemporary newspaper report a worker asked for leave from Miller who in return abused him. The worker then asked for his wage but Miller, true to the tradition of jute mill officials, kicked him. The court fined Miller Rs.20.¹⁶

Majoo Maithi, another worker, also mentioned before 1890 factory commission that he could remember two or three cases in which the operatives went to court for wages and won their cases. But other witnesses of 1890 factory commission had no knowledge about such court cases.¹⁷ It seems that the trend of seeking legal aid was not widely prevalent among the workers.¹⁸ In fact, the workers were

16. Ranajit Dasgupta, "Material Conditions and behavioral aspects of Calcutta Working Class 1875-1899", (hereafter Calcutta Workers), CSSS, Occasional Paper No.22, p.29.

17. IFC, 1890, pp.77-88.

18. Dipesh Chakraborty made a following comment on the topic:

"Our labour historians have not noticed this so far. Probably the practice was local and confined to certain mills only."

Sasipada Banerjee; "A Study in the nature of the First contact of the Bengal Bhadrakalok with the working classes of Bengal", I.H.R., 1976, p.355, fn.4.

mostly illiterate and poor and so avoided courts. The legal battle require an organized working class movement.

From 1880 to 1890 we notice the workers had developed a rudimentary form of struggle. Strikes occurred but failed to achieve the demands because of the lack of organized support from most of the workers. Legal aid was also sought by few workers. But on the whole the situation remained peaceful enough so that British Indian Association could speak of the existence of the 'greatest good feelings between the masters and the workers'.

The decade of 1890 constituted one of the most important stages of the transition in the jute industry. In the last decade of the 19th century, jute industry completed three decades of expansion. There came into existence a small number of hereditary second generation of workers. In the final decade of 19th century labour force~~ed~~ witnessed a tremendous expansion.¹⁹ In 1890s the non-Bengalee workers mainly from United province and Bihar became a substantial portion of jute workers.

New industrial towns with a large concentration of industrial workers surfaced in this area in 1890s.²⁰ Migrant

19. Ranajit Dasgupta, *Calcutta Workers*, *op. cit.*, p.39. The number of jute mill workers increased from 77,618 in 1895-96 to 1,10,057 in 1900-1901. Also see Report of Labour Investigation Committee (Jute) 1946, Table-2. (See Chapter II)

20. See Table-9 in third chapter 'Slum'.

workers formed their own bastees. There occurred a new kind of alignment among the workers in terms of caste and linguistic division. New workers felt a total alienation from their old surroundings. Even the backward technology of jute industry had imposed a regularity of routine and monotony quite unlike pre-industrial rhythms of work which depended on the variation of the seasons or the weather.

The industrial managerial system took into account every minute of the working hour.²¹ The north Indian peasants who formed a substantial section of industrial workers sensed a sudden erosion in their traditional form of life style. Their family system gradually changed. They were in a new environment where people could neither understand their language nor share their cultural values. Moreover, these new workers had little money to eat, and had no leisure hours to enjoy.

They had to depend on the sardars for entertainment, for shelter and for loans in hard times to maintain their

21. E.J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (Pelican, 1969), pp.85-86.

The changes that occurred in the initial period of industrialization in England has been described by Hobsbawm in a following manner. "This was so even in skilled pre-industrial wage work, such as that of journeymen, craftsmen, whose eradicable taste for not starting the week's work until the Tuesday (Saint Monday) was the despair of their masters. Industry brings the tyranny of clock, the pace-setting machine, the complex and carefully timed interaction of processes, the measurement of life not in seasons ('Michellma term' or 'lent term') or even in weeks and days but in minutes, and above all a mechanized regularising work which conflicts not only with tradition, but with all the inclination of a humanity as yet unconditioned into

existence. The sardars often used their caste ties, communal links and linguistic bonds to recruit workers. The workers realized the importance of these old social ties. Moreover, in an environment where their traditional identity suffered a gradual erosion they had to assert their old social norms, they had to go back to their old world by recreating those festivals and they had to develop a social mechanism by adopting the older form of social organization like caste panchayat. This stage comes in every early industrial society when a worker had to look backward as well as forward to acclimatize himself with new form of social development.²² In colonial society because of enclaved nature of capitalism this stage persisted for a longer period. Thus in 1890s the inhuman living conditions of Calcutta bastees, continuous oppression of management led them to demand not for an improvement in living conditions but for holidays on the religious festive occasions, which they celebrated in their villages for generation after

contd...

it... and by wages so low that any unremitting and interrupted toil would earn them money to keep alive..."

22. E.J. Hobsbawm, Primitive rebels (Manchester, 1979 reprinted), p.108.

"But it must never be forgotten that the bulk of industrial workers in all countries began, like Americans, as first generation immigrants from pre-industrial societies, even if they never actually moved from the place in which they had been born. And like all first generation immigrants, they looked backwards as much as forwards.

generation. Their refusal to change their traditional work pattern in the early stages of the industry also came from this mentality of looking backward. In 1890s when job uncertainty increased with the decrease in work days and real wages, the workers started to revolt against this situation by demanding religious holidays and resisting wage cuts. Along with these main issues two other issues gained importance, the grievances against sardari system and the lengthening of working hours.

From 1893-1900 industry witnessed an industrial unrest hitherto unknown in Calcutta. Shibpur and Howrah jute mills had strikes in 1893, Shamnagar jute mills in 1894. Titagarh Kakinarah and Chapdani jute mills had troubles, riots and strikes in 1895. Baranagar felt the touch of strikes in 1896. The tension continued upto 1899.²³ The industrial situation altered the mentality of the mill owners. They begged for police help, organized their own volunteer force but they also had to concede some of the demands of the workers. 'The voluntary force' of the jute mill owners consisted of European assistants

23. The main source of information regarding these strikes is Report on Police supervision in riverine municipalities, Judicial Police, Nos.6-11, West Bengal State Archives, 1896 January, pp.7-33. (Hereafter Pratt's report). Ranajit Dasgupta also has described in details these strikes in 'Calcutta Workers' (op. cit.), pp.81-95.

who had their own arms. But, rarely do we come across the use of such force in an organized manner to quell labour unrest. Some times in 'self defence' some individual mill managers fired in the crowd.

The main source of the trouble was, without doubt, the north Indian workers whom the authority expected to be steady in work and docile in nature. But in 1895 an IJMA letter to the chief secretary, Bengal government categorically points out that "The point to which the committee (IJMA) desire to draw the special attention of government is that, as matters at present stand, there is no civil magistrate or European inspector of Police, stationed anywhere in the densely populated manufacturing districts situated on the river side from Cossipore to Naihati between which places there are no less than ten large industrial concerns (jute, cotton, paper and glass) giving employment in all to about 35,000 work people, a many of whom are not as amenable to discipline as natives of Bengal."²⁴

The entire situation changed with gradual increase in the number of immigrant workers in the jute industry.

24. See fn.2. This letter of the IJMA Committee to Bengal government was written in January 1896 to draw the attention of government to the inadequate police protection of the jute mill areas.

Pratt, the Deputy Inspector General of police (southern and eastern range) Bengal, who conducted an enquiry in the area to have first hand knowledge about the labour unrest, said that old workers struck work in Howrah jute mill as their pay had been reduced. In Howrah jute mill at the time Bengalee workers numbered 2,800 and non-Bengalee workers were 1,018 in number.²⁵ However, Pratt did not mention that clash was between these two groups, but the influx of non-Bengalee workers in the industry was recent and perhaps their acceptance of low wage rate led to these strikes. Fort Gloster jute mill workers also demanded a wage increase. In July 1895 the spinners of Garden Reach demanded a wage increase. The authorities avoided a strike by yielding to thier demand.²⁶ In Kankinara jute mill in 1895 the manager's attempt to reduce wage rates of spinners led to strike and tension in the mill. According to contemporary sources, Kankinarah jute mill employed at that time 3,300 workers. Most of the workers were 'Hindustani Muslims' (which meant that this mill had large number of immigrant Muslim workers). The mill witnessed a serious strike between 15-18 June 1895.²⁷ According to Pratt "The mills were closed for

25. Pratt's Report, p.16.

26. Ibid., p.17.

27. Ibid., p.20.

10 days. The Gondolpara jute mills in French Chandanagore almost opposite (to it) opened and wanted coolies." They offered a higher rate of wages which demoralized the coolies of Kakinarah who demanded a rise. This was refused by the agents and led to riots in the mills.²⁸

Three days strike also occurred in Champdani jute mills in February 1895. Baranagar south jute mills in March 1896 had witnessed a strike²⁹ on the wage issue. Here too it was the spinners who led the strike. Baranagar north factory workers next day struck work and attacked an Indian clerk. On April 4, strikers assembled at the factory gate and demanded their wage but police dispersed the workers and arrested some of the boys employed in the spinning section. However, in Baranagar all the workers were Bengalee.³⁰

The main demand of the workers was centered around the demand for holidays on religious occasions. In Kakinarah jute mill holidays were taken forcibly by the workers on religious festive days. In Dunbur cotton mills three hours leave was granted for Muslims on Muharram day but they demanded holiday for the entire day. The manager of

28. Ibid., p. 24.

29. Ibid., p. 25.

30. Ibid., p. 27.

Champdany jute mill commented the 'Muslim workers' were the main source of the trouble.³¹ By the word 'Muslim' he meant the north Indian immigrant Muslim workers. In Kamarhaty the workers became violent when Id leave was not granted. The workers from both communities in Gouripore asked for holidays on religious occasions like Rathyatra and Muharram. In 1895 Titagarh Hindu workers assaulted the manager when they were refused a holiday on the day of Annapurna puja.³²

The workers' dislike for individual sardars also them to strike. In 1893 Shibpur jute mills observed a strike demanding dismissal of a sardar. In 1894 Shamnagar jute mills observed a strike because an European overseer struck a coolie.³³ The spinners also made a violent protest in Budge Budge jute mill in 1895 when the demand for dismissal of a sardar was not accepted by the employers.³⁴

All the managers in 1893-1900 were in fear of strike. 1895 marked the highpoint of the strikes.³⁵ In that year also the real wages of the workers declined. (See Third Chapter 'Slum', Table-10). The instability of job situation

31. Ibid., p.21.

32. Ibid., p.23.

33. Ibid., p.29.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

increased with a temporary depression in the industries in 1890-91. The workers testimonials before the 1890 factory commission report reflect this sudden decrease in the number of work days. But these strikes forced the management to accept holidays on religious occasions.³⁶ The series of strikes along with riots against Europeans (Tallah) shook the confidence of the management. Volunteer armed forces were raised by white managerial staff to resist workers' attacks.³⁷ Violence was the part of the managerial system in jute industries. The personalized management centred around managers, paternalistic administrative structure and colonial arrogance made violence a necessary component of the managerial structure. Pratt also commented that white supervisors of working class origin were quick to use hands. The operation of the entire managerial system depended on certain norms of behaviour of the managers which would indicate their social position.

As a result when the workers unrest gained its momentum, the violence was reversed. Physical attacks on managers by the workers became common. However, this reversion in the direction of violence led a historian

36. IJMA Report (Calcutta, 1896), Appendix, pp.76-80.

37. Pratt's report, p.30.

to develop a static model of working class unrest.³⁸ It is true that the violence of the workers led the authorities to organize a counter-violence in a much more organized form but this was not the only aspect of the labour unrest. The defiance of the authorities altered the consciousness of the workers and ideologies played an important role in this process of change in the attitudes of workers in the factories.

In the early stages of the industry, we have noticed that the workers action was limited to certain individual protests. There had not emerged any strong labour unrest with common points throughout the industry. Strikes were limited to certain departments. Gradually the situation changed. Strikes started to occur throughout the industry when workers became conscious of their demands. They also raised a new demand, the demand of paid holiday which

38. Dipesh Chakraborty, "On defying and defying authority: managers and workers in the jute mills of Bengal circle 1890- ", Past and Present, no.100, August 1983, p.138. also Communal Riots, op. cit., p.170. According to Dipesh Chakraborty this violence is an essential part of working class protest. The working class whether in the Swadeshi period or in 1940s organised under Communist party reacted in same violent way. There took place no real change in workers mode of protests in terms of new ideological development, except in adopting new slogans and flags.

alarmed the authorities. However, holidays without payment on religious occasions was conceded by the management.

The entire agitation revealed certain aspects of workers attitude towards the strikes. Workers had their own concept of fair judgements. They believed that their action was always justified in the eyes of existing law.³⁹ In this stage of agitation their anger against colonial rule and white oppression assumed the forms of religious protests. We have already noticed the Muslim workers' acceptance of the idea of pan-Islamism. The reinforcement of the community consciousness over all sections of the workers and the active involvement of immigrant Muslim workers in the strikes led to the establishment of Mohamed-dan association in Kakinarah jute mill. This was the first trade union organisation of the workers in the jute industry which had demanded limited working hours in 1908. This association came into existence in 1895 with the aim of protecting Muslim workers' interest and increasing the recruitment of Muslim workers in the jute industry.⁴⁰ Thus community consciousness led to the formation of the first rudimentary form of trade union in the jute mills. Partha Sarathi Gupta suggests that the origin of the labour

39. Dipesh Chakraborty has discussed this point in a detailed way in his article on defying the managerial authority, op. cit.

40. Dipesh Chakraborty, "Communal riots and labour: Bengal's jute mill hands in 1890's", Past and Present, May, 1981, p.156.

movement should be traced in craft unionism or in caste and socio-religious solidarity of working class groups.⁴¹ In the jute industry we notice the gradual emergence of spinners as the most important group of workers who led all these strikes. The rise of the spinners as the most vocal section of jute workers indicates a form of craft unionism.

But the strikes in the jute mills still remained in the rudimentary stages. There had not emerged a broad based trade union movement. Workers as a social pressure group had not yet emerged. The political understanding of colonial rule had not yet gained any concrete shape. Even a consolidated demand charter of the workers had not emerged. The strikes came from the spontaneous action of the workers. Religion played a dominant role in determining their action. Riots among the workers crippled their united action.⁴²

Religion was then an expression of solidarity which the workers adopted on a social plane because community consciousness (reinforced through recruitment process) made religion an unifying factor between different working groups belonging to the same community. Capitalist industrial

41. P.S. Gupta, "Origin & Structuring of the Industrial labour force in India" in R.S. Sharma (ed.), Indian Society Historical Probings, New Delhi, 1975, pp.426-32.

set-up makes the confrontation between labour and capital an inevitable part of industrial relationship. In the case of jute industry in Bengal community consciousness of the workers accelerated the workers' struggle. Community consciousness, the riots and the workers' decision to observe holidays on religious occasions reflect their desire to preserve their social tradition which suffered an erosion in an alien circumstances.

The isolation of the workers from other spheres of the society remained unchanged except for the intrusions in their world by some philanthropists. However, there did emerge a group of lawyers who represented the workers in the Tallah riots case which included Aswini Kumar Banerjee, a labour leader of the swadeshi period.

The unrest of 1890s altered the basic assumptions of the authorities about the worker. A clear cut working class movement started to emerge which frightened the jute mill authorities.⁴³ The emergence of nationalist movement and the attempt of the Bhadraklok swadeshi leaders in the twentieth century to organise the labour movement in the jute mills altered the forms of labour agitation and created a new type of consciousness among the workers.

43. The letter of the IJMA reveals the fear of the jute mill managers. See fn.2 of this chapter.

CHAPTER - V

NATIONALISM, FACTORY WORKERS AND BHADRALOK
IN LATE 19TH CENTURY BENGAL - : A CHANGING
RELATIONSHIP (1831-1905).

