



Khudiram Bose

The Symbol of Valiance and Death Defying Youth

The silent night was approaching dawn. Footsteps of the guards in the jail corridor broke the silence. Slowly it stopped before the 'condemned cell'. When the get was opened, a teenage boy with a smiling innocent face greeted them. He advanced in fearless strides to embrace death, with the guards merely following him. He stood upright on the execution platform, with the smile unfaded. His face was covered with green cloth, hands were tied behind, the rope encircled his neck. The boy stood unflinched. With the signal of the jailor Mr. Woodman, hangman pulled the lever. The rope swinging a little became still. It was 6 am. The day was 11th August 1908. The martyrdom of death defying Khudiram demarcated the onset of a new era in the course of Indian freedom movement.

The martyrdom of Khudiram rocked the entire nation. The dormant youth of a subject nation, oblivious of its own strength, dignity and valor shook off its hibernation. Khudiram's martyrdom brought a new meaning of life, new concept of dignity to the youth of his day. In his wake, like wave after wave, hundreds and thousands of martyrs upheld the truth that the only way to lead a dignified life is by dedicating it for the noblest cause, freedom. They came one after another, incessantly, shed their bloods, faced terrible torture, but never bowed their heads down.

3rd December 1889. Khudiram was born at Habibpur village, adjacent to Midnapore town. His father was Troilokyanath and his mother was Laksmipriya Devi. He was youngest member of the family. Aparupa, Sarojini and Nanibala were his three elder sisters. He lost his parents when he was only six years old. So the eldest sister Aparupa Devi took him to her father-in law's home at Hatgechha. There at Girish Chandra Mukhopadhyay's *Pathshala* (elementary school), his educational life began.

Amritalal Roy was Aparupa's husband. He was a clerk of the Ghatal Civil Court. When he was transferred at Tamaluk Court, Khudiram also went there with them. In Tamaluk, he was admitted in Hamilton High English School at fourth class (Standard VII). In his school life, he could be easily distinguished from among all the students, due to his bold character and courage. Once in his school, a teacher asked the students to deliver blow on the table by fist. Twenty boys took part in it; but all of them gave up very soon. Only Khudiram was knocking hard again and again. His fist was bleeding, but he didn't give up. At last the teacher hugged him warmly for his determination.

On the other hand he was very sensitive and soft hearted. In a winter morning, a beggar came to his home. He was shivering with cold. His worn out clothes couldn't provide him the warmth. Khudiram had a shawl. It was a precious possession and the last memento of his departed father. He gave him away that shawl. When the beggar left, Aparupa rebuked him, "Why did you give him the shawl? Will he use it? He will immediately sell it." Khudiram smiled, "I know it very well, *didi*. But that will help his family for a few days. If it provides few days meal, I think that will do justice to my father's memory." Again he said, "I can't control myself when I see that the ill fed poor men are shivering in cold and the upstart boys of the rich families wrapped in costly apparel pass by them heedlessly smoking cigarettes." Due to his deep feeling for the poor and destitute people whenever flood inundated Midnapore he rushed into the rescue work. He used to collect money, rice and clothes and distribute among the helpless victims.

During his schooldays the Swadeshi and Bilati Barjan (boycott of foreign goods) movement was going on in Bengal. People supporting the movement wore indigenous clothes. During that time one day his close friend Phanibhusan Ghosh came in the school wearing a khaddar

(indigenous cotton cloth) of Bombay mill. His other classmates bantered him because it was rough and not as good looking as the clothes coming from the mills of Manchester, England. But Khudiram strongly supported Phanibhusan by saying, “We should take pride in using all indigenous articles.” His argument moved others. They, all, took oath that they would never wear foreign clothes.

In 1904, when Amritalal again transferred in Midnapore town, Khudiram got admitted in the Midnapore Collegiate School. Here he did not confine himself to study alone. Rather he involved in variety of social activities. When outbreak of cholera turned into epidemic at Tamluk town, Khudiram rushed there. His relatives asked him not to go there; but he could not be restrained. He nursed the patients and arranged funerals of the victims. This disease is highly contagious, causing epidemic and at that time was almost incurable, but he didn't care for his own life. This love and feeling for common people gradually turned into the love for the country and involved him in the freedom movement.

