

**“ A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF
BENOY KRISHNA CHOWDHURY
(1911 – 2000)”**

**THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF
JADAVPUR FOR THE DEGREE
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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
FACULTY OF ARTS**

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Certified that the thesis entitled

A Biographical Study of Benoy Krishna Chowdhury (1911-2000) submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my own work carried out under the Supervision of Dr. Amalendu De (Formerly Guru Nanak Professor of Indian History (J.U.) and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree of diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

Amalendu De

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INTRODUCTION

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury is undoubtedly considered as an outstanding person in the annals of Political enterprise in Modern West Bengal. Certainly he occupies a significant place especially among the Leftist Leaders of the Post-1947 decolonial phase. He has been invariably applauded by the 'Leftist' and many a 'Rightist' alike, as a renowned dedicated communist who has been sustained his political crusade against the empowered evil social forces during his times. As it appears from the present research that he never been endorsed mechanical transplantation and indiscriminate replication of Marxist principle without prior experimentation on indigenous soil condition. However, it is asserted that he was overwhelmingly influenced by the Marxist philosophy. This close study of his political activities and endeavours has been revealed his pragmatic liberal-Nationalist face ad simultaneously unveiled the genuine Humanist-Marxist portraiture of him. This microscopic observation has led to a conclusion that his was not a hardcore dogmatic Marxist by conviction but was only a liberal compassionate Humanist-Marxist who acted as a politician and administrator in Colonial and Decolonial Bengal as true benefactor of the vast disposed populace as far as possible within the then existing social framework.

In this theses, therefore, first ever attempt is made to show how the front ranking political personality of West Bengal responded to the problems of his political career which were dictated largely by the contemporary political environment and socio-economic settings of his immediate environs during before and after bifurcated Bengal.

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first deals with Benoy Krishna Chaudhuri's family background, educational endeavours and the early influences on his mind. The second chapter quite elaborately assesses the multiple aspects of his political career as a nationalist freedom fighter and

dedicated communist organizer related to the Colonial era. The third chapter projects his political endeavours from 1947 to 1971 as a capacity of indomitable communist crusader. Fourth Chapter which focuses on his valiant political role during the 'Reign of Semi- Fascist Terror' in West Bengal. Fifth Chapter explores his administrative capabilities as an important cabinet minister of the Left front Government who took a every opportunity to promote common people's interests in Modern West Bengal. The Sixth or Last Chapter considers his quest for the historical evolution of the Land System in Bengal.

For collecting material relevant to the subject of my thesis, I worked in the West Bengal State Secretariat Library, National Library, Bhawani Sen Library (Bhupesh Bhawan), Muzaffar Ahmed Library (Ganashakti Bhawan), Gandhi Memorial Library, Centre for Studies in Social Science Library, Jadavpur University Central Library, B.C.Roy Library, State Central Library, and Police Training College Library.

My deepest intellectual debts are to the eminent historian Professor Amalendu De who was my research supervisor. Professor De was a great source of inspiration. He has known this work closely from its very inception and his given invaluable guidance and all-out cooperation.

To, Mr. Pradipta Ray, Unsung Freelance Research Scholar, alumnus; Calcutta University, Modern History Department. I owe most were it not for his passionate, patient and labourious academic assistance throughout my research, this thesis would never have seen the light of the day.

Gaurav Chandra Dutt.

**A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF
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**CHAPTER – I : FORMATIVE YEAR
(1911-1924)**

Formative Years

CHAPTER – 1

(1911-1924)

Leader, however, great is a product of immediate environs. Personality of a leader, his views and ideas are undoubtedly shaped by the ambience in which he grows up and also by the influences of the people around him. For a proper evaluation of the career of a eminent personality it becomes imperative to study him in the context of his times and circumstances and obviously his family background.