Permanent settlement, along with the gradual expansion in lower and middle ranking government jobs for educated Indians and the emergence of a small number of professional lawyers, jouranlists and medical practitioners gave birth to a powerful social stratum in Bengal known as the bhadralok community. The term bhadralok includes all sections of people who do not earn their bread through manual labour.¹

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1. This word is generally used to distinguish a section of people from the other sections known as chotolok who earn their bread through manual labour. The word bhadralok indicates a social position of a person who has little bit of education, enough leisure and surplus to devote his attention to other spheres of life than simply earning his livelihood. John Broomfield has made an attempt to study the role of the Bengalee bhadraloks in nationalist politics and social life of Bengal in his Elite conflict in a prural society: A case study of 20th century Bengal. Los Angeles, 1968

In fact the role of intelligentsia in a colonial society is much debated upon. It is difficult to employ the term bhadralok in terms of class structure of a society. It is an indigenous term to indicate certain social position of a section of people which they enjoyed because of their access to education, government services and certain other jobs, not directly related to the production of surplus. Intelligentsia which came from this wide social stratum bhadralok can be defined in terms of Dipan Chandra's categorization of the nationalist intelligentsia, " The mistake that is often made in this respect by writers, both Indian

Gradually in the late 19th century, people belonging middle stratum of society, (those above the toilers and below the zamindars) who were employed in government services or engaged in professions of law, education, journalism, or medicine and often connected with intermediary tenures, started to dominate bhadralok community. They took their inspiration from European middle classes who had played a significant role in renaissance, reformation and democratic revolutions in Europe which had changed the basic pattern of European social life.²

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and foreign, is that of looking upon the early Indian nationalist writers, publicmen and thinkers as..... ' the middle class' - instead of seeing them as intellectual representatives of new Indian classes and of Indian nationalism. As intellectuals some of them might and did represent different interests, classes or groups; at the same time, thinking was guided at the level of consciousness by thought and not by interests". Opeit P. 752 (N.P) see also Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's "Notes on the Role of the intelligentsia in Colonial Society: 'India from mid-nineteenth century", Studies in History vol. 1 No.1, Jan.-June 1979.

2. The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 9 Dec. 1869 had described the role of bhadralok in social transformation of Bengal in following words: "Middle class ('Madhya Bittya') people are always considered the most useful group in any society. Our country's welfare depends to a large extent on this class. If there is ever to be a social or any other revolution in this country, it will be by the middle class. All the beneficial insitutions or activities that we see in our country today have been started by this class---- The livelihood of middle class people comes from landed property and the

However the educated bhadralok constituted a minority in Bengalee society. The public service commission report of 1886-87 found 16,639 'educated natives' in Bengal.³ The bhadralok had a solid economic base, which enabled them to devote their attention to other spheres of life like culture and politics.⁴

This small group of educated Indians organized a large number of journals and newspapers in Bengal both in vernacular and in English.⁵ Social, political and religious reform movements, debates and discussions

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services... middle class people are often, 'Ganti-dars'. (A form of intermediately tenure common in the Jessore Nadia region from which the Amrita Bazar was then published). This quotation is taken from Modern India - Sumit Sarkar (Macmillan 1983), p. 68. This statement shows the Bhadralok community's ideas about their role in social transformation as also their socio-economic roots in Bengal society.

3. Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, p. 66, but it is difficult to understand the real definition of the term 'educated natives' from this source. Most probably it is made on the basis of official records, like the number of matriculates.
4. In 1883-89 only 9% of college students in Bengal came from families with annual incomes of less than Rs. 200. Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, pp. 66-67.
5. RNP (Beng.) April 3, 1881, gives us a long list of vernacular newspapers with the circulation exceeding 15,000 per week.

were organized by this section of society and they had access to the official circles, though after 1857 British Indian bureaucracy became gradually suspicious of this class.⁶ They played a significant role in creating a sympathetic picture of the peasant discontent during the indigo rebellion. Hindu patriot played a leading role in providing Calcutta with the news of the oppression of the planters.

After 1857, gradually, this growing educated well-to-do Indian intelligentsia, became critical of British rule. Though their basic faith in the progressive nature of the British government remained intact, yet they started to formulate criticism of various aspects of British policies and gave birth to the new ideas like drain of wealth pointing towards the exploitative nature of colonial rule. Nationalist ideas gradually took a dominant shape within this section of society. There was an attempt made by the colonial intelligentsia to alter the social structure of the

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6. British liberal viceroys particularly Ripon wanted to broaden the social base of colonial rule by taking this social group into confidence and by involving them in lower level decision making bodies, like municipalities, union boards and other so-called local self-governing institutions and also by giving more power to Indian members of bureaucracy like the Ilbert Bill.

Indian society, particularly Hindu society. The anti-satidaha movement, Brahmo Samaj movement, widow remarriage movement and the age of consent bill reflect the concerns of the educated bhadralok as intelligentsia to alter the existing structure of the society. The gradual development of nationalist movement also gave birth to Hindu revivalist thought and uncritical acceptance of certain aspects of ancient India as the ideal form of social system. At the same time they expressed their concern about the lower strata of the society. The condition of peasants did not escape the notice of the bhadralok intelligentsia. A section of the intelligentsia organized a movement to introduce rent reforms and formed rent associations.⁷

The condition of the tea garden workers also attracted the attention of Bengalee intellectuals⁸. Bangalee

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7. Krishna Kumar Mitra, the well-known editor of Sanjivani, has commented upon the role of Calcutta intellectuals in organizing rent movement in his 'Atma Charit' (Autobiography) (1937, Calcutta):

During Lord Ripon's administration a beginning was made in the work of improving the laws regarding the tenancy rights of the peasants. The British Indian association mobilized its forces to keep unimpaired the interest of the zamindar's and the Indian association took up the cause of the peasantry in a big way. Babu Dowarakanath Ganguli was, at the time, the Assistant Secretary of the Indian association. He was an embodiment of inexhaustible enthusiasm. He used to take Kaliprassanna Bhattacharjee, Kaliprassanna Dutta, Kalishankar

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intelligentsia also expressed their concern over the continuous deterioration in the peasants' economic position.⁹ At the same time they were inspired by the rise of Indian industries. The journals also, throughout the 19th century, appealed to their readers to take to independent industry or trade.¹⁰

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Sukul and myself with him to many villages in Nadia, Hugly and Howrah districts..... At Krishnaganj in Nadia nearly 20,000 peasants assembled. Some of them caused great excitement among those present as they went on relating the story of the terrible atrocities of zamindars. At Poradah, about 10,000 and at Kustia almost 15,000 people joined the meetings.... As a result of such an agitation, the government had to bring forward a new Tenancy Bill. (P. 94)

8. Dowaraka Nath Ganguli and Ram Kumar Vidhyaratna visited the tea gardens of Assam and narrated their experiences in their writings. Rankumar Vidhyaratha wrote a book called Coolie Kahini, and Dowarakanath wrote a column in Sanjeevani on tea garden labour, called Legriser Santan (লগ্ৰিস সন্তান) (Dr. Legris was the infamous slave owner in uncle Tom's cabin).
9. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya wrote a famous article on peasant condition in Bengal 'Bangalar Krishak' in his newspaper Banga Darshan.
10. Bholanath Chandra in his famous essay "A Voice for the commerce and manufacturers of India" published in the Mukherjee's magazine between 1873-1876 had appealed to his countrymen to consider industrialization as 'the ocean to the rivers of all thoughts'. Bharat Sramajibi also contained articles in May-June issue of 1879 carrying appeal to the rich classes to invest in the industry. Efforts were also made to start industrial enterprises. In 1867 Kishorilal Mukherjee started the Sibpur iron works near Howrah. The next real success in Bengali industrial effort came in 1893 when Prafulla Chandra Roy started his Bengal Chemicals. Hindu mela in 1867 also made arrangements for exhibition of Indian crafts.

During this period when intellectuals were experimenting with new ideas, the Calcutta-Howrah semi-urban areas witnessed a social transformation of an extremely significant nature. The gradual process of transformation of a segment of local population into industrial workers had taken place in this period.¹¹ The growth in the number of the slums of the 'coolies' migrating from United province, Bihar and Orissa changed the demographic composition of the population in certain pockets of this newly rising industrial belt from 1894-95 onwards.¹² We have to analyse in this context the reactions of the bhadralok intelligentsia to this aspect of social change and their understanding of the development of industrial economy, particularly the reactions of the newspapers towards the factory acts of 1881 and 1891. The role of other sections of society, businessmen, and zamindars, who formed a part of the higher echelon of Indian society has also to be taken into consideration. We will broadly divide

11. One such transformation can be located in Bar-nagar industrial belt where large number of juggis and tantis had become unemployed because of the introduction of industrial goods, joined factories as 'mill hand'. Dipesh Chakraborty has given us a clear-cut description of such transformation in his article "Sasipada Bannerjee: A study in the nature of first contact of the Bengali Bhadralok with the working class of Bengal", Indian Historical Review, Vol. 2, 1976, pp. 339-64. Hereafter 'First Contact').

12. See chapter 3 'Slum'.

militant nationalism aiming at making the people conscious of their 'Hindu national identity' and cultural tradition. On the other hand, we notice a transition within the reform movement. The rise of radicalism of young Bengal and their search for an alternative model of education system, led to the rise of new trends of thoughts.

The post- 1857 days witnessed a steady deterioration in the relationship between the educated Indian community and the ruling British Indian bureaucracy. With the basic changes in the attitude of these two communities, we notice the development of radical social reform ideas within the Bramho Samaj movement. The new centre of radicalism was Keshab Chandra sen. In 1870 Keshab Sen visited England and came into contact with socialists, liberals and social reformers, associated with unitarian Church. Keshab Sen was much influenced by Mary Carpenter, a close friend of Rammohan and a philanthropist, who worked among the British labouring masses.

Keshab Chandra Sen wrote "....., who are the really great men? The lowly ones of our country. For if they were not there who of us would get his daily bread, who would go to the races in his stately

carriage or would lean against his luxurious pillow and go on smoking his hookah? Look, such ordinary people supply us with every thing..... They labour day and night to supply us our food, but how many care to think even once how they themselves manage to exist?¹³ In the issue of March 13, 1880 Sulabh Samachar he wrote,

'In Russia now-a-days a tremendous upheaval is taking place. Among the educated classes a general idea has taken hold that the present monarch and the civil servants must go and the mode of administration be thoroughly overhauled. This group is daily becoming more powerful. Like the communists in France, and the socialist party in Germany, they too are rebelling against the king. They are ready to smash up the present, social, family and monarchical system in Russia.¹⁴

He also established a technical school which imparted training in carpentry, weaving, watch-repairing, lithography, printing and carving. He also set up a night school for the workers which had a regular course work for the adult students based on curriculum of primary education.¹⁵

13. Subah Samachar Srajan 31, 1278 (Bengali era) Chinmohan Sehanabis: "Brahmo Samaj and Toiling people". p. 118, Mainstream, vol. 127, Nos. 1-26, Annual 1978 (hereafter Brahmo Samaj).

14. Ibid., p. 118

15. Ibid.

Radicalism also had taken different shapes in 1870s. In the general assembly of the first International on August 15, 1871 at which both Marx and Engles were present, a letter was read which came from Calcutta. The letter itself in part reads as follows".....

Great discontent exists among the people, and the British government is thoroughly disliked. The taxation is excessive and revenues are swallowed up in maintaining a costly system of officialdom. As in other places the extravaganzas of the ruling class contrast in a painful manner with the wretched conditions of workers, whose labour creates wealth thus squandered. The principles of the International would bring the mass of the people into its organization if a section was started."¹⁶

It is not known who wrote this letter but it definitely exhibited a politically conscious mind which tried to establish a link between anti-colonial struggle and working class movement in terms of class struggle related to the international situation.

16. Ibid.

Sashipada Banerjee, one of the most widely known social reformers, was a product of this reform movement. Sasipada was much influenced by Keshab Sen's activities. He attended a lecture of Keshab Sen in August 1865 in Calcutta. Keshab's speech deeply touched him and he joined Brahmo Samaj as one of its members.¹⁷ Sasipada's activities were also influenced by Mary Carpenter, who came to Baranagar in 1866 and spoke about reform movements among the labourers in England in that period. Sasipada^h also decided to take up activities among the labourers.

Sasipada^h came from a Brahmin family of Baranagar. He also witnessed the gradual transformation of Baranagar into an industrial centre. In fact Borneo Company established jute factories in Baranagar in 1859 which in 1871 employed more than 5,000 workers. Local weavers, who lost their traditional livelihood

17. Keshab gave this speech in the house of Gopal Mullick in Sinduria patti of Calcutta. The main theme of his speech was "Struggle for religious independence and progress in the Brahmo Samaj, Introduction to Bharat Sramajibi 1287 (Bengali era) issue (1879-80) et. by Kanailal Chattopadhyaya, Devalaya Trust, Calcutta, 1975.

due to the competition from British goods obtained jobs in the mill.¹⁸ The transformation of a segment of local population into factory workers occurred just before his eyes. The bhadralok community of Barahanagar was also engaged in bitter debate over the establishment of the mill. The debate was also related to the basic economic interests of the bhadralok community.¹⁹ However, Sasipada was much influenced by this development. He argued in favour of industrialization of Indian society and wanted Indian richer classes to invest in industrial development.²⁰

Sasipada started his reformist activities from 1865 onwards. From 1865 to 1887 he built up eight organisations which directly or indirectly involve the participation of the workers.²¹ He had a faith

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18. Dipesh Chakraborty, 'First contact' op. cit. Indian History Review, Vol.2, 1976 p. 349.
 19. D. Chakraborty, 'First Contact,' pp. 340-42. "Akshari monan Ganguli (later a supporter of Sasipada) and Raj Kumar Mukherjee - two local landowners would support the establishment of the mill because many of the mill hands were now to be settled on their land, meaning higher rent for them. By the same token a Prana Krishna Tarkalankar whose lands the mill would take up for expansion of its works, might become an untiring 'enemy' of the mill."
 20. An article in Bharat Sramajibi (May-June, 1879) appealed to the zamindars and wealthier sections of Indian community to invest in industrial development. In another news item (Bhadra 1286-Sept. & Oct. 1879) Bharat Sramajibi welcomed

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in the civilizing mission' of British rule. His reformist ideals were inspired by Hindu concept of lok heeta and Christian concept of charity. Like a victorian liberal he spoke of the necessity of literacy campaign among the workers, the industrial peace and harmony between the workers and the management, and he gave a tremendous emphasis on infusing a sense of dignity of labour among the workers.²² In Indian society, particularly in Bengal, manual labour was much looked down upon. Those who earned their bread through manual labour was termed as Chotolok, a derogatory linguistic expression to indicate the

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the setting up of the soap factory in Kanpur. It had also welcomed the coming of European technicians to Bombay who would provide a training to Indian workers to learn the art of making crockeries in China clay.

21. T. Chattopadhyaya, "Baranagrer Dharma Sanskriti digdarshan" (in Bengali) in Baranagar Municipality Century Souvenir, 1869-1869, pp. 26-27, gives a short list of sasipada's institutional activities between 1864 and 1887. Also quoted in Dipesh Chakraborty's 'First Contact', op. cit., p. 244.
22. Bharat Sramajibi always carried a motto on the top of the pages 'Labour is the sign of human greatness'. See Kanai Lal Chattopadhyaya, ed., Bharat Sramajibi of 1879, (1287 Bengallies).

the inferior position of the people engaged in manual labour.²³

Sasipada was neither a revolutionary who made an attempt to organize the workers in a radical movement aiming at social transformation, nor was he an agent of capital whose reform work created an unnecessary passivity among the workers. Sasipada's reform work was significant till 1890s when there was no strong labour movement and the intelligentsia had been totally ignorant of the working condition of the labourers. Sasipada was the first social reformer, who extended Keshab Sen's reform programmes in concrete terms among the workers.

Sasipada was not totally unconcerned about the changes being brought about by the industrialization of Indian economy, as being claimed by a historian.²⁴ On the other hand, he by the term 'Sramjibi' (Labouring man) meant all who earned their bread through manual labour. He was not totally unaware also of the fact that workers were products of different social system

23. Bharat Sramjibi appealed in Poush 1287 (Dec.-Jan. 1879-80) to the workers, to come out of their age old exploitative system through education, and asked them to read Bharat Sramjibi which would help in the hours of need.

24. Dipesh Chakraborty comments that "He (Sasipada) does not identify the 'new' features of life of an industrial working class, to him they were

based on industrial economy. He further pointed out the growth of industrialization in 19th century India and wanted to spread education among the children of workers who were employed in these factories.²⁵

Sasipada from 1874 published a monthly journal called Bharat Sramjibi which had a large circulation of 2,000 copies. This journal carried articles on several events in the world, and on the new scientific inventions in England. He welcomed every new attempt of industrialization. He also spoke of government's

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all a part of the nebulous mass of 'poor people' suffering under the burden of ignorance. It is in this vague, general sense of a 'poor people' (including peasants) that the word Sramjibi is used in his journal Bharat Sramjibi (The Indian Working men)," , The first contact, op.cit. p. 353 IHR Vo. 2, 1976.