At that time many groups and clubs were being founded in Bengal for physical exercise. These clubs were the centres of physical culture to build up healthy body, as well as patriotic mind. The object was to prepare the youth of the country in order to combat the foreign rulers. At Tamaluk *Rakshitbati*, such a group was formed. It was named '*Matrisadan*'. Khudiram joined this group and soon became its central figure. He was very thin but had a strong and healthy body.

The political environment in Bengal then was becoming turbulent. The British imperialism realized that their existence could be endangered had the resentment of the people turned into organized protest struggle and the Bengal could be the origin of such outburst. So, in 1905, they brought the blueprint of 'Partition of Bengal' on communal lines. But the people strongly refused this proposal. The entire Bengal reverberated, “We don't accept the partition of Bengal.” Lord Curjeon declared the partition of Bengal as a 'settled fact'. But the people of Bengal rejected this declaration. Veteran leader Surendranath Bandopadhyay challenged the declaration saying, “We must unsettle the settled fact.”

On 7th August 1905, at a protest meeting held in Town Hall of Calcutta, the decision of boycotting foreign commodities were taken. On 25th September, a huge number of people gathered at Calcutta *Maidan* to protest against the 'Partition'. The police mercilessly lathi-charged the gathering. But that could not frustrate the resentment of the people. It spread throughout the Bengal. Foreranking intellectuals of the day, eminent personalities like Rabindranath Tagore, Chittaranjan Das, Sister Nivedita all joined this movement against partition of Bengal.

In Midnapore some secret revolutionary organizations started their activities. Jnanedranath Bose, Satyen Bose and Hemchandra Kanungo were the pioneers. Satyen Bose was a clerk of the

District Collectorate Office (He also later became a martyr on the gallows). Jnanendranath and Hemchandra were schoolteachers. One day Hemchandra was riding a cycle. A young boy blockaded his road and stopped him. From him the boy demanded a revolver. When Hemchandra asked what would he do with it, the boy told that he wanted to kill a *Saheb* (i.e., a British exploiter). That very boy was Khudiram. The patriotic feeling gripped him at a very young age.

One day Khudiram crossed the river Kanshaboti and entered into a dense forest. There was a deserted old temple. He was lying there for a long time although there had been many poisonous snakes and dangerous animals around. But he didn't care. As he was missing for a long time Satyen Bose went out searching him everywhere. At last he found him lying on the floor of the temple. In his query, Khudiram told that according to the local belief, if someone did prayer in that temple, any of his diseases would be cured. When Satyen Bose asked what was his disease, Khudiram replied that it was not of him, but of the country, which was suffering from an incurable disease, 'slavery'. Satyen Bose understood that Khudiram had the mettle for being a true soldier of freedom movement. He recruited him in their secret revolutionary organisation as a volunteer.

Though Khudiram didn't have any interest in his academic studies, he studied the biography of Mazzini and Garibaldi and such other revolutionary books with rapt attention. He considered nothing difficult or impossible for the sake of freedom movement. When the leaders gave him the responsibility to maintain regular link with the activities of the organisation in Tamaluk and at the same time look after the organizational activities in Midnapore, although Tamluk town was 75 miles away from Midnapore and almost no communication he without any question took up the responsibility and to discharge that he regularly traveled at night alone with a bicycle to go to Tamluk and again return to Midnapore by the morning braving the tremendous hardship and the risk of police arrest.

Khudiram used to return home at late night. His nephew Lalit used to wait for him to have meal together. One day they found, a cat ate the food. Khudiram told that starvation for a night would help their health. But Lalit could not tolerate hunger. So, they searched for food. An elderly lady was still working at her home. When she came to know from Lalit that the two were unfed, she invited them to have food at her home. But Khudiram was reluctant as he saw her glass bangles at her hand. Those were imported. Kusum Kumari Devi realized everything; she immediately broke her glass bangles. Then Khudiram happily accepted her invitation.