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury was born on January 14th, 1911 at his maternal uncle house Sutra. His ancestral house was located at village Sihi, Police station – Monteshwar, District – Burdwan. Moteshwar “ A small village in the Kalna sub-division situated on the east bank of the Kashi river. The village is a head-quarters of a police station, and contains a sub-registry office there are some very old temples here one of which is dedicated to Siva under his name Monteshwar”¹. His father Grindranath Chaudhury was a stamp vendor at Burdwan Court by profession. Of late, he had set up a grocery shop after being inspired by the Gandhian Non-cooperation Movement. Reminiscing about his father, Benoy Chaudhury wrote;

“My father was a stamped vender at Burdwan Court. In 1921 he gave up this job and started running a grocery shop at Jhapantala, neighbouring village in Madhamgram. I wonder whether in giving up a job my father was in any way influenced by the then Non-cooperation Movement”².

His mother’s name was Bilashini Chaudhury. Benoy Chaudhury was the first son of his parents. The Chaudhury family had hundred sixty five Bighas of land and the members of the family were either engaged in business or service. No one in the family work on the firm which they possessed. Their vast and large land was cultivated

by hired labourers. So from this angle the class hierarchy of Chaudhury family was that of petty Jotedar³.

The Chaudhury family came originally from Mondal gram, a village under Memari Police Station and later the family move to Sihi gram only after they had inherited the landed property of Benoy Chaudhury's maternal fold. At that time this type of peoperty inheritance was a quite normal practice among the high castes of the Bengali Society⁴. Benoy Chaudhury actually came from land owing and trading family of the Uggro Kshatrya caste. "..... The consequence was the Aguri Caste, through esteemed highly respectable, has never attained the full status of the Kshatrya, as it would be done, to judge from other examples, had its origin been less recent. Through its name Aguri is contracted from Ugraha – Khetri, or 'the flerce khetris' (probably in allusion to its semi barbarous ancestors, the Sadgops of wild Gopbhum), it is a distinctly cultivating caste. Its members, at least those of one section of the caste, wear the sacred thread, and assert their superiority over the Sadgops from whom they have in part sprung, a pretension which, through scorned by the Sadgops, ids practically admitted by other Hindus.

The Aguri are popularly believed to be the modern representatives of the Ugra or Ugra Kshatryas mentioned in Manu : "from a Kshatryas by a Sudra girl in born a creature called and Ugra (cruel) which has a nature partaking both of Kshatrya and of Sudra and finds its pleasure in savage conduct". According to the same authority, their occupation is catching and killing animals that live in holes." They are distinctly, however, a cultivating class: many of them hold estates and tenures of various grades, and the bulk of the castes are fairly prosperous cultivators. In 1872 they were almost peculiar to the territories of the Burdwan Raj, and its is clear that

the Burdwan Khetri could have been the only Kshatrya concerned in a development which appeared in single estate in Bengal.....”⁵

Benoy Krishna’s elementary education was started according to the then then convention of the Bengali Bhadrалоке family in the Village Pathshala. Before 1920 he spent most of his days in villages, although only occasionally he used to go to Burdwan Town. During his intimate association with the village he had been able to receive the formal training in disciplined life style from his grand mother. He always remain grateful to this religiously devout and pious lady for having inculcated in him habits of healthy and clean living which remain with him till his end. To greet rising sun and to catch the first twitter of the birds became for him, not a mere ritual but a delight which he never missed during his ling and struggling public career.

‘My grand mother was very early riser. After getting up the bed she used to recite rhythmically one hundred and eight name of Shri Krishna and many such rhymes. As a result, I develop the habit of early rising from very young age. My grand mother was the senior most housewife of the family and all of our family members obeyed her. She was very generous and affectionate, and did not ever chide the daughters-in-law or any body else of the family.’⁵

These years he thus spent in his grand mother’s company, were not only the happiest days of his boyhood but became the richest experience and source of his early education. His grand mother must have been a women of considerable character of genuine human quality, tact ad immense patience to keep the large Chaudhury house hold together and in harmony. She was very fond of Benoy Krishna probably because he was only was son of the youngest son.

Having lost his father at an early age, Benoy Krishna develops a protective feeling towards his grand mother.