25. However, it is Depsh Chakraborty who has pointed out Sasipada's concern for the rise of working class by to one of his letters. *referring During the past fifteen years, cotton and jute factories have been established by European capitalists in different parts of the country. Besides, there are iron foundaries and other workshops employing a great number of poor children. We have besides coffee, tea and other plantations which also give work to large number (s). In all these places there are materials for mass education if only schools could be opened to carry out the object. "First Contact" op.cit. p. 353, quoted from Indian National Association Journal, 1, 1871.

inadequate measures to protect labourers' interest or to remedy their appalling living conditions.²⁶

He was also involved in a protest against harassment of women by the police. He spoke for acts limiting working hours of workers which other Bengalee intelligentsia controlled media opposed. Sasipada's temperance movement had led to his arrest by the police due to the conspiracy of the wine sellers in the area.²⁷

Sasipada was the first reformer to speak on labourers' problems in concrete terms. He tried to organize his reform activities among the labourers which had attracted the attention of the intelligentsia, to the existence of a new class in Bengal.²⁸

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- 26. Sasipada also tried to put forward the example of Richard Archright, Robert Burnes, Count Ramford and others to project the stories of prominent men with humble background. However he never used any Indian name. This indicates a typical colonial mind obsessed with the idea of the superiority of white skin.
 - 27. Introduction to collected issues of Bharat Sramajibi Op cit. p. 12
 - 28. Sasipada's activities aroused interest in a section of Indian and British Indian Press. He also was successful in enlisting the support of reformers like Sibnath Sastri who wrote a poem in his magazine Bharat Sramajibi

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Sasipada's welcoming of industrialization, his emphasis upon working among the workers as a new segment of the society was radical in terms of 19th century reform movement. He failed to expand the reform programmes because of financial dependence on the Britishers and also due to the lack of a programme of struggle, because of the minority character of the Indian Working class. But it should also be not forgotten that he was the lone intellectual who drafted a reform programme for women workers, muslim workers (virtually unthinkable in 19th century Bengalee bhadralok society) and child labourers. This was indeed a pioneering attempt.²⁹

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"Awake, oh! brother toiler !
 The end of the epoch is here.
 Men and women, all are moving
 This is no time for slumber.
 I call upon you to wake up !
 Look! There beyond the seas
 How toilers in their thousands
 Fight a tremendous battle.
 Their motto - no more shall we remain
 in the dark,
 Come, let me see you all!"

Indian Dailynews on 11 December 1873 gave a coverage of the news items of Bharat Sramajibi and spoke about its objectives as "It is a purely an educational paper and its object is to supply a news of supplying the moral intellectual condition of the working classes... to make or keep them worthy and respectable members of the society.

29. Sasipada's failure was the failure of a bhadralok reform movement of the 19th century which always looked towards European support. Rammohan who

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Keshab Chandra Sen's gradual shift towards mysticism, and his 'authoritarian' tendency to dominate the entire movement on a personal basis led to the dissensions among his followers.³⁰ Sibnath Sastri, a brilliant intellectual of the 19th century, who was much influenced by socialist literature tried to give leadership to the reform movement. But Sibnath, instead of expanding the movement on the basis of his ideological formulations,

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was an ardent supporter of French revolution and liberation struggles in Latin America argued for setting up European colonies in India to improve the life style of the 'natives'. Vidyasagar despite his independent position also took the help of the British government to introduce widow remarriage act. Young Bengal radicalism was also the product of western education and it could not strike roots in the mind of people because of its intellectualism and utter foreignness. They failed to grasp the basic nature of Indian social development. Sasipada in the same manner adopted his reformist programme after observing the life-style in Britain. He wanted to follow the process of social transition in Victorian England and where the journeymen in an atmosphere of free-capitalist development could establish themselves as successful business men. The situation was different in colonial India. However, like all the nationalists he believed that if the Indian wealthy class started investing in industries, then drain of wealth to England could be stopped. (See Bharat Samaj, Jaistha 1287, May-June 1879).

30. See, Notes on Bengal renaissance, Susobhan Sarkar, p. 53.

formed a somewhat exclusive group which reflected an idealist utopian attitude towards society instead of a pragmatic reformist programme.³¹ But he was a passionate reader of socialist literature and deeply committed^{to} secular ideas.³²

31. The members of Samadarshi society were bound by the pledges which they had to take when they became members. Bipin Chandra Pal who was a member, refers to these pledges in his memoirs thus:

1. We shall not worship idols or images.
2. We shall not in word or deed accept caste differences.
3. We believe in equal rights for men and women.
4. We shall not marry girls of less than 15 nor before we ourselves are 21...
5. We shall as far it lies in our power, try to spread education, particularly among women and the masses.
6. We shall practise riding and rifle shooting.
7. Though we believe that self-government is the only system of government oriented by God, yet in view of the present condition prevailing in our country as also for our future well being, we shall abide by the orders of the foreign rulers but inspite all privations and poverty shall never accept service under this government."

They also took a pledge that none of them would keep separate accounts. Whatever any one would earn would go to a common pool and from that they would maintain their existence.

32. In his unpublished Diary, October 1988, Sibnath Sastri wrote:

"Over and above, I have also to purchase some socialist literature. For the study of such literature is essential for acquiring knowledge about the tasks that would face us while building new society."

Brahmo Samaj, op. cit., p. 120.

But as a deeply religious person Sibnath tried to synthesize between socialism and secularism and deep religious traditions and customs existing in India. He was a spokesman of unison of religious tradition and secularism.³³

This emphasis, on the combination of religion and faith in God with radical politics, had a peculiar impact on the workers. A section of white collar workers in the early 20 century became influenced by the ideology that India's path towards industrialisation would be free from class conflict and India's message is social harmony between different segments of the population who had an 'apparently conflicting' social interests.³⁴

Now we would turn our attention towards the development of the politics of associations and the attitude of these associations towards workers' problems.

We would also focus our attention on the Indian Newspapers and their understanding of the labour problems in the late 19th century.

33. In his Englander Diary Sibnath wrote,

"When working among young men and women one has to bear in mind both the destructive and creative aspects. On the one hand, the smashing up of superstitions, caste differences and the empty sastric injunctions, and on the other, the inculcation of steadfast honesty, respect for saintly lives, faith in religion, absolute reliance on God-both the sides must be taken care of. On the one hand socialist and secularist literature has to be studied, and its essence assimilated and, on the other, our faith and reverence have to be kept alive by delving into the lives of saints, meditation and sadhana. To the extent that I am able to imbibe both in my life, I shall be able, exactly in the same measure to transmit the same to others." (pp 172-73). "Bramho Samaj op.cit. pp 120-21.

34. We will discuss this aspect at the end of this chapter again.

Section 2

Politics of the Associations and media reactions
to the workers' problems

The British Indian association was the first political association whose members discussed various aspects of British Indian polity. It was a landlord dominated body. Its attitude towards the labourers' problems was a mixture of paternalistic concern of a zamindar towards his tenants and a non-committal stand on the workers' problems. It had a clear-cut idea of worker's problems and described it in a detailed manner without any display of concern for the workers. Their letter to Royal Commission on Labour starts with the following introductions:

"British Indian association is a political association but several of its members are large landholders whose tenants work in different jute and cotton and other mills for the manufacture of textile fabrics."³⁵

This introduction shows the point of concern of the zamindars. But this letter does not indicate the position of the association on the labour problems.

35. Royal Commission on Labour (English), Foreign Report, 1892, Vols. 2 p. 146. Report on the Labour question in India, dt. Calcutta, the 8th July 1892. From Babu Raj Kumar Subadhikari, Secretary. British Indian Association, to the Government of Bengal, General Department.

The letter states facts and finally speaks of a 'greatest good feeling' between the workers and the factory management. It also speaks of judicious distribution of working hours between men, women and children workers. This letter points out that the workers also worked on Sundays.³⁶ But there was a difference in the tone of their letter and Sasipada and other reformers' attitude towards the subject. Where Sasipada passionately had argued for the introduction of labour laws limiting working hours, the letter had avoided any comment on it and by emphasising the fact that "there is usually the greatest good feeling between the labourers and masters" the association only had expressed its approval of the situation. Earlier the same organization expressed its concern over the [Ilbert bill issue and were critical of the measure of lowering the age for civil service examination. This relative calmness over the issue that seemed distant to them (agrarian disturbances affected their interest directly and they took a position either for or against the movement depending on the nature of the disturbances) also had become characteristic of the nationalists' silence on labour problems.

36. Ibid.

In the 1890s Congress was an established body. However, Congress had not expressed its opinion during the debate on the factories act of 1891.³⁷ It generally shared the view that the bill would cripple the Indian industry. In fact the only reference was made to working class problems from the Congress platform by Surendranath Bannerjea in his presidential address when he warned against the use of factory legislation to restrict and raise the cost of production. He also pointed out that, even apart from England, Japan was a serious rival of India in the field of textile industry. The only resolution that Indian National Congress

passed regarding labour problem was against the Indian mines Act of 1901.³⁹ The mover of the resolution, Bhupendranath Basu, protested against the provision prohibiting women workers from carrying their children underground with them and declared that 14 years as the maximum age for children was on high side because at 14 Indian women became mothers. Even the clause of appointing educated and trained managers was opposed

37. Bipan Chandra has made a detailed analysis of the nationalists' attitudes towards labour problem in his book, Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India, Chapter VIII Labour (pp. 323-94). Peoples' publishing house, New Delhi, Reprinted November, 1982.

38. Ibid., p. 399

39. Ibid., pp. 352-55

because it meant that Indian mine owners would have to appoint trained officials from Britain which would increase the cost of production and in the long run would remove the Indian mine owners from the competition. Indian National Congress leaders were much concerned about the Industrial development in India and sought to protect jealously the interests of the rising Indian bourgeoisie than the workers employed in their factories except in the case of Assam tea gardens where the tea garden owners were mainly white planter.

In Bengal the journals were silent over the working conditions in the jute mills, though they protested against the oppression of the planters in the gardens of Assam. But when due to the pressure of textile magnates in Britain and philanthropists both in Britain and in India, Government planned to introduce legislation limiting the working hours of the children, Indian owned newspapers were vocal in criticizing government's policy. The Factories Act of 1881 limited the hours of children to 9 hours per day. By the term children they referred to boys between 7 and 12 years of age.⁴⁰ In Bengal the newspapers poured their attacks on the act from 1879 when the bill was ready for discussion. The Brahmo Public Opinion of Calcutta which was

40. Ibid., p. 325

the main spokesman of the radical Brahmos of Calcutta on 27 February 1879 declared that legislation limiting working hours of workers was not necessary.⁴¹ Amrita Bazar Patrika of 10 March 1880 ridiculed Shorabji Bengalee for his pro-act attitude.⁴²

Indian newspapers of Calcutta generally took a position against the introduction of the bill. Naba bhikar, a vernacular newspaper on March 21, 1881 declared that factories act owes its existence due to the influence of Manchester. It pointed out that to make the goods manufactured in India dearer than those imported from England the law for the regulation of labour was introduced. The paper also hinted that viceroy Ripon was not aware of this sinister game to destroy Indian Industries. According to the paper Secretary of State and other members of council had not revealed to him the main intention behind the bill which was prepared before his arrival in India.⁴³ A mufassil newspaper Bardhaman Sanjibani made the same kind of analysis of the act.⁴⁴

Sadharani another Bengali newspaper commented on 27 March 1881 that the passing of factories act was

41. Ibid., p. 332.

42. Report on Native Press (Bengal), 2 April 1881
(Hereafter RNP (Beng)).

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

wholly due to the persistent efforts of Manchester to ruin the rising textile industry of India. They said that there was not the slightest necessity for the measure. They also asserted that operatives in Indian mills were not subjected to any cruel treatment. The new law would have the effect of bringing poverty upon many who have hitherto found employment in the mills. ⁴⁵

Actually the paper predicated that factory owners would evict certain labourers from their job because of the passing of the law. However, the paper did not think that this type of activity would be selfish and inhuman act on the part of the factory owners.

Bharat Mihir another contemporary Bengali newspaper wrote on March 9 that by passing the factory bill into law Manchester had obtained another triumph.⁴⁶ The paper also pointed out that Ripon was unaware of the origin of the law. But the paper had clearly pointed out that this law would have the most injurious effect upon the rising textile industry of India. It would make capitalists less willing to invest in this business and would destroy the employee-employer relationship in the factory. Anand Bazar Patrika of 4th April 1881 had a long article on the factory act. The Patrika

45. Ibid.

46. 19 April 1881 RNP (Beng.).

pointed out that the passing of this measure was due to same consideration which led to the remission of cotton duties. "It will restrict labourers in the 'factories' to a condition which had never evoked any sympathy from either their friends, relatives or rulers succeeded from this distance in exciting his Lordship's pity." 47

Only exception to this virtually unanimous denunciation of the act was Somprakash. Somprakash of 28 March 1881 wrote that one measure would not have the effect of securing any advantages to British textile industries. Somprakash believed that the government acted with its usual generosity to the labourers. The paper pointed out that this would not involve much additional outlay. However, Somprakash also pointed out that by excluding tea gardens and ⁿIndigo plantations from the purview of the act, government had shown a kind of favouritism to certain industries. 48

From 1882 the Manchester and Lancashire manufacturers began to exert pressure on the government to extend the act to women and male adult workers also. In India Lokhanday, a philanthropist, who had run a press (Dinbandhu)

47. Ibid.

48. April 2, 1881 RNP (Beng.).

in Bombay in this period came out for a more widely covered legislation. He also mobilized workers and demanded that working hours for all workers should be limited upto sunset.⁴⁹ He further submitted a memorandum in October 1881 to Bombay Factory Commission, which was signed by 5,500 workers.⁵⁰ However, the law was passed on 19 March 1891 which only restricted daily hours of work of women to 11 and children to $6\frac{3}{4}$ hours. There would be an interval between 12 and 1 p.m. for half an hour for all adult workers. A weekly holiday was also made compulsory for adult workers.⁵¹

The reaction of Bengalee newspapers to the agitation of the philanthropists for restricted working hours remained the same. Sanya wrote on 28 December 1889 that the proposed extention of English factory law to India would increase the poverty of the country.⁵² Surobhi-o-Pataka another vernacular newspaper pointed out on 3rd January 1889 that Lancashire cloth industries had certain disadvantages in competing with Indian products and pointed out three such disadvantages.⁵³ So by passing the industrial labour law Lancashire would

49. Bipam Chandra op. cit, p- 342 fn 52 (footnote -fn)

50. Ibid., p. 341.

51. Ibid., p. 343.

52. 5 Jan. 1889 RNP (Beng.)

53. 12 Jan. 1889 RNP (Beng.).

not be able to gain the old market. The paper hoped that government would not pay any heed to the selfish demand of Lancashire for the extension of the English factory law to this country. Sulabh Samachar and Kushdaha observed on 18 January that English law would not be suited to India for climatic reasons mainly.⁵⁴ The paper observed that in a hot climate like in India workers would like to do more work in the morning and in the evening. In fact according to the paper's calculation Indian workers did only half an hour more work than English labourer. Sahachar, another Bengali newspaper, published from Calcutta claimed on 6 Feb. 1889 that India would be better governed if queen Victoria and her privy council ruled the country than the Secretary of the State. Sahachar pointed out that Lord Cross, the secretary of State, was out to ruin Indian industries on the instruction of Manchester.⁵⁵

However the 1890 factory commission's recommendation proved to be harmless enough so that even one of the most vocal anti-labour regulation act newspapers like Samya (12 December 1890) welcomed it.⁵⁶ The nationalist newspapers in Bengal exhibited certain tendencies which were prevalent in Indian nationalists circle. These newspapers were excessively concerned about the fate of

54. 26 Jan. 1889 RNP (Beng.).

55. 16 Feb. 1889 RNP (Beng)

56. Surobhio Pataka also welcomed it. 22 Feb. 1890
RNP (Beng.)
Sahachar, 9 Sept. 1890 - (10 Sept. 1891) RNP (Beng)

the Bombay based Indian textile industry. But they were not concerned about the fate of the workers employed in British jute mills in Calcutta. They were totally silent in this matter. The jute working class which was composed to a large extent of non-Bengalee workers coming from Bihar and U.P. failed to attract the attention of Bengalee bhadralok nationalist politicians. The total unawareness about the conditions of jute working class in Bengal became more pronounced when the newspapers with confidence claimed that Indian workers were happy.⁵⁷

While the agony of the Calcutta working Class was neglected by these newspapers, the oppression of Assam coolies came under their purview. Charuvarta on 16 January 1882 commented that Lord Ripon after coming to India faced two crucial laws, one law was labour law and another Assam emigration law. He passed both the laws which indicates that even a liberal viceroy could not withstand the pressure of interest councillors. The councillors who surrounded him were supporters of tea planters.⁵⁸ It is interesting to notice that Charuvarta considered that both the 1881 Indian

57. Sulabh Samachar and Kushdaha. 18 Jan. 1889, 26 Jan. 1889 RNP (Beng.).

58. 14 Jan. 188r - RNP (Beng.).