Khudiram stayed at his elder sister's husband's house. His political activities troubled his brother in-law Amritalal as he was a government servant. He expressed some dissatisfaction over that and advised Khudiram to give up the political activities in order to stay in his house. Khudiram didn't hesitate a moment to leave the shelter and devote his life for the cause of India's

freedom. At first he took shelter in a weaver's workshop at Aliganj, but soon he started to work in the rural areas of Bengal and moved from village to village. He stayed few days in a cottage of a poor farmer in Bankura. The farmer was old and sick. So, Khudiram helped him in ploughing his land. He never did it before; but when he understood the old man could not till that year, Khudiram readily took up the responsibility of tilling the land although it was very labourious.

To build up organization, Khudiram had to move in different areas. Often he had to starve for days together due to lack of money. A lady noticed this and she was the sister of advocate Mr. Abdul Wahed. She was socially an outcaste. She took Khudiram as her younger brother. Religion, social customs nothing could prevent her from offering food, shelter and affection to Khudiram. This relationship created some rumors in the society. Even some of his leaders doubted him. His leader Hemchandra Kanungo confessed in his book, "When this gradually came into public, many people criticized young Khudiram. It's a matter of regret that the author (Hemchandra) himself was one of them. Though after a thorough enquiry our suspicion was removed." However it didn't leave any trace of grievance or injury in Khudiram's mind. He never defied his leaders; he was loyal to them, respected them and carried their instructions. He sacrificed his life at their direction, even knowing that they had questions about him. This loyalty was not to any person, but to the impersonal cause.

The anti-partition movement surged a new tide in Bengal, which crossed its geographical boundary. The boycott and non-cooperation movement were spread throughout the country. The administration failed to control this movement. This wave reached Midnapore also. In February 1906, an agriculture-industry fair was organized at Midnapore. Satyen Bose and other revolutionary leaders decided to distribute there a pamphlet named *Sonar Bangla* giving the call of boycott movement. It was then a highly risky job so Khudiram was deputed for distribution of this pamphlet, as he was a school student. On the last day of the fair the District Magistrate Mr. D Watson came prize distribution. Khudiram was at the entrance of the fair. A teacher, Mr. Ramchandra Sen, found that the pamphlet was anti-British, so he forbade him. But Khudiram didn't pay any heed to his words. Then Mr. Sen called the police, who caught Khudiram. But he gave a blow to the constable and escaped. Satyen Bose was watching the whole episode from a distance. He tried to misguide the constable by giving him wrong information about the boy. Although Khudiram escaped the incident did not end then and there. The District Magistrate Mr. Watson summoned Satyen Bose. He dismissed him from his service on 1st April 1906. Khudiram was absconding then. The leaders thought if he surrendered, he would be given light punishment. So they wanted him to surrender. But they had a little inconfidence too that he might divulge the secret information regarding the organisation under pressure. He was told with exaggeration that the police would torture him in their custody and according to the IPC 121 and

124 he might be given life imprisonment or death sentence. But it did not frighten him at all. He never uttered a single word about the organisation or in his own defense neither in court nor to police. During his trial he told his advocate, “Why are you wasting your time and energy to save me? I don’t want to defend myself, nor I’m willing to avoid punishment. If they put me under bar, I’ll be glad. Who is afraid of punishment, imprisonment or death, is not befitted to serve the motherland.”

The trial created a stir among the common people, the news spread very quickly that a young boy showed courage to hit the British police. But in the court, the government could not prove their allegation. So, Khudiram was made free on 16th May 1906. Many students and youth were present at the court on that day. They immediately arranged a *Victory March* through the town. Khudiram was garlanded and given a ride on a car. The big procession followed him. His instance encouraged the youths and many of them joined in the freedom movement.

After this incident, Khudiram was trying to collect money for their revolutionary activity. At that time, the king of Narajol, Mr. Narendralal Khan asked him to meet. Khudiram’s father was his *tehshildar* (cashier). He collected Rs. 3000.00 as revenue and put it in an iron safe box a few days before his death. But after his demise, one of his relative stole that money. Therefore, the estate manager attached all land and properties of his father Troilokyanath, auctioned and deposited the money in the estate-fund as compensation. When Narendralal came to know this, he repented. He promised to offer Khudiram the same amount of land and requested him to stay at their family and resume his study. It might be a ‘golden opportunity’ for any common people. But Khudiram didn’t accept the proposal. He told, “I don’t need any property or land, nor I want to stay at your royal family for study. I have already given up my study. If I stay with your family, I will become a *babu* (an elite). Then I wouldn’t care to serve my country.” On repeated request of Narendralal Khan, Khudiram told him if he wants to offer money, he should give it to the Chhatra Bhandar (Students’ Store / Treasury) and help the physical training centers. The king was surprised to hear that Khudiram had no personal need.