The harmonious relationship and pious communal feelings across the communities within the rural setting of his ancestral village were indelibly imprinted on Benoy Chaudhury's mind. In this connection, in his later life he recollects about peaceful coexistence in the village as a keen observer :

*'In our village population Hindus and Muslims were in almost equal proportion. There was on the whole, good and harmonious relation between two communities. Hindus used to participate without reservations in Muslim festivals like, Muharrum. Similarly, Men and women from the Muslim locality used to visit the Puja Panels in the Hindu area. They used to witness the Pujas from a distance and enjoy it then too. Personal relation was close and full warmth.'*⁶

After short period of study in a village Pathshala, Benoy Krishna at the age of nine went to the Municipal High School of Burdwan town along with his three brothers. The Municipal High School was an old, renowned, large educational Institution of Burdwan District. It was set up in the year 1855. This school had a reputation for its academic enrichment. A large number of students able to secured Govt. scholarship and every year numerous students of this school passed out with distinction. A separate arrangements for sports and games were also had been exist within the Institutional agenda. Benoy Krishna and his class mates were used to participate in different plays and games. The school also had a scout team. Four senior classes could join this particular squad. So, this kind of internal environment of this school simultaneously has been provide the essential curricular and co-curricular training for the advancement of the pupil.⁷

As a teenager Benoy Krishna also over joyed to see the festive mood of the Hindu Community with an eye of avid spectator. :

‘During the Pujas the artist from Krishnagar used to prepare beautiful painting on different episodes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the puranas; and these were kept open to public view for about a month. People – both males and females, from far-off places crowded to visit these works of art. During Saraswari Puja, thousands of people thronged at the banks of Krishna Sagar every year to witness the display of fireworks.8’

Of course his adolescent mind not only stimulated by the conventional socio-cultural inter communal life style of Burdwan common folk, he was also a close silent and keen observer of political maneuverability of common people and its leaders in Burdwan town since his early teens. Needless to say that his intimate family members were some how moulded by the contemporary dominant Swadeshi trend. His district had also its own legacy of unique and unified popular struggles against the colonial administration during the Pre-Gandhian and Gandhian era or initial phases of the 20th century Bengal.

With the start of the Swadeshi movement or Anti Partition Agitation at the turn of the century the Indian National Movement leap forward. Women, Students and large section of urban and rural population of Bengal and other parts of India became actively involve in politics for the first time. “The next half a decades of, the emergence of almost all the major political trends of the Indian National Movements from conservative moderation to political extremism, from terrorism to incipient socialism, from petitioning

and public speeches to passive resistance and Boycott. All had their origins in the movement". 9

This was the particular phase from 1903 to 1905 when moderate techniques of petitions memorandum and speeches, public meetings and press campaign holds full sway the objective was to turn public opinion in India and England against Colonial Administration. The hope was that these would yield sufficient pressure to prevent this Carzonian diabolic Act from occurring. The Colonial Central Government of India however remain passive, despite the large scale protest voiced against the partition proposals. The official decision to bifurcation of Bengal was announced on 19th July, 1905. 10

The former proclamation of the Swadeshi or Anti Partition Movement made on the 7th August 1905 in a meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall. The movement hither to sporadic and spontaneous, now had a focus and a leadership that was coming together at the 7th August meeting. The famous Boycott resolution passed on September. The Government announced the partition was to be effected on 16th October, 1905. 'Later in the day Ananda Mohan Bose and Surendranath Bannerjee addressed two huge mass meeting which drew crowds of 50,000 to 75,000 people'. The following weeks saw the popular protest meetings held almost everyday across Bengal. 11

After 1905 however in Bengal the extremism acquired a dominant influence over the Swadeshi agitation several new forms of mass mobilization and political techniques of struggle now began to emerge at the popular level. The militant nationalists put forward several new ideas at the theoretical, propagandistic and

programmatic plan. Political independence was to be achieved by converting the movement into a mass movement through the extension of Boycott into a full scale movement with the application of non-cooperation and passive resistance. The extended Boycott was to include boycott of foreign goods, boycott of Government schools and colleges, courts titles and government services. They also organized and used these strikes as a tool against the colonial administration. The greatest visible success at the practical and popular level the Boycott and a public bonfire of foreign cloth, picketing of shops, selling foreign goods all became common in remote areas of Bengal as well as many important district town and cities throughout India.