Factories Act and Assam Emigration Act were products of the same type of anti-India attitude. The paper failed to distinguish between a pro-labour and anti-labour law. Sulabh Samachar of 21 st January 1882 claimed that the Assam emigration law was the outcome of tea planter's pressure.⁵⁹ Sadharani on 22, January 1882 criticized Lord Ripon for his acceptance of the law because of the pressure of the fellow councillors on Assam emigration issue.⁶⁰

The entire Indian press in Bengal exhibited a dual position on the labour problem. To understand this attitude, one has to take into account the socio-economic compositions of Bengali nationalists. We have already observed that the bhardralok nationalist intelligentsia came from mainly lower level government officials, journalists, lawyers and medical practitioners who also had substantial landed interests. These were the people who belonged to the middle stratum of society below the landlords but above the toilers and had enough surplus to maintain their existence. It is true that this social group can again be divided into various sub-categories but one can broadly define this group as Broomfield does," a social privileged and

59. 21 Jan. 1882 - RNP (Beng.).

60. 28 Jan. 1882 - RNP (Beng.)

consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents and professional and clerical employment; keeping its distance from the masses by its acceptance of high caste prescriptions and its command over education, sharing a common pride in its language, its literate culture and its history; and maintaining its communal integration through a fairly complex institutional structure that it had proved remarkably ready to adopt and augment to extend its social powers and political opportunities.⁶¹ However, bhadralok community was not a class in economic terms but it constituted a dominant social group in Bengal, particularly the new intelligentsia of Bengalee society came from this segment of society. At the same time we notice that there took place very little industrialization under the leadership of an indigenous mercantile community in Bengal. This bhadralok social group which worked upon themselves as a newly emerging Indian middle class, made repeated appeals to the wealthier sections for investment in industries, but failed to arouse the interest of the Bengalee landlords.

During this period Bombay witnessed the emergence of Indian controlled industries. The Bengalee bhadralok

61. John Broomfield, op. cit. pp. 12-13.

intelligentsia could find point of their interest and defended the rising industrialist class from all attacks. This indicates a peculiar situation in a colonial society where inter-class conflicts were "conditioned by and ideologically consciously subordinated to a "supra-class contradiction between imperialism and so-called "national interest" in an ideology that objectively serves the interests of indigenous industrial bourgeoisie and supports capitalist growth/ⁱⁿ general." 62

Thus on the one hand, the basic bhadralok desire to maintain their separate existence to keep a safe distance from a people who in linguistic and cultural terms represent a completely alien community and on the other hand their concern for rising Bombay based Indian industries kept them away from Calcutta workers (because any legislation to improve the conditions of workers in Calcutta on all Indian plane would involve Bombay industries). Thus was generated a kind of callous attitude in the nationalist circles towards the workers. This attitude can be summed by quoting from Amrita Bazar Patrika's much used statement; "A larger death rate among our operatives is far more preferable to the collapse of this rising industry.... We can, after the manufacturers are truly established, seek to protect the operators." 63

62. S. Bhattacharya: "Notes on the role of the intelligentsia in colonial society: India from mid 19th century." (Studies in History, January 1979, pp. 89-104)
Page - 103

63. Amrita Bazar Patrika , 25 Sept. 1875

Section 3

Mercantile Classes and the Workers -
Communal Riots in Calcutta.

We have observed earlier that in the early 1870s workers moved the courts for getting justice from their employers.⁶⁴ It is not known who ^{their} lawyers were. But there existed another kind of relationship between muslim working class and the upper class Muslim traders in Calcutta. Hazi Nur Muhamad Zakaria, a rich trader of Calcutta, tried to build up a social relationship with the muslim workers. In 1896 Nazar Mian, the Imam of Rishra, wrote a letter to Zakaria seeking help to celebrate Bakr Id peacefully.⁶⁵ The same Hazi provided money for the defense of Syambazar rioters.

A letter from Hazi Zakaria (it is not known whether he really wrote it) on 6th July 1895 reached the mill hand in Kakinara jute mills re^{qu}esting all true Mohameddians to help Tallah rioters created a commotion among the mill hands of Kakinara. This indicates Hazi's influence over the workers. Thus the Bengali bhadralok politicians' apathy towards the working class was utilized by another kind of people to protect their mercantile interests.⁶⁶

64. See Chapter four.

65. Dispes Chakraborty, "Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute mill hands in 1890s," past and Present No. 91, May 1981, p. 156

66. Ibid., p. 160.

In 1895 Kakinara^{ah} Mohameddan association, an organization of Muslim workers, began to work. Kazi Zahiruddin Ahmed, the organizer of the union, was a clerk in the Kakinarah mill. He started organizing the workers in the mill. In 1908 report of IFLC he also drew the commission's attention towards the exploitation by the Sardars and babus even though some of the sardars were also Muslim.⁶⁷

While the Muslim upper class leaders tried to build up a nexus with the working class population on the 'religious issues' they were totally silent about the economic exploitation of the workers. The Muslim merchants exploited the religious emotional involvement of Muslim mill population but never came forward to press for the working class demands. Thus at the beginning of the 20th century these leaders failed to influence the working class movement.

Section. 4

The Search for an Alternative Path:
Bhadralok Attempt to mobilize workers

With the change in the political atmosphere in Bengal particularly when Curzon attempted to curtail

67. We will discuss it again in chapter six, Report of IFLC - 1908 vol.- 2, witness No. 181, . 182-84 pp. 263-65, 270-71.

Indian representation in educational institutions and later on in every government institution the nationalist intelligentsia began to rethink about workers' role in society, and also about the process of social development. This was particularly manifest in Satish Chandra's articles.

Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the editor of Dawn a journal published from Calcutta, argued in his articles 'aspects of Economic life in England and India' (August 1898) and the 'Indian economic problem' (March, April, May, June 1890) that the labouring population previously depressed by the great landowning class now fell into an equally depressed condition at the heels of the capitalist employer.⁶⁸ He argued for the development of small scale industries, a plan which Rabindranath Tagore had given much organized form in his Swadeshi Sanaj. " 68 (a). The development of individual family based industries was only alternative to the capitalist development in the eyes of these intellectuals. However, they did not know that in small scale industry profit is marginal, the exploitation of labour is greater. This again shows that with the changes in the attitude of the British colonial government a section of bhadralok intelligentsia~~s~~ had started to think in new terms.

68. Bipan Chandra, 'Labour', p. 391 (op. cit.).

68(a) Rabindra Rachanabali tritya Khandu - Vishva bharati editions p. 38

From 1897 a group of bhadralok nationalist politicians tried to develop relations with working class. This was the group which would become the main leaders of the working class movement in 1906 and after. Aswini Coomar Bannerjee appeared in the court in 18~~97~~ to defend the workers involved in Tallah riots. Later on we shall observe that a group of middle class politicians, some of them with moderate background, provided leadership to the labour movement. These politicians were Aswini Bannerjee, Athanisius Apurba Kumar Ghosh, Prabhat Kusum Roy Chowdhury, and Premtosh Basu.⁶⁹

The partition of Bengal changed the situation in working class movement. The workers employed in different industries started to draw the attention of the Bengal intelligentsia. On various occasions S.N. Bannerjee asked A.C. Bannerjee and Prabhat Kusum Roy Chowdhury to help the workers in their fight.

Even Rabindranath Tagore referred to the white collar workers in a famous speech delivered at the height of the 1905 upsurge that the long suffering impoverished

69. Sumit Sarker, Swadeshi movement in Bengal 1903-1908, Delhi, Reprinted 1977. Chapter V, Labour Unrest and Trade Union (pp. 182-251).

Rabindra Nath Tagore, Swadeshi (Tritiya Khanda Rabindra Nath Tagore (Visva-Bharati 2 Edition)).

clerks decided not to tolerate insults any longer. This was a reference to the striking clerks of Burn Iron Works.⁷⁰ Nationalist intelligentsia realized that to develop mass movement against the British colonial government, workers would be a potential ally. They, however, laid stress on organizing labour movement only in European owned mills. The Daily Hitavadi supporting the formation of unions in Jute mills in 1906 wrote "The fact that these unions are being organized only in these concerns which are under European superintendence is a proof that at last the people of India have acquired from their rulers a common trait of character-viz., a love for men of their own race." (Daily Hitavadi, 22 July 1906).⁷¹

To sum up, one can notice three broad trends in the attitude towards working class problems in nationalist intelligentsia, though there took place a constant transition in these attitudes and trends of thought. Firstly a wide section of nationalist intelligentsia more or less focussed their attention on British Controlled distant tea garden labourers, neglected the condition

70. "Vijaya-Sam^milan" - Bangadarshan, Kartik 1312. (1905). Rabindra Rachanabali 9th Volume, p.471.

71. 28th July, 1906, RNP (Beng.).

of the factory workers and were much concerned about the growing Indian owned Bombay based textile industry. Secondly there was a group of social reformers and philanthropists who made an attempt to synthesize the concept of Christian charity and the Hindu concept of lokheeta in their reform programme and put forward an argument for a mass literacy campaign among the workers. Thirdly a group of nationalists wanted to avoid the path of industrialization and would have liked to follow the path of developing small scale industries to avoid the oppression of workers and to create a delicate balance between the agrarian sector and the non-agrarian economy. Apart from these trends there existed a nexus between Muslim traders and workers. The former wanted to use the workers in their struggle for survival against ^{the} expanding Marwari business community.

The Swadeshi movement provided a common platform for all these nationalists to rethink their strategy on the worker's problems. The main contradiction in colonial society, between subject masses and alien rulers, here coincided with the workers-capital conflict in the jute industry where capital was dominated by the British capitalists. A rudimentary form of alliance, thus developed between workers and bhadralok nationalists.

The new trade unionists constantly argued that Indian society in its process of development would

have a path where class harmony and spiritual development would replace class struggle and vulgar materialist life style. This attitude gradually penetrated into sophisticated skilled workers' minds who mainly came from lower fringes of bhadralok society in Bengal. In 1921 Karmi one of the earliest journal of white collar labour association wrote in its editorial.

"The difficult task for India is to see that its its society, religion and morality are not swept away by the turbulent wave of changes that is coming over to reestablish harmony in the midst of all these conflicts and contradictions, attacks and counter-attacks.... If we want to avoid the clutches of death, save the world from total annihilation, then we shall have to propagate once again India's spiritual message. Only thus capitalists will not exploit labour and the latter will not force the former with the spirit of confrontation."⁷²

Thus the bhadralok nationalists petty-bourgeois ideology stated to influence a section of the working class, particularly the white collar workers. This process began in 1905 with active bhadralok participation in the working class movement.

72. Sanat Bose, Social Scientist, January 1983, Vol II, Number 1
 "Labour journalism in the Early 20's: A case study of two Bengali Labour Journals." (P 32.42) Page - 35.

CHAPTER - VI

SWADESHI MOVEMENT - A NEW PHASE IN WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE

The nationalist movement in Bengal reached a turning point with the promulgation of the Bengal partition Act on 16 October 1905.¹ The old style moderate Congress politics of petition and conventions was replaced by mass politics which gradually included a programme of boycott of British goods and passive resistance. Congress leaders, who were still busy in exposing 'un-British' rule, had to come out to the streets of Calcutta, Dacca and Mymensingh. Strikes, mass agitation, the slogan of boycott and the planning of a swadeshi reconstruction of rural society and education, changed the socio-political environment of Bengal.

There occurred both quantitative and qualitative jumps in the working class movement with the beginning

1. For further details, Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908 P.18, Delhi 1977 (Reprinted). But the real mass movement started with the official proclamation of the act.

of the anti-partition agitation. Not only the factory labourers but also the workers employed in the government press, in the railway, in the telegraph departments and in the unorganized sectors such as carters, cobblers, fishermen and porters joined the movement.² The working class, during this movement, was not only involved in putting forward economic demands but also launched a political struggle against the colonial government and against racial discrimination. Strikes occurred in mill after mill and political issues along with economic demands became the motor force of the movement.

Why there took place a mass
agitation from 1905 to 1908

This question is an important query into the most significant aspect of the agitation. In fact, the working class movement started to gain a mature form from this period. With the gradual expansion of the industry the workers' struggle went through different phases. In the beginning, in the early seventies the workers' response.

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2. Sumit Sarkar has described the labour unrest in Bengal in a great detail in his book, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908 *Op.cit.* "Labour Unrest and Trade Unions", PP. 182-251.

to the factory disciplines came as a spontaneous resistance of a first generation peasant-turned-worker. Absenteism, slow working pattern, and much accused dilly-dallying by Indian workers indicate this. But authorities gradually developed a management system. They emphasized upon the utilization of cheap labourers and pre-capitalist socio-cultural system of Sardari to maintain the management structure.³

In 1895-96 there took place also a transition in the behaviour of the workers. The workers from 1880s gradually started to use a new weapon, strike, though there did not develop a trade union or a consolidated demand charter. In 1895-96 when the real wages of the workers reached the lowest ebb there took place a series of strikes which brought about craft unionism among the workers. The spinners constituted the backbone of this wave of strikes. Along with this, we have noticed a resurgence of pre-capitalist ideologies like community consciousness among the workers.⁵

3. See Chapter 4, "Traditionalism and non-Conformism among the workers: labour unrest in the jute mills (1881 - 1897)".

5. See Chapter III and Chapter IV "Traditionalism and non-Conformism Labour unrest in the jute mill (1881 - 1897)".

The racial arrogance of the white officials, unnecessary physical violence committed by the white supervisors made the workers ready for an ideology which would speak for an end to racial violence. When in 1905 there came a series of political strikes with the massive involvement of the dominant section of Indian society in Bengal, ^{the} Bhadralok, the workers immediately joined the struggle. With this coincided a continuous decline in the economic position of the jute workers. Real wages declined sharply between 1905 and 1910,⁶ while prices rose sharply from 1905 onwards. The southwest Bengal witnessed the sharpest prices rise.⁷

6. Table 14 : Index Number of Monthly Real Wages in Jute Industry.
(Average of 1890-94 = 100)

	<u>1901</u>	<u>1902</u>	<u>1903</u>	<u>1904</u> — <u>1905</u>
Calcutta	112	116	117	118
Southwest Bengal	101	108	122	114
Average	108	113	120	116
	<u>1906</u>	<u>1907</u>	<u>1908</u>	<u>1909</u> <u>1910</u>
Calcutta	107	102	99	105 109
Southwest Bengal	102	96	97	106 109
Average	105	100	98	103 109

Source: K.L. Dutta, Report on the Inquiry into the Rise of the prices in India, Vol. III, p.199

During 1895-97 when the working class unrest took place on a large-scale, we have witnessed a similar decline in the real wages. But the workers struggle in 1905 were not limited only to economic struggle. Their political struggle was the result of racial discrimination in every sphere of life. This united all sections of the workers, in the railway, the government press. Burn steel works and as well the dock workers, porters, carters and fishermen. This political and economic struggle led to the formation of first trade union organization in Bengal.

Communal Riots virtually disappeared. Riots did occur in rural Eastern Bengal but could not set aflame the Calcutta - Howrah industrial belt. The nationalist participation in working class struggle and a change in the political environment of Calcutta, altered the situation.

The workers through earlier struggles of 1895-96 had gained a maturity. They learned the art of strikes during that period. But till 1905 workers were politically and

7. Table-15: Index under for whole sale prices (Average for 1890 -94 = 100).

	<u>1903</u>	<u>1904</u>	<u>1905</u>	<u>1906</u>	<u>1907</u>	<u>1908</u>
All India Average	107	106	116	129	133	143
Calcutta	104	105	113	126	131	140
Bengal South and West.	107	106	116	135	142	149

Source: K.L. Dutta, op. cit., Vol.I, pp.ii, 32, 40-41.

culturally an isolated community, alienated from the middle class life, confined only to the slums of Calcutta. The cultural alienation of workers did not come to an end with the Swadeshi movement but their economic and political demands received a sympathetic treatment in the media. During 1895-96, the working class was in a process of formation, when 'workers' action had the basic characteristics of 'crowd' action.⁸ However, while focussing on the development and on the changes in the nature of the political environment, one cannot ignore the grievances and socio-economic factors which brought the bhadralok into the struggles. With their easy access to western education and a relatively strong economic basis they had established a hegemony in the socio-political life of Bengal.⁹ The press workers, railway station masters, clerks in the jute industries themselves came from the fringe area of bhadralok society.