During the period the nationalist newspapers were consistently publishing articles exposing the ruthless exploitation of the British imperialism. At that time such an article was published in *Bandemataram* the newspaper published by the revolutionary organisation Yugantar. So, a sedition case was lodged against its editor Bipin Chandra Pal. Bipin Chandra came in the court, but didn’t defend himself. He said, “I have conscientious objection against taking part in a prosecution which I believe to be unjust and injurious to the cause of popular freedom and the interest of the public. I have objection to swear in this proceedings. I refuse to answer any question in connection with the case.” The Judge Mr. Kingsford sentenced him two months imprisonment for contempt of court. The people who were present outside the court protested against this unjust verdict. They

raised slogans against British imperialism. The police severely lathi-charged on the agitating people. Sushil Sen, a 14-year-old boy was present there. He knocked down a police sergeant when the sergeant was beating the people. Shusil Sen was immediately arrested and Mr. Kingsford ordered flogging him 15 times.

The entire Bengal was aflame with this verdict. Even the British newspaper, *The Nation* wrote: “the flogging of an educated man for political offence is surely a noble infamy. The flogging of politicals is rare even in Russia of Tsar.

The revolutionaries decided this humiliation must be paid back. In a confidential meeting Raja Subodh Mullick, Arobindo Ghosh and Charuchandra Dutta gave Kingsford death sentence. At first a parcel bomb packed within a book was sent to Mr. Kingsford. But by chance it was not opened and Kingsford escaped the life attempt. Then another attempt was taken. Barindra Ghosh and Ullaskar Dutta tried to make bombs in the laboratory of the Presidency College under the direction of Sister Nivedita. In the laboratory of Acharya J C Bose and Acharya P C Roy, some bombs were produced. But during trial, a young revolutionary Prafulla Chakraborty died due to explosion.

In the mean time Hemchandra Kanungo returned from Paris being trained on the science of explosives. He and Ullaskar Dutta made few high explosives. Meanwhile British government apprehending attacks of the revolutionaries on Kingsford, he was then transferred to Muzaffarpur. But the revolutionaries decided to teach British a lesson that even there he will not be spared. Khudiram and Prafulla Chaki were selected for this operation.

Khudiram became proud as his leaders gave him this great responsibility. His face flushed with joy. When his friends saw that Khudiram bought a pair of new shoes, they were astonished as because he didn't wear shoes since long back. They asked with eager faces – You have purchased new shoes!

- Yes, I am going to marry.
- Where?
- In the North.
- When will you come back?
- Never! I'll live in my father-in law's house permanently.

What a humor! No anxiety, no restlessness, no excitation was found in his behaviour.

Khudiram and Prafulla Chaki reached Muzaffarpur on 10th April 1908. But they found that Kingsford had restricted his movement after being alarmed by the intelligence. Khudiram and

Prafulla Chaki took shelter in a lodge and were watching the movement of Kingsford. On 30th April, they got an opportunity. At about 8.30 they saw that Kingsford's car had been returning from nightclub. Khudiram threw the bomb, which exploded loudly. The car went afire. Thinking that the operation was successful, Khudiram and Prafulla escaped from the spot and decided to be parted and walk towards opposite directions along the railway track.

Khudiram reached Wyni rail station in the next morning, which was 25 miles away from Muzaffarpur. Then he was extremely thirsty. When he was drinking water in a food-stall, two constables arrested him. After body search the police got two revolvers, 37 round bullets, an Indian railway map and a page of railway time table. Khudiram was chained and brought back to Muzaffarpur. But he was not afraid. He shouted *Bandemataram*, when he was brought by police car. *The Statesman* wrote: "The railway station was crowded to see the boy. A mere boy of 18 or 19 years old, who looked quite determined. He came out of a first class compartment and walked all the way to phaeton, kept for him outside, like a cheerful boy who knows know anxiety on taking his seat the boy lustily cried '*Bandemataram*'."