To some extent the movement was successful through the different techniques of mass mobilization, public meeting and rallies. In different regions of India numerous meetings and processions were took place. Many districts, talukas, villages and towns felt the radical heat of popular sentiment and deep anguish.

One of the significant aspect of the Swadeshi movement was a great stress given to Atmashakti or self reliance as a inalienable part of the struggle. Self reliance in various fields like as the reasserting of national dignity, honour and confidence. Self-help and constructive work at the village level was envisioned for social and economic regeneration of vast common folk.

Swadeshi movement or anti partition activity with it's multiple political programme and activity was able to draw a large section of people in modern political arena for the time in India. ¹²

Along with the other districts of undivided Bengal Swadeshi movement or anti partition agitation engulfed the Burdwan district also. The intra and inter communal leadership and common people were actively participated in the anti partition upsurge. Prominent district leader Promothonath Mukherjee, Arobinda Prakash Ghosh, Manabendra Chattopadhyay, Abinash Chakrabarty, Rakhal Chandra Deb, Balai Deb Sharma, Swami Kamalananda and Abul Kashem played the leading role in this district. After the promalgamation of Bengal partition the large number of agitated people parading the streets, public meeting and demonstrations were held at different localities of different villages of Burdwan. Protest meeting were organized at katwa, Baidyapore, Dhatrigram, Anukhal, Bakhnapara et al. Patriotic Swadeshi centiment and anti imperialist ideas has been accelerated and extended in rural tracts of Burdwan during the Swadeshi phase of Bengal politics. Historians of Burdwan districts are unanimously admitted that the Kalna Sub-division certainly occupied a special significant place in the history of the Swadeshi agitation in Burdwan. Intense anti partition movement was launched by the people of Kalna town and it's leadership was provided by the leaders like Upendra Nath Hazra, Debendra Nath Sen and Upendra Nath Sen. At Memari nationalist leader Abul Kashem was the main organizer of the anti-partition agitation. In many places of burdwan the boycott of foreign goods and public burning of foreign cloth were organized. With the establishment of few national school, the expression of swadeshi constructive ideas was also materialized. Contemporary district leadership were also took up specific plan and programme for spreading the spirit of nationalistic education across the district. Development and extention of rural small scale industries was included as an important agenda in their political programme. 13

1906 onwards militant nationalism and revolutionary terrorism also spread their wings over the vast terrain of district politics. The close associate of Aurobinda Ghosh renowned revolutionary like Jatindra Nath Bandhopadhyay, Bhupendra Nath Dutta, Rash Bihari Basu, Pulin Bihari Das, Manabendra Nath Chattopadhyay and others were hailed from this district. Number of young people of Burdwan were baptized revolutionary terrorism by the eminent contemporary revolutionaries of Bengal. Even it was also claimed that Aurobindo Prakash Ghosh has been maintained a close linkage with the Gaddhar party. Two important revolutionary organizations of Bengal Yugantar and Anushilan Samity set up their revolutionary wing during the Swadeshi phase in Burdwan. Famous revolutionary leader of Benaras Sachindra Nath himself actively associated with the Burdwan branch of Anushilan group. Due to intra party squabble the Anushilan Samity failed to build their organization upon strong political base. In 1913 a devastating flood was broke out in Burdwan district and at that time Jatindra Nath Mukherjee, Amarendra Nath Chatterjee, Bipin Bihari Ganguly and Makhan Lal Sen like eminent revolutionary figures has been get an opportunity to communicate each other and subsequently an important discussion was held between them on district specific unified revolutionary and terroristic plan and programme. Yugantar revolutionary group to some extent had been mobilized its influence among young people of Burdwan. At Searasol village Nibaran Ghatak one of the follower of Bipin Behari Ganguly and his close relative Dukuribala Debi set up a small centre of Yugantar group. At that time Atmonnati Samiti was very much active as a branch of Yugantar group in Burdwan town. ¹⁴