8. This has reference to the communal riots in Tallah and Shyam bazar in 1896,^{see} Chapter 3, for details.

9. The intelligentsia of Bengal came from this social category. It is a social category and not a 'class' in relation to its position in production relation. See Chapter 5, for details, "Nationalism, Factory Workers and Bhadraklok" in *late 19th century Bengal - a changing relationship (1831 -1905)*".

Bengalee ~~ee~~ bhadralok, through its socio-religious reform movement in the 19th century, acquired a cultural unity.

The Bengalee literature, songs and paintings received a world wide recognition. Bengalee bhadralok society because of its English education started to dominate lower level government positions throughout North India. This undoubtedly bred a kind of self-confidence.

But with this confidence there took place disillusionment. Ram Mohan and Dwarkanath had visualized a partnership in empire. Queen Victoria's proclamation, which Bengalee intelligentsia received with enthusiasm, spoke about a liberal India where there would be a gradual transfer of power of Indians, which never became true in reality.¹⁰

Even after a decade of Congress agitation a very paltry reforms came in 1892. Lord Curzon during his Vice-royalty reduced the number of elected representatives in the Calcutta corporation. A new university act was promulgated to tighten

10. The moderate tradition in the Congress could never come out of this, even during the Swadeshi movement. See Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., pp. 35 - 97.

official control over universities and a new official secrets act, curbing press freedom. Finally Lord Curzon openly proclaimed in a convocation address that "the highest ideal of trught is, to a large extent, a western concept".¹¹

The racial arrogance of the Britishers, the racial discrimination in the jobs, in terms of promotions and salaries, had become unbearable to the Bengalee bhadralok.¹ With this there occurred a change in the international scenario with the rise of Japan and the Russian revolution of 1905. The rise of Japan and the defeat of imperialist Russia in their hands, brought tremendous confidence in the mind of educated Indian community in Bengal, about the rising Asian nationalism.¹²

Despite their socio-economic hegemony, Bengalee bhadralok knew that they constituted a small minority of the entire society. We have already noticed Keshab Sen's pronouncements, Sasipada's social reform programmes and Vivekananda's emphasis

11. Quoted in Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., p. 24

12. "The Bengali newspapers of these years are full of Japan • funds in aid of Japanese sick and wounded were collected through public entertainments at city college and Overtown Hall. Sarala Debi thought of organizing a Bengali Red cross, and there were of organizing a Bengali Red Cross, and there were cases of children given nick names, after Japanese leaders!" Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., pp. 28-29

on Sudraraj and to set up an organization to work among the 'Daridra Nara-Narayan' (Poverty stricken human beings - the real embodiment of God).¹³ All this was a manifestation of the attempts to bring the two socially distant communities together. Workers, as a result, in a new phase of nationalist struggle were encouraged to be organized within the Swadeshi movement. It was looked upon as a New strategy to create pressure upon the British Raj.

This entire development was fuelled up by a Government declaration partitioning Bengal. This came as a rude shock to the bhadralok community. This led to a mass upsurge in 1905. The preparation for an agitation against partition has already started in 1903 when the proposal became known to the Congress leaders. But 1905 marked the real beginning.

Working Class Movement and Swadeshi Agitation

In this context we have also to understand the limitations and inner dynamics of the working class agitation. The babus

13. Marginally, we might note that the Hindu revivalist trends common to all India. C. 1870-1910 were also experienced by the bhadralok.

and the Sardars were part of an exploitative system created by the management to chain the workers to the jute industry through debt bondage. Yet these two groups (who formed the link between management and the workers) formed a link between workers and the nationalists. The workers, mostly uneducated, could not have a direct access to the nationalist leadership. The Sardars and clerks (who themselves came from fringe areas of bhadralok community) became the backbone of new trade union movement. The entire agitation, particularly the organized agitation depended on the bhadralok politicians for its leadership. As a result the inner bickerings in Congress and the final failure of the bhadralok nationalists to develop a broad based mass movement involving the peasant communities led to the collapse of the working class struggle.

(i) The gradual development of
the Struggle

We have already observed that the period between 1903-1908 witnessed an unprecedented price rise which affected the income of the working men. In the first decade of the 20th century jute industry went through a period of boom and expansion. The workers in the jute industry started to resist this gradual erosion in their income. The industrial

working class's demand for limited working hours also began to take shape from this period. The spinners and weavers of Budge Budge and Kakinarah jute mill who appeared before Indian factory labour commission in 1908 demanded 12 hours working day and the abolition of night work.¹⁴ The workers also gradually became conscious of the racial discrimination. The rise of nationalist movement provided the outline of action. The response to the 16 October "hartal" (total strike) against the promulgation of Bengal partition, among all sections of the working masses was of great significance and indicated a new stage in working class consciousness.

Amrita Bazar Patrika of 17 October 1905 gave an interesting report of the unorganized labourers' response to the strike. Caste pride, the economic issues and an overall nationalist sentiment (which had cut across class barriers) compelled even the unorganized workers like carters and fishermen ^{to} strike:

14. Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission, Evidence Vol. II, Evidence Witness No. 176 (Kazi Zahir-ud-din Ahmed, Kakinarah and witnesses 192-193. (Budge Budge Jute Mill Weavers and spinner by A.C. Banerji) p. ~~22~~ 228.

"But the two most remarkable incidents were the organizations of fishermen and carters. A representative of the former saw us Saturday last and said that they would not adopt this course. We enquired, "Why should we not?" Said he, "Even muchees (cobblers) are making their disappreciation of the partition measure by refusing to mend English shoes. We are a superior caste to the muchees and we must also do our duty. He then said that about one lakh of fishermen supply Calcutta with fish and the partition measure brought them together!..

As regard the carters we had also some conversation with a few of them. We asked what had led them to combine and cease all work yesterday. They said, that, like Calcutta a, mokam' (port) has been created at Chitagong. They carry jute in their carts and this way ^{they} earn their bread. But said they, if another port ~~was~~ ^{is} created at Chittagong most of the jute traffic would be diverted to the new port and their earning thus be halved..... Now the significance of those two incidents cannot be overstated. The recognized leaders had nothing to do with the organization of fishermen and the carters. So the feelings of discontent had at last reached the lowest strata of the society."

Above mentioned

(Amrita Bazar Patrika's report indicates the impact of the Swadeshi movement on the working masses. Their realization of their class interest along with political interest led them to strike work.

The same report also gave a picture of Calcutta on 16 October 1905 and has shown its impact on working population. "The following incidents will show how the spirit of nationality had powerfully affected even the lowest classes. Carters numbered about 11,000 struck work. Twelve jute presses, one gun-factory and about 75 local mills were closed. Male and female hands working in these manufacturing refused to work and consequently they had to be closed. The labourers in Government Gun factory had just commenced work when they heard the cry of 'Bandemataram' and at once they all left work and in body came out and

shouted "Bande-matarom" with thousands of others. There was not a single cart or a coolie near any of the four goods terminals of E.B. railways. All the marts and bazars of Calcutta as well as of Ultading Tallah, Bally gonge, Pattipukur, Boleghata; Hath Khola, Shyam bazar etc. were closed."

This indicates the working men participation in the nationalist struggle against Bengal partition.

Strike was not limited to jute mills alone. There occurred a strike among the clerks of Burn company in 1905. The Government press strike had become the most important labour struggle in that period, where the Indian Christians in large number also joined the Strike. Eastern Indian Railway strike also created sensation in the Indian press and virtually paralysed the Howrah division and Asansol division lines from 23 July to 10 October 1906.¹⁵ Anglo-Indians also struck work demanding higher wages. The entire railway set up was paralysed for two weeks in November 1907.¹⁶ Tram workers also struck work in October 1905.¹⁷

15. This strike broke down because Bhadralok were not prepared to go far and they tried to restrict the activities of two extremist labour leaders A.A.K. Ghose and Premposh Bose. A.C. Banerjee tried to reorganize the union with people of more moderate variety of the leadership which included men like Surendra Nath Banerjee and Rabindranath Tagore as President and Vice-President. As a result the strike broke down. (See Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., pp. 215-17.)

16. Ibid, pp. 224-25

The strike of white workers were opposed by nationalist leaders

17. Pioneer, 24 July, reported that one of the principal grievances of striking clerks in Delhi Section of Eastern Indian Railway was the use of the term 'native' to designate them. They wanted that they should be called 'Indians'. This indicates the new national pride that made the workers conscious about their national identity.

These strikes were definitely associated with the economic demands of the workers like the demand for monthly wages by tram conductors instead of payment by trips and better uniforms and reduction in their working hours. Clerks in Burn Iron Works struck work because they felt a new mechanical system of recording attendance was derogatory to their social status. Press workers struck work for better pay, abolition of fines and arbitrary demotions. All these strikes and actions were the outcome of a large political struggle of the Swadeshi movement. The most important factor behind these strikes was the racial arrogance of the white supervisors. This new realisation of racial question really came from a new understanding of their own social position by the workers. National pride acted as a uniting factor. Along with it came the realization of the workers about their class position. The very use of the strikes as a bargaining bait indicate their new consciousness about their role.

In the jute industry both the workers and the nationalists appealed to each other for support in their struggle. In 1905 three strikes were significant.

The first occurred in the beginning of October. Two jute workers were injured when an European assistant tried to kill dogs. Instead of dogs, workers were injured. This led to strike in Gauripore. The other strike was a protest against a white overseers' assaults on workers which took place in Garden Reach in Hugly jute mill. The Wellington jute mill witnessed an older type of strike by muslim weavers who demanded sufficient rest to observe Ramzan.

In Fort Gloster jute mill we witness a new type of struggle where both economic and political demands were involved between 1905 and 1906. Bengalee of 10 January 1906 described the cause of strikes in details :

"Our readers are perhaps aware that nearly seven thousand mill hands employed at the Bowreah jute mills known as Fort Gloster jute mills have now for some time on strike. They struck work for the first time on the 16 October last, their alleged complaint then being that the rules and regulations under which they had to work were much too severe and in fact tended to affect their life in a remarkable degree. They also complained of the harsh treatment of Mr. Forrester, the manager of the mill. The first strike however had for its immediate cause, what to us then appeared to be a piece of unjustified conduct on the part of the manager, the latter having allowed his displeasure in an unwarrantable fashion at people tying Rakhi on their wrists and also at the cry of Bandamataram. Luckily directors of the mill having in an open appreciable measure conceded what the mill hands had wanted."

The strike occurred on the question of shouting Bandemataram in the mill areas on 7 December 1906.¹⁸ The manager objected to it and the workers protested against the attitude of the manager and his European assistant. After this with the help of the District magistrate, the manager launched a case against the mill workers. According to Bengalee of 10 January 1906,

"This case came on for hearing last Friday, when we are glad to be able to say, the matter was settled in a desirable way, having regard to the allegations against the two accused. The men were warned and discharged and there is every possibility of satisfactory relations restored between the manager and the mill hands."

However, again on 1 March 1906, the strike started and this time management dismissed 4 sardars and 7 clerks.¹⁹ On 12 and 13 March 1906 Mill Durwans and some constables went on rampage on the mill baste in Khajahar village where the workers resided. Next

18. Bengalee, 10 January 1906. In this strike, when the police superintendent enquired, why the strike occurred, the workers told him that the all the workers were brothers and all the people in Bengal also were brothers and police insulted them by arresting two of them. This indicates a new feeling of solidarity among the workers - Report on the Agitation against the partition of Bengal - Letter from Govt. of Bengal, 26 January 1906, Para 61 - Home Public Progs A, June 1906 n 175.

19. Three of these sardars were Muslim. Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p.229.

morning police, at the request of the management, started indiscriminate arrests. Bengalee reported in its 15 May issue how the entire incident took place and how false cases were lodged. According to management the arrested workers obstructed entry of the employees and coolies in the mills and on the arrival of police they started to run but were caught by the police and put to jail. The workers pointed out that they were dismissed from service because of their participation in the strike and when the strike was on some constables and durwans went to the workers' houses and told them to go to the thana. After the initial refusal of the workers, constables grabbed them and put them up in the lock-up and lodged a false complaint against them.

The entire episode points out three important developments in the working class movement. First that strike occurred on political issue (rakhi bandhan) along with the economic issues involved in it. The political issue did not directly affect workers' immediate economic existence yet they were organised on the political basis. Secondly, the workers developed their own slogan which they had derived from the

nationalist movement "Bandemataram." This highly political slogan indicates the nationalists influence on the workers. They even resisted the efforts to stop shouting this slogan.²⁰ Finally, the authority's mode of operation in suppressing the workers movement also took a new turn. The management adopted the policy of mass terror through organized violence and attacks on the bastees and villages.

Strikes became a common feature of industrial life of jute industry from the summer of 1906. Arathoon, Clive jute mill, Naihati jute mill and Hoogly jute mill witnessed strikes throughout 1906.²¹ India jute mill workers struck work in protest against the ill-treatment of the workers by the white supervisors. Naihati jute mill workers struck work because a section of workers demanded equal wages to other mills. Hoogly jute mill went on strike in November, 1907 demanding better terms for night work.²²

20. Bengalee 10 January 1906.

21. Report on the Anti-partition and Swadeshi movement in Bengal, para 12 - Home Public Progs B. October 1906, n.13. Also Bengalee, 2 August 1906, 18 December, 1906. Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p.230.

22. Bengalee, 1, 5 and 6 December 1906.

Strikes continued in 1907 also. Hastings, Wellington, (two jute mills of Rishra), Clive Arathoon and Soorah jute mill struck work.²³ Strikes took place also at the Delta jute mill (Sankrail) in September 1907.²⁴ In October, there occurred strike in Beliaghata branch of Baranagar jute mill. Two jute mills at Rajganj National and Belvedere went on strike in January 1908. Bengalee and non-Bengalee workers clashed in Raj Ganj.²⁵ In March 1908 Kakinarah workers struck work in protest against the burning down of their bastee. There took place a clash between a strong crowd of 5,000 workers and the European supervisory staff.²⁷

(ii) The issues of these strikes and the change in the nature of strikes :

These strikes represent a new trend in the working class struggle. In the 1890s strikes occurred

23. Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser, 1903-1908. Calcutta - 1908, pp-8.

24. Letter from head clerk Benod Behari Mukherji to A.C. Banerjee 12 September 1907. Private papers of A.C. Banerjee, Nehru Memorial Library - the full text of this letter is given at the end of this Chapter.

25. Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., p.231.

26. Ibid., p.231.

27. Ibid., p.231.

demanding holidays on religious festive days. The demand came out of the workers' in a 'new-found' community consciousness. This led to clashes between the two dominant religious communities Hindus and Muslims.²⁸

The other issues of 1895 struggle included the attempts of the workers to resist the wage-cut. The demand for wage increase was also a major factor behind the 1895 strikes.²⁹ However, the main emphasis of the strikers throughout 1894 and 1895 was on the religious holidays. The other demand constituted an outer framework of a spontaneous struggle.

But during the period 1903-1908 we notice a gradual crystallization of these demands in the form of 12 hours working day, better terms of night work,³⁰ and active protest against the rude and brutal attitude of the white supervisors. This indicates a shift in the central focus of the workers from an issue, associated mainly with the

28. See Chapter-4, op.cit.

29. Ibid.

30. See Report of IFLE, 1908 Vol 2 Evidence 192-193 p.278.

realm of religio-cultural-psychological set-up, towards daily problems (related to work situation) faced by them.

Along with this we notice a change in the composition of the strikers. Earlier we have observed that the spinners and weavers formed the nucleus of the agitating workers. But by 1905 the workers of the beam department, engine workshop and weaving section joined and led strikes.³¹

In the earlier period, community consciousness provided the basis of the working class organization. Kakinarah Mohameddan association indicated the basic nature of the pattern of the earlier mobilization. In 1905, nationalism had made inroads into working class mind. This was an important turning point in the history of working class movement. In 1905 the workers intervened in the political struggles decisively and this led to a broad-based bandh (total strike) in the industrial belt on 16 October 1905. The nationalist activities led to gradual consolidation of workers in a purely trade union organization, the 'Indian mill hands association'.