Prafulla Chaki was also chased by the police. To avoid arrest, he committed suicide at Mokamaghat railway station on 1st May 1908. But till then Khudiram did not know this news, so he confessed everything and shouldered all responsibilities to save Prafulla. Later for identification, his dead body was brought at Muzaffarpur where Khudiram confirmed his identity.

His trial started on 21st May. When Khudiram came to know that the bomb killed two innocent English women Mrs. Kenedy and Miss. Kenedy, and Kingsford escaped from the attack he was shocked. According to IPC 302, he was prosecuted for murder. On 13th June Judge Karndoff gave his verdict. Khudiram was sentenced to death.

When the verdict was given, Khudiram was smiling. Judge thought that he could not understand the verdict. So he asked Khudiram if he understand the significance of the verdict.

Khudiram – Of course.

Judge – Have you anything to say?

Khudiram – If you allow me, I can narrate the technique of making a bomb.

The Judge ordered the police to take him away.

A week was granted for appeal to the High Court. But Khudiram did not want to appeal. He was ready to sacrifice his life. But in the direction of the party his advocates told him, if his appeal was granted, he might get an opportunity to work for the country. Then Khudiram agreed. But this appeal was rejected on 13th July at the Court of Mr. Brett and Mr. Ryves. The whole nation burst into thunderous protest against this capital punishment. Rallies and agitations were

organized in Calcutta and other parts of the country. But nothing could prevent the imperialists from executing the sentence. Though all these did not leave any impression on Khudiram. He was in total mental peace. His weight was increased.

At last 11th August came. Khudiram boldly advanced to sacrifice his life. The next day's newspaper wrote: "Today Khudiram was hanged at dawn. He steadily stepped for execution platform cheerfully. Even when his face is covered with clothe, he was smiling." (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, August 12, 1908). *The Empire* reported: "Khudiram Bose was executed this morning It is alleged that he mounted the scaffold with his body erect. He was cheerful and smiling."

This boldness, valiant sacrifice, calmness became a symbol of revolt and youthfulness. It inspired the students and youths of one after another generation. The life of Khudiram became a symbol of self-dignity, boldness and deep love for poor and destitute. His sacrifice was not out of a momentary decision, but culmination of a struggling life. He is a great martyr of the uncompromising trend of India's freedom movement. Khudiram not only stirred the youths of pre-independent India, but still inspires the young and struggling hearts. In 1911, when Subhas Chandra Bose was a schoolboy, he observed the martyr's day by fasting. Similarly the young martyr Madhai Halder, who laid down his life protesting against the anti people policies of CPI(M)-government of West Bengal, observed his martyr's day at his home. He used to tell his mother Gayeswari Devi, "I will be like Khudiram!"

Due to this the ruling capitalist class and their stooges are afraid of martyrs like Khudiram. That's why they are trying to push these characters of the uncompromising trend of the freedom struggle into oblivion. In independent India, these fighters and martyrs were labelled as 'terrorists'. The uncompromising trend is not given importance in the history of freedom movement. The first Prime Minister of India, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, refused to unveil the statue of Khudiram as he did not represent the trend of non-violence movement. In the syllabus of NCERT textbooks Khudiram, Bhagat Singh, Asfaqullah have been described as terrorists. But people fighting for the cause of emancipation, of real freedom, for them Khudiram's life is an inexhaustible fountain of inspiration.

All India DSO observes the martyr's day of this great revolutionary in a befitting manner. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, great Marxist thinker of this era, educated us, "If we don't study and cult the characters of great men of past, we will be rootless." All India DSO never forgets this education. What is more, the struggle of remembering a revolutionary character can never be academic; rather it is inseparable with the struggle to build up a new social system, which will be free from all sorts of exploitation. In the occasion of the centennial martyrdom of Khudiram, the 11th August 2008 this is our heartfelt tribute to the great martyr.