Anusilan Samiti failed to build up their organizational capacity due to lack of proper intra party co-ordination and desirable

cohesion among its revolutionary workers. Till today, there has been no such comprehensible serious and pains taking research work carried out on the nature of true relationship between different revolutionary group of Burdwan district during the early phase of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal. As per as scholar's knowlwdge goes that professor Probodh Chandra Sen and Radha KAnta Dikshit were intimately associated with the Anushilan Band. Another revolutionary of Burdwan Ajit Saran Basu was an active follower of Barindra Kumar Ghosh, the eminent revolutionary leader of Bengal engaged himself in some revolutionary activities. Renowned district Congress Leader Jadabendranath Panja and Jitendranath Mitra were greatly inspired by Aurobinda Ghosh's radical extremist ideas during Swadeshi period. Jitendranath Mitra has been maintained a close communication with the National Council of Education. Scholars explored the close linkage between Jatindranath Roy, the famous Anushilan leader of North Bengal and BIjoy Kumar Bhattacharya who in his later political life was mainly responsible for political base of Congress party in this District. It was now became evident that organizational weakness and incapable leadership played as the major impediment to real consolidation of revolutionary movement in Burdwan in spite of large presence of brave and patriotic young force. ¹⁵

The dawn of the 20th Century proves inauspicious for the mighty colonial rule in India. The first decade witnesses the formation of strong popular prolific resentments against the British administration, which leave a deep impact on the future course of the freedom movement. At that time serious symptoms of troubles for the imperial rule erupt for the first time. The abject failure of the early moderate congress leadership of secure any favorable concession from the colonial regime led to widespread unrest and

restlessness among Indians. The nations clamours for radical actions leading to the emergence of Militant Nationalism, Swedeshism and Revolutionary Terrorism. The second decade of the 20th Century sees the far more maturing of the techniques of the freedom struggle. Indian nationalist support the British war efforts during the First World War in the hope of receiving some concessions later but they are betrayed. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant starts movements for Home Rule. Meanwhile, the British government retaliates and passes the infamous Rowlatt Act to suppress the nationalist agitations. The incident that follows the passing of the act is regarded as one of the most barbaric acts of political repression in colonial India – The Jallianwala massacre in 1919. Now the stage is set for the rise of a different kind of charismatic mass leader Mahatma Gandhi on the National political platform. Unfortunately on 1st August in 1920 the first truly mass leader of Modern Indian Politics Bal Gangadhar Tilak was passed away. The mournful positive reaction of Burdwan people against the firebrand nationalist leader Tilak’s sad demise was reflected through the Benoy Chaudhury’s vivid recollection.

‘Our house in Burdwan was as told earlier very close to the main street – hardly one minute of walking distance. All important incidents of the town, therefore, reached us very quickly. I got the news of Tilak’s death. On seeing the mourners’ procession from the roof-top, I got down, joined the procession and walked almost upto the Town Hall, though at that time I did not know about Tilak – who he was or what he did. 16

Sri Nibaran Ghatak a poet and teacher of Kazi Nazrul Islam was intimately connected with the Chaudhury family. Shri Ghatak’s aunt Dookari Bala Devi who served two years imprisonment due to

her involvement with the revolutionary terrorist activities. Shri Panchnan Chaudhury one of the member of Benoy Chaudhury's family was also detained without trail for his close association with the revolutionary groups. We have already mentioned that Benoy Chaudhury's father was greatly influenced by the Gandhi and non-cooperation movement of Bengal in the early twenty's. His maternal uncle who was a train guard of East India Railway Company had been actively associated with the Railway Trade Union Movement in it's early phase. So that kind of political consciousness' within the family ambit definitely left an impact on the impressionable responsive mind of Benoy chaudhury. ¹⁷ From his early student life, he was well acquainted with the contemporary political scene in India.