31. Letters from a clerk to engine shop of Delta jute mill and the workers of beam department of Fort-gloster are preserved in A.C. Banerjee, private papers in Nehru Memorial Library.

One should not overestimate this process of transition. This new development was without doubt a qualitative jump in the working class movement, but the lack of stable leadership of the movement and the gradual decline in the political agitation among the bhadralok led to the collapse of this movement. It is also true that during 1905-1908 period a large section of workers remained outside the realm of organized politics. In 1908 the Factory Commission noted the inability of the workers

"to combine over any large area with the object of securing a common end by concerted action. One of the main difficulties experienced at present, when unrest appears among the workers, is in ascertaining the cause of unrest. Frequently, no definite demands are formulated, no grievances are stated, no indication is given as to the cause of the discontent; the operatives simply leave work in a body, or more commonly they drop off one by one without explanation, and accept employment under more congenial conditions in other factories."32

This remark covers a much broader section of workers employed in all industries. In the jute industry too, we notice that trade union activities were limited to certain factories particularly where Bengali workers were concentrated. The political nature of Swadeshi also created an environment of a

32. Report of IFLC 1908, Vol 1 p-14.

'Bengalee consciousness' which led to clashes in at least on one occasion between the Bengali and non-Bengali workers.³³

Finally, ^{we focus on} the pattern of mobilization. In the unorganized sector, we come to know from Amrita Bazar of 17 October 1905 how the caste pride of the fishermen prompted them to join strikes. This cannot be entirely ruled out in the case of workers in the industrial areas. The involvement of traditional institutions like caste panchayats in workers movement may also have been a fact.

Thus these strikes definitely represent a new trend in the workers struggles but it had not totally changed the socio-political environment. In the 19th century Bengal the workers outside the factory joined 'crowd actions' (as different form pre-industrial mobviolence) against police and other repressive state organs. This 'crowd' had acquired to an extent a concrete class shape in the trade union organizations

33. In January 1908, a serious riot between upcountry workers and Bengalee workers took place at the National and Belvedere jute mills of Raj Gunje. Howrah Hitaishi; 1 February 1908 RNP(B) for week ending 8 February 1908).

in the ~~sw~~ swadeshi period(1905-1909) but there were problems in the field of action.³⁴ These problems were related to the structure of the trade union and the pattern of the mobilization of the workers. The working class dependence on the bhadralok for political action and the latter's failure to directly communicate with the workers led to the dominance of intermediaries in the trade unions.

But one aspect that indicates the positive development is the lack of communal clashes in the period. In 1895-96 the emphasis on the religious issue led to communal clashes. But between 1905-08 when Eastern Bengal witnessed communal flare ups, workers remained untouched by communal passions. This indicates that with the development of nationalism, which indirectly helped in shifting the focus of the agitation from religious holidays to twelve hours working day, there was a radical advancement in the field of working class politics.

34. In the third Chapter, we have explained crowd action on the basis of Rudean framework.

the

(iii) The Emergence of Trade Union: Pattern of Mobilization, Nationalist Labour Leaders' Attitude to the Union and the Working Class Idea of Trade Union Movement

The emergence of the 'Indian mill hands association', a trade union organization of the jute workers, ~~an~~ was the most significant aspect of the labour movement in the swadeshi ~~x~~ period.³⁵ The bengalee described a meeting of the Indian Mill hands association which took place in Budge Budge on August 12, 1906. This description reflects the ideas of the nationalist labour leaders :

"A meeting of the mill hands' union took place last Sunday, 19th August at 'N.....' Bazar, Budge Budge. Nearly two thousand mill hands were present at the meeting, and Mr. A.C. Bannerjee Bar-at-Law, the President of the Union, was in the chair. Mr Bannerjee opened the meeting with a stirring speech in which he explained to those present the utility of union. He said that as he was opposed to the servile submission of servant to ~~k~~ his master, so was he opposed to hasty and unjudicious strikes. The object of the union should be to bring about a healthier understanding between the master and servant. At present the master had in most industries almost all the advantages on his side and the servants had few or none. This should never be, or permitted to be. It was not possible in Europe, but it was an everyday occurrence in India. In Europe, ~~but~~ it became impossible because of the concerted action of the labourers; in India it would be before long become equally impossible if only the labouring classes understood their own interest and learnt the great virtues of united action. Such action according to Mr Bannerjee could only be possible by the establishment of trade unions, all over the country. In these unions, people would be brought well under discipline, the absence of which so often lead to unnecessary friction and waste of energy. There must

35. Sumit Sarkar, Op.cit., pp.194-99. Sumit Sarkar provides us with a brief sketch of the background of these labour leaders.

be rules of each union and such rules must be religiously obeyed. The unions would also (infuse) labour with a consciousness of dignity hitherto monopoly of capital. After a few other observations made in the same strain; Mr. Bannerjee put from the chair the rules which had been framed by the executive committee for the acceptance of the union. These rules, after they were explained in Bengalee by A.C. Roy of Calcutta, were passed by the meeting unanimously and with acclamation."³⁶

The description provides us with a picture of the ~~an~~ concept of the trade union activities of nationalist leadership. We notice that the emphasis is upon the labour-capitalist relationship and the united action of labourers. It reflects the concern of a trade unionist who wanted to promote trade union activities in an organized form. But his concept of the role of a trade ~~is~~ union in settling the industrial disputes ~~is~~ had not come out clearly. The purpose of the union was to bring about 'healthier understanding' between the 'master and servants' indicate the role of mediator which A.C. Bannerjee wanted this union to perform. Throughout the period between 1905 to 1909 the union more or less negotiated with the authorities and the factory owners. It had not set up a trade union branch starting from the grass root level with a machinery enlisting

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membership, organizing strikes and creating pressure upon the mill authorities to come to terms. The union intervened in various industrial disputes of the period. It negotiated a strike in June 1907 in the Burmah Oil Company depot at Budge Budge.³⁷ In April 1908 it offered to negotiate in a strike in Vulean Iron Works in central Calcutta but was rejected by the management.³⁸ We also see its efforts to negotiate on behalf of the Calcutta telegraph delivery peons in February 1908 but its proposals were rejected by the management.³⁹ It also tried to organize dock workers in March 1908, who demanded a grain compensation allowance because of the rise in price of food stuffs.⁴⁰ A.C. Bannerjee held meetings with these workers and claimed these workers as members of Indian Labour union (the new name of the Indian mill hands association). This strike involved more than a thousand workers.

37. Bengalee, 6 July 1907.

38. A.C. Bannerjee Private papers, Nehru Memorial Library, has preserved the letter of A.C. Bannerjee to Vulcan iron works with a comment of the manager on the envelope that he would not open the letter of an outsider.

39. Bengalee, 14 March 1908.

40. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 9 April, 1908 Bengalee, 19 March, 1908.

Another aspect of trade union activities that must be noted that is the use of the English language in framing official rules. Bengalee 21 August 1906 report, mentions the translation of the rules in Bengalee for the workers. This indicates a serious communication gap and it made the control and leadership of the union by the bhadralok necessary.

The union in the jute mill depended on the clerks and sardars for mobilization. In all the strikes sardars took a leading part. A letter from the head clerk of the Delta jute mills Sankrail informs him about the end of the strike in accordance with the proposal of A.C. Bannerjee: ⁴¹

Manickpura
The 12th September
1907

Dear Sir,

I am glad to inform you that the workers have now joined to their work according to your proposal of the last meeting. They expect much of your help to form their "union" as they are quite ignorant about this.

Please let us know when you will kindly manage your time to visit here for the next meeting. They solely depend upon you for this present matter.

Yours faithfully,

Benode Behari Mookherjee
Hd. Clerk

Delta Jute Mills
Sankraib R.D.
Howrah.

The emphasis on the sentence that "they expect much of your help to form their "union" as "they are quite ignorant about this" reflects the attitude of the white collar workers in the formation of the union. In this case we can clearly perceive the dominance of bhadralok politicians in organizing the ignorant poor. The workers also depend upon these bhadralok. They often regard it as upakar or 'help' to them in the charitable sense of the term. This dependence is also evident in the workers' letter. This attitude and communication gap between the literate bhadralok and illiterate ignorant proletariat made the role of sardars and head clerks in organizing the labourers an unavoidable part of the trade union movement.

A letter of the workers of the beam department of Budge Budge jute mill reflects the same attitude and dependence on a bhadralok trade unionist who had been regarded as a 'protector'. The letter on the other hand draws our attention to the role of sardars and head clerks as the petty exploiters of the workers.

Bandemataram
Sri Aswini Kumar Bandopadhyaya,
President, Indian Mill hands Union

Respected Sir,

We are sorry that we were unable to join the last convention of the union due to some unavoidable reasons. We feel the need of having a special convention in the month of January. Hence we would be much obliged if you let us know when it is convenient for you and we all promise to be present in that gathering.

We the undersigned persons work in the Beam department of the Budge Budge jute mill. We are extremely grateful to you for your service in forming our union and we are its members. Hence we would like

to apprise you of the oppression of our superior and seek your able advice to remedy it. We hope you will protect us from this oppression perpetuated by them. We give you a brief sketch of the ways & we are being oppressed and hope to narrate the whole story in person.

We are forced to bribe the sardars and the babus to get our leave sanctioned by the saheb and give donations during the Durgapuja, failing which we are harassed or even sacked from the job. So we had to reluctantly satisfy the whims of the superior. Last year due to the rising prices we decided to reduce the Durgapuja subscription. However Head Sardar Haricharan Khara instigated the Assistant Babu Atul Chandra Chatterjee so that the subscription is raised. When they advice the Incharge babu Purna Chandra Ghosh to collect more subscription, we decided not to pay any amount. As a revenge, they have now started to project us as guilty of various faults thus forcing us to contribute to the 'White man's company. After your writing to Purna Babu and Haricharan Khara, they have increased their misdeeds. Therefore, kindly suggest means of combating these elements and advice us on how to deal with the situation. Please protect us from this oppression.

Yours sincerely.

Cont in the next page.

Bridge Bridge Jute Mill
Dated 11 Paus, 1313. 42

This letter had been signed by 29 workers and the absence of their surname suggests these workers were from low caste Hindus and belonged to genuine proletarian stock. Here also we came across the workers expressing 'gratefulness' to the babu for his service in organizing their union. They were again asking him for protection. This letter indicates, the dependence of the workers on the bhadralok agitator, and the personalized structure of the trade union.'

Instead of a hierarchy being established the & 'union' depended on A.C. Bannerjee's personal efforts. But much more important was the limitations of a union dependent on the petty exploiters of the workers. The story narrated in the letter was not new. We have already observed how the mill authorities had allowed ~~to~~ a system of exploitation outside production relation through sardars, ~~to~~ clerks and mahajans.

42. A.C. Bannerjee private papers, Nehru Memorial Library. The original is in Bengalee.

But being a bhadralok whose ideals and value sense were anchored in a victorian English education system, A.C. Bannerjee could not establish direct rapport with the workers themselves, whereas his recruits, the members of bhadralok society (fringe area of bhadralok society), the barababbus were themselves a part of the exploitative system.

Here we came across not only a serious limitation of emerging trade union movement, but also the lack of understanding of the entire exploitative system. It was also not easy for A.C. Bannerjee to ignore the barababbus as Mr. Krishna Pada Halder^a clerk of Rajganje jute Mill engine shop had pointed out :

S ri Sri Durga Sahai

To

Aswini Bannerjee
President, National Jute Mill and
Badvedre Jute Mill Union,
Rajganje.

Respected S ir,

We are glad to know that you have fixed the date of your meeting on next saturday at Jorhat Bangabandhab Samity. We would be much obliged, if you kindly confirm your coming to the rally, for the mill, could be informed about it in advance. Also kindly do not mention my impression on our barababbus which I have told you in a secret discussion. It can hamper my position in the factory.

I have a feeling that the criticism you made on the barababu in the last session of our Samity might have an adverse effect on the Samity as he commands support of a large section of non-Bengalee workers. If we antagonise the barababu he might mobilise his supporters against the Samity. So I suggest we collaborate with the barababu for the time being in order to maintain workers' unity. The barababu apparently felt bad for not being able to attend the last meeting.

Rest when we meet.

Yours sincerely

24 Magh, 1314

Krishnapada Haldar
Rajganje National Jute Mill
Engine Workshop.

43

This indicates the influence of a barababu on the workers despite his oppression. In 1908 Rajganje Mill witnessed a riot between Bengalee and non-Bengalee workers. In fact, the 'barababu' postponed a proposed meeting.

Dear Mr. Bannerjee,

Rajganje
12.2.08

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your post-card and telegram. This Saturday being the pay-day of month and hours too it will not be convenient to hold a meeting that day. The date and time for holding a meeting will be duly intimated to you. please note.

Yours faithfully

Gurupada Mukherjee.⁴⁴

43. A.C. Bannerjee private papers, Nehru Memorial Library. The original text is in Bangalee.

44. A.C. Banerjee, private papers, Nehru Memorial Library.

The above indicates that the emergence of a workers union under bhadralok nationalist leadership depended much on intermediaries like sardars and head-clerks. There was a pressure from below which forced them to take up the leadership. But the workers due to the lack of education, and their isolation from outside world, were much ~~confused~~ confused. The organised political and trade union struggle depended for its continuation on the bhadralok nationalists.

The trade union struggle suffered from a serious limitation due to the hegemony of the bhadraloks, even without doubt though it marked an advancement in terms of organization and demands ⁱⁿ comparison with an earlier struggle.⁴⁵ The trade union also acted as a bridge between jute workers and other workers involved in struggle, dock

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45. Here we come across a totally different pattern of the formation of trade unions, from the industrialized country, in a colonial society. In Great Britain from the formation of "London Corresponding Society" in 1792 (by Thomas Hardy, a shoe maker) to the collapse of chartist movement, ~~it~~ ^{it} was the workers who were in the forefront. In India the situation was opposite. Here the workers primarily due to lack of education and social alienation in socio-cultural terms depended on the bhadraloks. In a colonial society, ~~xxx~~ there was an exclusive ruling elite group, white officials, isolated from Indian society. Below them were the Indian educated classes (in Bengal bhadraloks) who constitute the apex of Indian society. Workers belonging to the lowest arena of the society isolated from rural home and urban educated classes depended on the bhadraloks for organized politico-economic struggle though there always had been pressure from below.

workers, printers, telegraph peons. The main link again was the nationalist leadership. But a trade union with an emphasis on class solidarity rather than on communal solidarity reflects the appearance of a rudimentary form of class consciousness.

In fact, the reaction of the jute mill authorities, Anglo-Indian press, the police and the government reflects the success of this new wave of working class struggle.

(iv) The Response from above; the reaction of the Jute Mill Authorities Government and Anglo-Indian Press:

The jute mill authorities became alarmed by the sudden increase in the number of strikes in Jute Mills. On the one hand they, in collaboration with the government forces, tried to brutally repress the entire agitation. On the other hand they expressed their willingness to cooperate with A.C. Bannerjee. We have already come across their attack on village Khajai on 12 March 1908, and the burning down of Kakinarah baste to contend with the labour unrest. False cases were lodged and Bengalee on 10 January 1906, while describing the strikes in Fort Gloster jute mills, commented on the collaboration of the District Magistrate and the mill Manager:

"After this there was a prosecution of two of the mill hands, in which curiously enough the magistrate of Wluberia, who tried the case and also the District Superintendent of police seemed to have taken an unusually keen interest, why the magistrate of Howrah should have such special interest cannot be explained except by the fact that he bears a name which in the positive of that of the manager - one being Forest and other Forester. That the conduct of both would have been appreciated in a Forest, we have no doubt that is neither here nor there."

The intensity of Bengalee's anger reflects that these two people had gone beyond the normal limit of arresting and harassing the strikers involved in a political struggle in that mill.

But, on the other hand, we notice a 'civilized' jute mill officer R. Duncan of Budge Budge jute mill who on 19 August 1906 (when Indian Jute mill association was established) "bowed, in fact, kept bowing when the noble words, ~~Bande~~ Bande Mataram rent the welkin." 46

But the same Mr. Duncan expressed his shock when A.C. Bannerjee asked him to close the mill on 16 October 1907 to commemorate the Bengal partition day.

