

Partition of Bengal 1905: Throes of the Revolutionary Movement

Selections from ‘Jugantar’

Original Bengali Book “Agnijuger Agnikatha (Jugantar)” - Compiled and Edited by Anshuman Banerjee

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About the Book

This book is a collection of selected articles from the Bengali book “Agnijuger Agnikatha (Jugantar)”, translated in English. The objective of this Bengali weekly journal “Jugantar” was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare to inspire the youth of Bengal for the freedom movement against the British rule.

During the revolutionary phase of Bengal’s history, three important journals were published – “Bande Mataram”, “Jugantar” and “Sandhya”. A collection of selected articles from these journals was first published from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry in 1973, which was included in Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. The compilation of articles from Jugantar was done by Anshuman Banerjee and was published from Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry in 2001.

In the Indian Freedom Movement, Sri Aurobindo was the first to proclaim boldly the ideal of “Purna Swaraj”, that is, complete independence. He inculcated this idea into the consciousness of the people until it got fixed there as the immediate aim of the national endeavour. Through his contributions in the Bengali journal “Jugantar” and the English journal “Bande Mataram”, he created and released a mighty wave of moral and spiritual force which awakened the nation and eventually led it towards freedom.

Apart from these two journals, many other valuable documents had been kept in the custody of Alipore Court, Kolkata. It was due to the relentless efforts of the former secretary of Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture, Late Joya Mitter, that these important documents were retrieved and the microfilms of the same were preserved carefully by Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture and the Ashram. From the documents, the compilation of articles from Jugantar has been done to create this book.

The role of the weekly journal “Jugantar” was significant in initiating the great nationalist movement in Bengal, in which Sri Aurobindo contributed regularly with his articles. It was Sri Aurobindo’s intention to build up a network of strong revolutionary centres all over the country to impart military training to the youth. “Anushilan Samiti” was founded in different centres of Bengal as an attempt to organise Bengali youth through a programme of physical fitness and spiritual training for a nationalist movement. By 1905, the work of Sri Aurobindo and his brother Barindra Ghose allowed Anushilan Samiti to spread across Bengal in developing the youth physically, mentally and spiritually.

In 1906, Sri Aurobindo left Baroda and settled in Kolkata. Under his guidance, the political scene took the shape of a full-scale non-violent, non-cooperation and passive resistance movement after the Bengal partition in 1905. What was at first a protest movement against the partition soon developed into a broader movement of ‘Swadeshi and Swaraj’ under his inspiration. A Bengali

weekly paper, "Jugantar" was initiated in March 1906. There was no declared editor for Jugantar, although Barindra Kumar Ghose, Upendranath Banerjee and Debabrata Basu were the editors in reality. Sri Aurobindo was the main advisor. Within a year of its publication, the number of copies touched ten thousand.

Between 1906 and 1908 the editions of Jugantar which have been retrieved, clearly indicate that the journal published various national and international news of great significance and constantly advocated India's complete freedom for progress. Jugantar strongly believed that a strong leader could be selected from the ordinary people who were fighting for independence, which had been echoed through the writings of Sri Aurobindo in 1906. Swami Vivekananda expressed similar views and had faith and dependence in the common people. The sufferings and pains of the underprivileged tax burdened masses as a result of the British rule were also portrayed through this journal. Reports on loss of lives due to epidemics and famines were regularly published. The common people were over burdened with "Road Cess", "Local Cess", "Public Work Cess" and other forms of taxation, in addition to what they were already paying. The country witnessed a decline in the fields of Agriculture and Commerce. Villages were not developed, water bodies were not cleaned which led to the spread of diseases. The profits made by the British at the expense of India's deterioration were published.

The protests and strikes organised by different organisations against the British were highlighted by Jugantar. The sacrifices made by individuals in the freedom struggle nationally and internationally were reported on a regular basis. The journal had a significant role in uniting the Hindus and Muslims in order to end the British rule. Jugantar believed that the British had adopted a policy of dividing Hindus and Muslims for their gains which led to riots and quoted several examples of the two communities observing festivals together and helping each other.

Jugantar voiced its opinion that several religions had taken birth in Bengal which would thrive in future without communal disharmony. Sri Ramakrishna's example was quoted who had embraced all religions and communities like Shaktas, Baishnabs, Muslims, etc and had attained perfection. On the other hand, Jugantar mentioned that India had the unique characteristic feature of establishing unity in diversity which would provide a solid basis for a durable synthesis of mankind and the foundation for India to lead the world. India had always embraced different kinds of religion, culture and languages.

As regards strikes, Jugantar has published information of national and international significance. Relevant portions from "The Social General Strike" written by Arnold Roller found place in Jugantar. The history of the American freedom movement was regularly posted. The need for selfless leaders who would dedicate themselves in the task of sowing seeds of protests among the masses was voiced by Jugantar which ultimately led to the creation of the essay, "Dharmaghat" published later.

The consistent efforts of Jugantar in developing self confidence and the spirit of freedom struggle among the common people was noticed by the British. They tried to stifle the work done by journals like Jugantar, Bande Mataram, Sandhya, etc. The news of curbing the freedom of press was published in Jugantar. The newspapers run by the British like "Englishman", "Statesman" and "Pioneer" opposed the regional newspapers and accused them of initiating 'anti national activities'.

In 1907, the Jugantar office and the house of Bhupendranath Dutta were raided by the police for publishing 'provocative' articles. The "Jugantar Case" was initiated by the government. Contrary to the idea of the British, instead of silencing Jugantar, it led to further anti-government feelings among the people. At this time, Sri Aurobindo was declared publicly as the Chief Editor of Jugantar.

The next step by the government to suppress Jugantar was in the form of having control over its printing office known as “Sadhana Press”.

Jugantar was again accused of sedition and without the printing permission, its publication remained suspended for some time. Later, Baikuntha Chandra Acharya sought permission from the Chief Magistrate Kingsford and the publication of Jugantar resumed as a weekly Saturday journal. It faced extreme adverse circumstances due to repeated raids and confiscation of documents. But the publication continued with the support of its subscribers.

During this time, Jugantar appealed to the Hindus and Muslims to work unitedly for India’s independence. Through the article “Bharater Bhubishyot”, the Indians were reminded about the examples of Garibaldi, Shivaji and Ramachandra who had all prayed and worshipped in order to achieve their goals. Jugantar was going through a severe financial crisis and had to make an appeal for monetary support. Donations were received from several corners, proving the popularity of the journal. Businessmen came up with financial aids, ignoring the attacks of the government. The journal could not be published regularly for some time due to several constraints.

The details of attacks that Jugantar had faced, were published under the title “Jugantarer Abhibadan”. During this acute financial crisis, Jugantar was accused for the sixth time and its printer Birendranath Bandyopadhyay was arrested. The last edition of Jugantar was published on July 06, 1908. It had become extremely difficult to recover from the repeated attacks of the British government and Sri Aurobindo and his followers had also been arrested in the Alipore Bomb case.