By 1920 Mahatma Gandhi had became the undisputed leader of the Indian freedom struggle. The nationalist agitation against the Rowlatt Act had touched Hindus and Muslims alike, bringing them together in main stream political activity. During the period non co-operation movement and Khilafat agitation simultaneously had been energized the struggling Indian people. The Indian National Congress for the first time 1920 accepted a radical programme, a programme of action incorporating all segments of Indian Society. The eminent Legal professional and famous Congress leader Chittaranjan Das was accepted this programme on certain condition. The programme initiated by Mahatma Gandhi in the Congress was not all together unknown or total novel among Bengali People. In 1905-1908 during hey day of Swadeshi Movement his kind of programmes more or less chalked out by the Bengal leaders. The radical tone of Non-cooperation Movement against the colonial administration was launched earlier by the Khilafat Conference, but by the Congress adoption of the Non-cooperation element within the

mainstream National Movement was sprang up with its new energy and new form. January 1921 onwards it began to register considerable success through out the country. Gandhiji along with the Mahammad Ali and Saukat Ali who were the front ranking leaders of Khilafat Movement, undertook a nation wide tour. ¹⁸

“ The Non-cooperation Khilafat alliance made 1921-22 was possible the point of greatest strength and unity in the entire history of the National Movement of Bengal. It is true the most political leader accepted Gandhi very late, only with C.R. Das conversion of Nagpur after which even the terrorist agreed to give Gandhian method a trial for a year.”¹⁹ under the influence of C.R. Das’s charismatic leadership the released revolutionary terrorist found a space here and happily joined the Congress as its volunteers at grass root level in 1921. ²⁰

The Annual session of Congress was held at Nagpur in 1920. All the opposition against the Gandhian scheme had wiped out. Chittaranjan Das who moved the main resolution on non-cooperation after his political settlement with Mahatma Gandhi. The programme of non-cooperation included the surrender of titles and honours, boycott of Government sponsored educational institutions, law courts, foreign commodities, resignation from Government service, non payment to taxes. Congress organizations was encouraged the people to set up a national educational institutions, to establish the village level panchayat’s to accelerate the hand spinning and weaving activity. Leader’s were also asked to maintain Hindu Muslim unity, give up untouchability and practice and observe strict non violence. Mahatma Gadhi promised to the entire nation that if the programmes was totally materialized then Swaraj would be achieved within a year. The clear out provision of extra –

constitutional mass action within the Congress programme has been able to attract quite a large number of revolutionary terrorists belonging to different group affiliations in Bengal. ²³

When Britain declared war against Turkey in November 1914, the anti-Congress and pro-colonial Government attitude of the Muslim League was changed with the induction of younger men. The prominent younger League activists like Muhammad Ali, Wazid Hassan, Abul Kalam Azad and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were eager to interact frequently between the League and the Congress. At that time the Muslims refused to believe that Britain's action was secular in nature, so their leadership had been tried to mobilize their confrontational approach towards the British Raj. The colonial administration was very soon stepped up to retaliate the Pro-Turkish element in India. In the meanwhile the defeat to Turkey created the apprehension of Islam in danger, an issue that could be effectively used to organize the mass support. The result of this quick development was a shift in Muslim League leadership from the moderate constitutionalist to those who asserted on broad-based Islamic mass movement. This particular context was thus prepared for the beginning of the Khilafat movement. Behind the Khilafat movement were the rumors about a harsh peace settlement being forcibly imposed on the weak Ottoman emperor who was still respected as the Khalifat or the supreme spiritual head of the Islamic by the Khilafat committee in Bombay. Undoubtedly it was a Pan-Islamic movement in all its outward appearance and the cause had nothing to do with India from the angle of a materialistic point of view. The leaders actually had little concern about restructuring the political or geo-political realities in the Middle East area but they found that through this mobilization the divided Indian Muslim