Budge Budge
Jute Mill Co. Ltd
7 Clive Row,
Calcutta, 20 Sept. 1907

46. Bengalee, 27 August.

Andrew Yule and Co.

Agents.

Dear Mr. Bannerjee,

I have received your letter of the 24 August and exceeding regret I cannot accede to your request to stop the mill for half a day on the 16 October. For me, timing any stoppage entails serious loss to the company which I am not justified in incurring, and keeping in mind the fact that the mill will be off time following week for probably 4 to 6 days (Poojas). I do not think the work people would enjoy losing another half day's pay. May I ask, cannot your demonstration be held during the Pooja week? What is the demonstration for? I am at all times ready and willing to do all I can for my work people but I must say that your proposal does not strike me as reasonable.

Yours etc.

R. Duncan.⁴⁷

Actually the workers were often subjected to harsh treatment but while dealing with the labour leaders the mill managers maintained a formal tone of 'gentleman to gentlemen' discussion. Mr. Forrester the infamous manager of Fort Gloster jute mill wrote to A.C. Bannerjee on 11th January, 1906.

47. Nehru Memorial Library, A.C. Bannerjee, Private Papers.

The Englishman expressed fear over the political implication of a long swadeshi struggle involving the lower classes. On 30 September, 1905, it wrote :

" If the lower classes of Hindus now join the Babus and school boys in pursuing an active boycott propaganda there is certain to be serious trouble. Therefore, we repeat, what we said yesterday, the partition and boycott is no more a matter for statesman and economics. It is a matter of police."

When during the agitation in Fort Gloster Jute mill the manager knocked down two workers, the workers went on strike and replied to the police that 'all workers' and 'all men', in Bengal, were their brothers.⁴⁹ This was precisely what the British government feared that the emergence of a new sense of class solidarity and a political solidarity cutting across all forms of socio-economic distances would endanger the existence of British rule. Thus an official survey on the agitation entitled Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser contains a section on 'industrial unrest', which is stated to have been a "marked feature of the quinquennium ... In many of the strikes professional agitators were prominent, and the power of organisation which was so apparent in the political agitation is equally noticeable. Both were new factors in the industrial history of the province. The industrial agitators were mostly briberless barristers, who made it their business to be found and preside over unions... Such unions were formed for Indian press employees, mill hands and railway servants; strikes started or encouraged, and the strikers were backed up as long as their funds lasted." 50

49.(A) Home public progs A, June 1906 w.75, also ^WSpit S arkar op.cit., p. 228.

~~was~~ lasted." 50

It is essential now to study the ideological roots and the political influence of the workers' struggle on the overall political ideological formulations of the Bhadrakalok nationalist politicians.

- (v) The Political Impact of the Working Class participation in the Swadeshi Movement on the Nationalist Leadership and the reasons for the collapse of the political struggle.

It is difficult to present a total picture of the political impact ^{of the labour movement} on the swadeshi agitation. It is also difficult to locate ^{the} ideological roots of labour leaders like A.C. Bannerjee and Prabhat Kishore Roychowdhuri who were mainly involved in organizing Jute mill workers. Two other leaders, Premtosh Bose and Athansius Apurba Kumar Ghosh, were more involved in Railwaymen's strike and in organizing government press employees.

We will focus mainly on A.C. Bannerji and P.K. Roychowdhuri. A.C. Bannerjee was a student of law in England in the 1880s when England witnessed the renewal of labour struggle after a long interval. It was there perhaps A.C. Bannerjee got his first impression of a powerful labour movement. Later, while addressing the workers in Budge Budge jute mill he referred to the united workers' struggle in Europe. It should be noted that during Sasipada's visit to

50. Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser, 1903-1906, p. 24. Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p.184.

England Sasipada became much more influenced by social welfare tradition. Sasipada's background was reformist. Whereas Aswini came from a new generation who were critical of Congress politics and as a result perhaps had been more influenced by early stirrings in England. ⁵¹

A.C. Bannerjee in his later political life had maintained a centrist position when the moderate - extremist division came about. He had a better relationship with the moderate politicians. In his autobiographical note too he spoke of his preaching of socialistic principles among the workers. However, it is difficult to imagine what he meant by socialism though his private papers contained cuttings from Justice, a social democratic newspaper. ⁵²

51. Sumit Sarker, op.cit., pp. 199

52. A.C. Bannerjee was much more influenced by the European nationalist intellectuals and heroes of the 19th Century. In his private papers we came across a letter of Anurobindo Ghosh which indicates this fact.

12 Wellington Square
June 26, 1907

Dear Aswini Babu,

I quite forgot about it, I am afraid I cannot just think of any such book as you want. There is Marriot's Makers of Italy but that is not a biography nor anything like comprehensive. Bent's life of Garibaldi is crammed full of facts and very tedious reading. I don't think there is any good life of Mazzini in English-only the translation of his autobiography. However, I will look up the subject and if I find anything, will let you know.

Yours sincerely

Anurobindo Ghosh.

A.C. Bannerjee, however, was also a pragmatic politician. In 1907, when charged with serious propaganda, he promptly apologised. Gradually he became involved in local municipal politics and after 1908, we do not notice his activities among the workers.⁵³

Prabhat Kusum Roychowdhuri was a moderate. He was involved throughout his life in the workers movement. He, in 1915, moved a resolution in 24 Pargana district Congress demanding abolition of light work. Even before his death he was associated with Taxi-cab union.⁵⁴

53. Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., pp. 194-99.

54. Ibid.

But the broad trend in the nationalist controlled media continued. We have noticed in an earlier chapter that the Swadeshi movement brought a new trend in the media which sympathized with the struggling workers and covered news of the strikes.⁵⁵

It also threw light on the workers' plight by publishing articles like 'Factory Labour or Slavery'.⁵⁶ But the real impact of workers struggle can be noticed on the extremist politicians.

During 1905-1908 the political mobilization of workers in Calcutta was not as successful as in Bombay, where Tilak could mobilize thousands of workers for a nationalist cause.^{56(a)} The social distance between Bengali bhadralok and mostly non-Bengalee Calcutta proletariat often stood in the way of labour participation in nationalist cause. The dependence on sardars in mobilizing workers also influenced the workers attitude towards the union.

55. Bengalee, 20 March, 1907.

56. In fact there took place massive strike in Bombay for six days when Tilak was imprisoned in July, 1908.

The rise of labour party in England and the Russian Revolution 1905 along with the successful Tutocor in strikes influenced extremist politicians' attitude towards utilization of labourers as a political force. In Punjab the workers' strike in the military arsenal also drew the attention of swadeshi leaders to this new movement.⁵⁷ The Amrita Bazar Patrika editor asked Gokhale to establish contact with labour party leaders in England.⁵⁸ B.P.N. Sinha, a correspondent of Amrita Bazar Patrika, also appealed to Mr. A.C. Bannerjee to organize a labour party in India.⁵⁹

The Daily Hitavadi also wrote in December 1905 that the Russian Revolution had shown efficacy of strikes as a political weapon.⁶⁰

57. Sumit Sarkar, op. cit. p-298.

58. Sumit Sarkar, op.cit. p-297

59. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 22 December, 1906.
Also Sumit Sarkar, ibid.

60. Daily Hitabadi, 4 December 1906 (RNP(3) for week ending 9 December 1905).

Bandemataram carried a description of the Stuttgart Congress of socialists and also of an expelled socialist member's speeches. It published a song of the English labour struggle.⁶¹

61. The song is given below:

THERE IS FREEDOM TO ALL WHO WOULD TOIL.

Here is freedom to all who would toil
To produce what can't do without.
To till and make use of soil
Which is ours without shadow of doubt.
But to all who this right would deny
And yet boast that we Britons are free
We might manfully answer you lie
And no longer your slaves we will be.

CHORUS

Then, O tyrants and masters beware,
No matter what your pedigree
By the Red Flag of freedom we swear
Neither master nor slave we will be
The days for all humbugs are gone

We now live in a different age
We have evolved from the cave and stone
To a thinking and rationalist age,
And what they thought just for the slave
Either fendal, Wage, Chattel or thane
Now inherits oblivion's grave
Never to be resurrected again
For the cause of true liberty spreads,
And her worshippers reveal in mirth
Wherever humanity treads.

The inability of Swadeshi extremist politicians to grasp the real significance of a secular political culture of the working class movement led to a different concept of socialism.

On September 17, (Bhadra 31, 1314) Bandemataram wrote

"strike have now become very common. It is very significant that they synchronized with the birth of the swadeshi spirit in the country. Land have since then come to stay. The people that have learnt to be self-respecting are bound to be someday or other really above to the supreme necessity and freedom of a nation. And once they have realised this necessity, the struggle for freedom will cease to be sectional and isolated ... To help the poor in the assertion of their rights serves the cause of freedom and also established the bonafide of our intentions." But the same article again pointed out that -

"The caste rules of India which furnish such a hurdle to our political appressors were not conceived in a mean and selfish spirit. They had on the contrary the true socialistic aim of keeping awake in every class of the society a sense of duty to it. irrespective of any consideration of gain or of honour." On September 21, 1907, Bandemataram in its editorial on caste and democracy points out that "Socialism is not an European idea, it is essentially Asiatic, and especially Indian. What is called socialism in Europe, is the old Asiatic attempt to effect a permanent solution of the

economic problem of society which will give man leisure and peace to develop undisturbed his higher self... The fulfilment of Hinduism is the fulfilment of highest tendencies of human civilization and it must include democracy, and socialism also purifying them, raising them above the excessive stress on the economic adjustments which are the means and teaching them to fix their eyes more constantly on the moral, intellectual spiritual perfection of mankind which is the end."

Thus a stress on Hindu identity as Indian identity, uncritical acceptance of Hindu social institutions, without much stress on real day-to-day economic issues, the nationalists failed to attract a large section of proletarian masses. A section of workers were indeed organized on a political basis but a proper ideological framework, suited to the times, could not be presented before them. The Swadeshi leaders came near the working class ideology of socialism but again went back to the spiritual message of India.

The Swadeshi extremists after their failure to stir the agrarian masses stressed more and more on the need for dedicated revolutionaries who would conduct a heroic attack on particular points of British colonial machinery.⁶² This tilt became obvious from the failure

62. See, for detail analysis of this shift, Sumit Sarkar, op.c it., pp.31-91 and 465-492.

in practice to implement the programme of passive resistance. The labour leaders of moderate variety who mobilized the workers in a trade union organization could not develop a political programme of agitation. As a result the political struggle and organized trade union movement collapsed in Bengal.

CONCLUSION

While tracing the labour capital relationship in the jute industry, in a factory, at the point of production, we have defined class consciousness as "the way in which experiences are handed in cultural terms embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional terms."¹ Thus we have tried to portray the process of transformation of a section of the Indian society, mostly peasants and artisans, into an industrial working class and have made an attempt to study the refashioning of their cultural experiences, and social existence in a new pattern. This process of transformation in terms of experience, value systems, tradition and the economic and political agitations of the workers led them to realize their new existence as members of a common social stratum broadly defined as class. Thus class consciousness emerges from a complicated process of social transformation which in the case of the jute workers in Bengal came into being through the sharing of a common experience and common politico-economic struggle.

We have tried to explain how in India, due to a lack of integrated industrial development, pre-capitalist

1. E.P. Thompson, op. cit., p.9.

production relations in agrarian sector survived and led to an enclaved industrialization. Thus the workers who came from this pre-capitalist social formation tried to stick to their older social customs. The dominance of migrant labours and the erosion in their traditional social mechanism in mill bastees led to an identity crisis. They came to a new work place where not only was the work pattern different but social customs, language and culture too were different from their native region.

In jute industry the sardars gradually became the kingpins of the recruitment operation. The relationship between the sardars and the workers were marked by several types of social ties and economic bondages. The sardar often recruited on the basis of caste and kinship ties. He paid their travelling expenses and when they came from the villages he arranged for their dwelling places. He gave them money when needed. Thus the sardar became the community leader. He performed two duties in the industry. On the one hand he was the most important man of the management in the lowest rung who recruited the work force and disciplined them. On the other hand he became the natural leader of the workers.

The workers decided to assert their traditional
and
values/recreate their social mechanism of caste panchayat

in the new social circumstances. They demanded holidays on wages, they turned strongly towards community life. They demanded holidays on religious occasions. In the capitalist industrial set-up labour-capital conflict is inevitable. In the case of jute industry community consciousness accelerated the workers' struggle. Thus the community consciousness led to the formation of a rudimentary form of trade union organization though in the form of a community organization.

Outside the factory, on the streets of the city, we notice the outbreak of crowd violence and riots. This crowd violence also reflects the process of transition of a pre-capitalist mob towards an industrial class though such a transition need not in and of itself necessarily be 'completed'.

The workers politics and their transformation into a class in the political sense of the term was related to the development of nationalist consciousness among the most influential social section known as the bhadralok. The role of the bhadralok cannot be defined in terms of class relationship but they constituted a social group with mainly intermediary tenure holders, lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists and other educated men who were the intellectual representatives of Indian society in the colonial period.

In the beginning they remained unconcerned about the workers' condition though radical social reformers took interest in working class affairs and Sasipada Banerjee a social reformer initiated reform programme among the workers. With the increasing disillusionment of the nationalist intelligentsia with the advent of industrial capitalism in India, they also tried to search for an alternative for the industrial economy which they visualised as a western phenomenon. Rabindranath Tagore prescribed the path of rural regeneration, whereas Satish Chandra Mukherjee envisaged the development of small scale industries. With the turn of the century and the partition of Bengal, the Bengalee nationalists turned towards workers as their natural allies. This led to a tremendous transformation in the working class consciousness. The nationalist consciousness gave birth to class consciousness. Trade union organizations came up. Political and economic demands of the workers were put forward. But finally due to the hegemony of the bhadralok leadership over the workers and the lack of a firm ideological outlook the organized political and trade union movement collapsed. Here too we have come across the problem of the bhadralok leadership in organizing the trade union movement. They could not reach the workers belonging to proletarian stock. They depended on intermediaries like

sardars and clerks who were themselves exploiters. As a result the workers were often not much inspired to join the trade union movement.

In spite of the shortcomings of the movement this phase of the workers struggle was marked by communal harmony and a nebulous class unity. The workers became conscious of their role as a dynamic social force in this phase of the struggle.

Two noted historians who contributed on this subject, Dipesh Chakraborty and Ranajit Dasgupta have not discussed how the bhadralok influence to a great extent shaped the workers movement in a different way and infused it with nationalistic consciousness. Ranajit Dasgupta has analysed the growth of consciousness of the workers in terms of the transition in the forms of the struggle and has also focussed on the work situation, wages and the structure of the labour market along with social composition and migration pattern. Dipesh Chakraborty on the other hand has tried to penetrate the workers' mind while explaining the social ~~autonomy~~ ^{anatomy} of the communal riots in the late 19th century. He has also pointed out the role of technology in shaping the attitude of the jute workers towards industrial life. He has also explained the role of Sasipada Banerjee as a social reformer in shaping the

workers' consciousness but has stressed Sasipada's ideas more than workers' reaction. But Dipesh Chakraborty viewed the workers' consciousness as an independent domain and virtually neglected the role of bhadralok agitators in shaping that consciousness in the swadeshi period (1903-1909) though he has analysed bhadralok participation in working class movement in 1940s.

In fact, in the Indian situation, workers were more or less illiterate. In Britain in the second half of the 18th century two-thirds of the workers could read and more than half could write. In India, where the workers were mostly from peasant society, they gradually formed a rudimentary trade union organization through struggle. However, a broad movement involving the socially dominant class was necessary to make an impact upon their mind.

In the colonial situation the main contradiction in society was that between the ruling classes of Britain and the Indian masses comprising all sections of Indian society. In Calcutta the contradiction between British controlled capital and the Indian labour was integrated with this main social contradiction. This integration led to a qualitative jump in the working class movement from community consciousness to class consciousness.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

These biographical notes are not alphabetically organized. We have tried to maintain a thematic unity in the order of the biographical notes. These notes are brief life accounts of several personalities who shaped the intellectual development and influenced the course of events in the 19th and early 20th century Bengal. But unfortunately there is very little evidence available on the active working class participants in the Swadeshi agitation. It is also difficult to present biographical data on the life of the jute mill managers who also played a role in structuring the working class consciousness. Most of the notes given below are based on the accounts of Samsad Bangali Charitabidhan (Samsad Biographical dictionary of the noted Bengalees) published by Sishu Sahitya Samsad Pvt. Ltd. 32A, Prafulla Chandra Road, Calcutta-700 009) on 22 May, 1382 (Bengali era).



Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833): Rammohan Roy came from a traditional Bengalee Brahmin family. Rammohan was the first intellectual who challenged the basis of Hindu orthodoxy. To give a concrete structure to his religious belief he established the Atmiya Sabha in 1815 which he transformed in 1829 into the Bramha Smaja. The Bramha Samajists for the next 50 years dominated the social reform movement in Bengal.

In the 1820s Rammohan organized a movement against the custom of Sati which Bentinck banned by enacting an act in 1829. Rammohan published three magazines between 1821-23, Brahmanical magazine, Brahman Sbad hi and Sambad Kounudi, and Mirutul Akbar to propagate his ideals of women liberation, religious reforms and for civil liberty. He was the first person to organize the movements against press censorship law of 1823 and for the introduction of juries in the judicial system. He also spoke for the introduction of western education with an emphasis on natural science.

He was an internationalist. He supported the uprising in Naples by the Carbonaries in 1825. In September 1823 he hosted a dinner party to celebrate the independence of the Latin American colonies from the rule of Spain. In 1830 he also welcomed the French Revolution. But Rammohan's nationalism was extremely abstract in nature. In India he not only supported the British government but also spoke for the establishment of European colonies in India to develop the moral consciousness of the Indian people. In fact, his economic interest was deeply tied with the British free traders and East India Company. He also purchased Zamindaris. Thus he was the first intellectual to challenge the orthodoxy of the Hindu society and a nationalist who

was happy to celebrate the independence of colonies, but a firm believer in the progressive nature of the British rule in India. This set the path of the later social reformers who also had a basic faith in the British rule but argued for social reforms.

Mary Carpenter (1807-1877): Mary Carpenter was born at Exeter, the eldest child of Lant Carpenter, the unitarian minister at Exeter. Trained as a teacher she took an active part in the movement for the reformation of neglected children, and founded a ragged school and several reformatories for girls. She was an active labour reformer and helped in organizing a night schools for workers. She was close to Rammohan. She helped in moulding the ideological perspectives of Keshab Chandra Sen and Sasipada Banerjee and inspired them to take up the cause of labour reform. With philanthropic aims, she visited India four times, and America once (1873). Besides her reformatory writings she published Our Convicts (1864). The last days of Rammohan Roy (1866), and Six months in India (1868). (The details are from the Chambers Biographical Dictionary, New edition, 1961, published by W and A Chambers Limited, 11 Thistle Street, Edinburgh, 6 Dean Street, London, W-1).

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884): Keshab Sen came from an aristocratic Hindu family of Calcutta. He

studied in Hindu College (1848-58). After his marriage in 1857, he joined the Bramha Samaj and soon became its leader.

Keshab Sen took interest in working class affairs after his return from Britain in 1871. He started the Indian Reforms Association in 1871. In the same year he started Sulabh Samachar an one pice daily to propagate his reform ideals among the poor. In 1872, the Civil Marriage Act was passed due to his initiative. But he allowed his minor daughter to be married to the ruler of Koch Bihar.

To protest against his action radical Bramhos came out of his Bramho Samaj and organized the Sadharan Bramho Samaj.

Sibnath Sastri (1897-1919): Sibnath Sastri was one of the most noted radical intellectuals of the period. He studied in the Sanskrit College and passed M.A. in 1872 in Sanskrit. He became associated with the Bramho reform movement in 1865 and helped Vidyasagar in organizing widow remarriages. In 1869 he officially joined Bramho Samaj and abandoned his sacred thread. He was associated with several types of reform movements, particularly he was active in spreading education among women. In 1878 he came out of the Keshab Sen controlled Brahmo Samaj to protest against his violation

of the Civil Marriage Act. In 1878 he established his famous Samadarshi Secret Society. He also made propaganda for the political unity of India and an egalitarian society. He spoke against Hindu revivalism during the swadeshi movement. His novel 'Yugantar' inspired future revolutionaries and they named their publication and secret society as Yugantar in 1907.

Sasipada Banerjee (1840-1925): Sasipada was also a member of the Bramha Samaj who was the first labour reformer ^{in Bengal}. In this dissertation we have already given an account of his activities. His ideological inspiration came from Keshab Sen and Sibnath Sasri. (see chapter V for details)

Dwarkanath Ganguly (1844-1898): Dwarkanath came from the Dacca district of modern Bangladesh. He was a school teacher in Faridpur in Eastern Bengal. He joined the social reform movements of the time. In 1869 he published a book titled Abalabandhab to protest against the social oppression of women. In 1870 he was invited to come to Calcutta by the Bramho social reformers. In 1873 he established the Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya. A girls' hostel attached to the school was also set up by him. In 1876 he established Banga Mahila Vidyalaya. He left Keshab Sen's Bramho Samaj in 1878 to join the Bramho society known as the

Sadharan Bramha Samaj. He went to Assam in 1886 to organize a movement among the coolies of the tea garden and published a series of articles in Sanjibani on the condition of the coolies.

Krishna Kumar Mitra (1852-1936): He was a political activist and a journalist. His father organized peasant resistance movement against the Indigo planters. He was a Bramho Samajist and founded the Sadharan Bramho Samaj in 1878 to protest against Keshab Sen's daughter's marriage. In 1883 he started Sanjeebani, a weekly magazine. He organised movements against the lowering of the eligibility age for Civil Service Examinations. In 1886 he went to Assam to observe the situation as a journalist and wrote his famous book Coolie Kahini. He also participated in the rent movement at Pabna in 1876 and in 1890 he joined the last phase of the peasant struggle against the indigo planters in Bengal. He joined the Swadeshi agitation in 1905 and was imprisoned at the Agra Fort. He opposed Mahatma Gandhi's politics in the Congress. He wrote an authentic biography of Prophet Muhammad in the Bengalee language.

Bholanath Chandra (1822-1910): Bholanath Chandra was from Calcutta. He studied in the Hindoo College and then joined Howman and Company as an agent in a sugar factory. He worked there for 30 years. He was

a noted essayist and wrote only in English. He first published a travelogue in the Saturday journal in 1866. Later on it was published in 1869 in English with a title 'Travels of a Hindoo'. He also wrote on the Black Hole tragedy which was alleged to have occurred at Calcutta in 1756 and showed that it was nothing but the imagination of Holwel. He was the first person to give the slogan of boycott of British industrial goods in 1874. His book A Voice for the commerce and manufactures of India had laid the economic basis for the slogan of boycott later adopted during the swadeshi period. He was one of the most ardent propagandists of economic nationalism.

Surendra Nath Banerjee (1848-1925): Surendra Nath Banerjee came from a Brahmin family and his ideological moorings were strongly anchored in Victorian liberalism. He never lost faith in the British rule and spoke for agitation through petition. He started his career as an I.C.S. officer but was thrown out of the job in 1873. After that he joined the City College as a teacher and earned fame as an orator. In 1876 he established along with Ananda Mohan Basu, the Indian Association. In 1879, he started Bengalee, a daily paper. In 1895, and in 1902 he presided over the all India sessions of the Congress.

He organized movements against the lowering of age in the Civil Service Examination. He also protested against Lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act. In 1890 he went to England to appeal for creating a representative government in India. In 1897 he went to England to appear before the Wombelly Commission as a witness. From 1905 to 1912 he was the most prominent leader in the Swadeshi movement. He declared that he would unsettle the settled fact. (Lord Curzon proclaimed the partition of Bengal as a settled fact.) Surendra Nath, throughout his life remained a 'moderate' in politics. He accepted the 'Montagu-Chemsford' reform and joined the Bengal ministry in 1921 during the Khilafat agitation. He was awarded knighthood during this period. But later on at the fag end of his life, he was defeated by the young Swaraj party candidate in the provincial assembly election. Despite his later isolation from the nationalist movement, Surendra Nath was a pioneer nationalist politician who tried to create political consciousness in a secular manner. His book Nation in the making is an important source for understanding the ideology of the early nationalists.

Satish Chandra Mukherjee (1865-1948): Satish Chandra was a noted intellectual of the time. He passed the entrance exam. in 1879 and in 1886 he completed his B.A. in English from the Calcutta University. From the

beginning he tried to search for an alternative to the colonial education system. In 1895, he established the Bhagabat Chatuspati with this object. But he could not continue it. In 1897 he became the editor of Dawn and till 1913 he was in that post. He continuously propagated nationalist ideals in his magazine. He formed Dawn society against the Calcutta University circular in 1902. He was also related with the Bandematararam newspaper of the extremists. In 1906 he became the director of National Educational Council formed to run the national schools to coopt the students who boycotted the British schools. These schools with their emphasis on education in the mother tongue, tried to introduce an alternative educational curriculum. He coordinated the activities of several nationalist schools in Bengal. He helped in organizing the National College in Calcutta and he became its Principal after Aurobindo Ghosh's arrest. In 1922 he went to Sabarmati to help in publishing Young India when Gandhi was arrested.

Aswini Kumar Dutta (1856-1923): He was again a teacher-politician from the Bramho Samaj. In 1879 he passed the M.A. and the B.L. examinations but became a teacher in a school at Sreerampore. Later he came to Barishal to practice law and in 1882 he joined the Bramho Samaj. In 1885 he became the Municipal Commissioner

and established the Poples' Association to fight against corruption. In 1887 he established schools for girls. In 1888 he became the Vice-Chairman of the Barishal Municipality. In 1889 he established the Braja Mohan College and worked there for 25 years. In 1897 he became the Chairman of the Barishal Municipality.

Politically, Aswini Kumar Dutta was critic of the Congress Moderate politics. He was a believer in self help and at the Amarabati Congress he appealed to the Congress to become a mass organization by organizing self help programmes in the rural areas. He criticised the Congress as a mendicant organization, limited to the English speaking elites.

During the anti-partition agitation in 1905 he built up the Swadesh Bandhab Samity which became a powerful organization in the Barisal district. When Eastern Bengal witnessed communal tensions, Barisal remained calm. The Nationalist movement was strong in the district due to his efforts. In 1909 he tried to unite the Congress but after his failure he left it. He was imprisoned in 1908 at Lucknow. He supported the Non-Cooperation agitation proposal in the Calcutta Congress of 1920 and transformed Brajamohan School into a nationalist school.

His books were Bhatiyoga, Karmayoga, Prem, Durgotatsab Tatwa, Atma Pratistha, Bharat Geet. He established

other organizations like the Little Brothers of Poor, the Band of Hope, and the Band of Mercy.

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950): Aurobindo Ghosh was a famous political figure and a noted philosopher. We will try to give an account of his early political life here. Aurobindo graduated from Cambridge in 1892. In 1893 he joined the Baroda College as a teacher. In Baroda he came into contact with Thakur Saheb a revolutionary leader of Maharashtra. In 1902 he sent his brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh to Bengal to organize a revolutionary secret society. In 1905 he joined the Swadeshi movement. In 1906 he left Baroda and became the Principal of the National College in Calcutta which was then established to develop an Indian education system. Later on he became the editor of the daily English newspaper, 'Bandemataram'. In 1908 he was accused of sedition and was imprisoned in connection with the Alipore Conspiracy Case. But Chittaranjan Das the famous Bengalee barrister defended him and obtained his release. After his release Aurobindo became attracted to Hinduism and propagated Hindu theistic philosophy. He started an English weekly magazine Karmayogin and in Bengalee he edited Dharma a religious magazine. He then left Calcutta and went to Pondicherry where with a French lady Paul Rischer

he set up an Ashram in search of divine truth and spent the life of a religious saint.

During the swadeshi days Aurobindo formulated his famous passive resistance theory, and propagated total boycott of British administration, British goods and educational institutions. He was a militant Hindu nationalist. Like Bankim and Vivekananda, he stressed upon the Hindu identity of the Indian people. He took Hinduism as the basis of the new nationalist philosophy ignoring the fact that more than half of the Bengalees were Muslims. He avoided the agrarian no-tax campaign on the Irish lines because it would antagonize the patriotic zamindars. As a result the Muslims and lower caste Hindu peasants remained aloof from the nationalist movement.

Aurobindo Ghosh wrote more than 38 books. He wrote 32 books in English and six in Bengalee. The most famous books were The Life Divine, Essays on Gita, Savitri and Mother India.

Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932): Bipin Chandra Pal in his early life was influenced by Sibnath Sastri and joined the Bramho Samaj in 1877. He married a widow in 1888 as a step towards women liberation in India. In 1901 he became actively involved in agitational politics. He edited the New India magazine and later he edited Bandemataram in 1906 before Aurobindo Ghosh. In 1902 he went to Assam

and launched a movement against the tea planters. He went to the court against them. In 1902 he was expelled from Assam and he joined the Swadeshi movement of Bengal in 1905. Bipin Chandra left Bandemataram because of his differences with Aurobindo Ghosh. In 1908 he was imprisoned because of his refusal to give evidence against Aurobindo Ghosh.

Politically during the Swadeshi agitation he was an extremist who also called for total boycott and was in the Lala Lajpat Roy Balgangadhar Tilak group. But during the First World War he joined the Home Rule League Movement and in 1921 he opposed Gandhi's political movement and adopted pro-governmental stand.

Kazi Zahiruddin Ahmed: It is impossible to give the full biographical details of Kazi Zahiruddin who was a labour activist. Kazi Zahiruddin was a clerk at the Kakinarah Jute Mill. He witnessed the process of exploitation of the mill workers. In 1890 he established the Mohameddan Mill Association to recruit more Muslim workers in the jute mills and also to help them at the hour of distress. But his organization was not a philanthropic organization like Sasipada Banerjee's night schools. In 1908 he was the first labour leader to raise the slogan of the 12 hours working day before

the Indian Factory Labour Commission. Thus he was the first labour leader who tried to organise jute working class though on community basis and came from the white collar workers themselves.

Aswini Coomar Banerjee (1866-1945): We have already discussed A.C. Banerjee's life in detail. A.C. Banerjee studied at St. Xaviers and Free Church College. He went to England in 1866 and came close to Lord Northbrook there. But he was more influenced by the rise of English labour movement at the time. In England he came to close to Surendra Nath Banerjee. After coming to India he became a critic of Congress politics. But in 1905 he actively participated in the jute mill workers movement. He claimed himself to be a socialist and his workers union Indian Mill Hands Association consisted of 50,000 members. He also participated in organizing railway men's strike at Asansol and Printers strike at Calcutta. The establishment of Indian Seamen's Union was another contribution.

Probhat Kusum Roychowdhury (-1921): His father Deviprassana Roychowdhury was a noted nationalist intellectual. P.K. Roychowdhury was a barrister and also edited Nabya Bharat, a monthly magazine. (see for details sixth chapter).

Apurba Kumar Ghosh: He was the most noted Christian Swadeshi leader and closely related to ^{Priya} ~~Priya~~ of the ^{Anushilan} ~~Muslim~~ group. A.C. Banerjee said that A.K. Ghosh used to give lectures on socialise in London. In 1904 he led the Printers strike and was given the title 'Raja of Printers Union'. He also was the President of the Eastern Indian Railway-men strikers Union. The first meeting of the Union took place in the Sandhya office. Later on he was removed from the post by the moderate Congressmen because of his radical and uncompromising posture.

Premtosh Basu (-1912): He was another noted labour leader of the Swadeshi period. He also was the owner of the Sandhya magazine. He sold most of his family property to purchase arms and amunition for the revolutionary terrorists. In 1908 when the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case started he left for England to avoid arrests. There he could not get money and died of pneumonia because of the lack of winter clothes. He also helped in organizing Printers strike, (Eastern Indian Railway) Strike and Burn Clerks' strike. He was a close friend of Rabindranath Tagore who helped him in various ways till his last days.

Hazi Nur Muhammad Zakariah: In Calcutta during the 19th century there came up a group of momen traders. They formed a very powerful Muslim business group who emerged as the leaders of the non-Bengalee Muslim community in

Calcutta. This group was basically anti-British and supporters of pan-Islamic movement Hazi Nur Muhammad Zakariah, a merchant, was one of them though he always maintained a good relationship with the British officials and the Bengalee Hindu gentry. It was due to his indirect patronage the 1896 Tallah riots occurred. He had links with the workers in the jute mill areas around Calcutta. (see for details chapters IV and V).

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