Community could be united within a very short span of time. The anti British element within the Khilafat agitation inspired Mahatma Gandhi to support this Islamic cause in a bid to bring the Indian Muslims in to the main political arena of Indian nationalism. The summer of 1920 onwards Mahatma Gandhi and Saikat Ali tour extensively across the country to mobilizing the public support for the non-cooperation Khilafat programme. After the withdrawal of Rowlatt Satyagraha, for the first time through the Khilafat non-cooperation amalgamation created an another splendid opportunity came into being to unite the Hindu and Muslim in their common struggle against the colonial machinery. ²⁴

The Congress leadership organized hundreds of meetings and mobilized a large number of political workers throughout India. In the first month itself almost 90,000 students left their educational institutions and joined more than 800 National School & Colleges that has been already established all over India. In Bengal Chittaranjan Das played a vital role in promoting the non-cooperation movement with the help of his able political commander like Subhas Chandra Bose, Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, Birendra Nath Sasmal and others. The educational boycott was particularly successful in undivided Bengal,. The students of Calcutta able to organize the province wide large scale strike. ²⁵

During the pen ultimate phase of the 19th Century the liberal, and constitutionalist and moderate Congress leadership filed to mobilize their organizational network in Burdwan district. Although since 1876 a few Hindu and Muslim local leaders of Burdwan intimately connected with the contemporary nationalist politics. Indian association had been set up it's branches at Burdwan town, Kalna town and Purbastahli at that time Nalinakhya Basu,

Jagatbandhu Mitra, Moulabi Muhammad Iasin and Abul Kasem has been frequently interacted with the eminent nationalist leader Surendra Nath Banerjee. In 1899 and in 1904 two political sessions of Indian National Conference was held at Burdwan town.²⁶

Brilliant legal professional of Bengal Rashbihari Ghosh held from this district and he adorned the Presidents chair of the two successive sessions of Indian National Congress in 1907 at Surat and in 1908 at Madras. His political views were respected by both moderates and extremist. He made a princely donation to the National Council of Education during the Swadeshi Phase of Indian politics²⁷. So, the Burdwan district certainly has been maintained somehow it's close linkage with the main stream Indian political activity since last half of the 19th Century.

The first major Gandhi led main stream Indian political upheaval against the colonial regime naturally touched the Burdwan district. Irrespective of community affiliation the people of Burdwan actively responded to the Khilafat Non-Cooperation movement. Just after the first World War anti imperialist Khilafat agitation has been gathered it's momentum and substantially popularized among Muslim community. District congress leader Mohammad Iasin was played the leading role to mobilize the Muslim masses against the local colonial authority. Other nationalist Muslim leaders of Burdwan like Abul Hayat, Molla Jahed Ali, Abul Kader, Kachi Mian were actively cooperated with him. A revolutionary Balai Deb Sharma has been maintained very cordial relationship with this Muslim leadership²⁸.

Till 1925 the most significant aspect of Muslim politics in Burdwan district was however it's non communal nature and free

from sectarian tendencies. In 1921 such type of congenial communal ambience helped the district Congress leadership to some extent accelerate their Non-Cooperation Khilafat programmes at Kalna, Katwa, Assansol, Baikunthapur, Burdwan town and other rural areas. District Congress President Muhammad Iasin, district Congress Secretary Jadavendra Nath Panja, Jitendra Nath Mitra, Dr. Binod Bihar Mukherjee, Dr. Gunendra Nath Mukherjee, Jahed Ali, Hare Krishna Mondal, Annada Mondal, Khudiram Modak, Abul Hayat Bijoy Bhattacharya, Sudhin Roy, Promotha Banerjee and other political activist were successfully built up the mass mobilization against the imperialist Government in Burdwan districts but feudal, affluent and educated Pro-British elements of this district did not cooperative with the nationalist agitators. The young members of Swaraswati Karma Mandir of Assansol undoubtedly tried their best to spread out the secular and national sentiments across the district. In 1922 nationalist of Burdwan has been set up two National Schools in Burdwan Town and at Baikunthapur²⁹. During the period the Khilafat non-cooperation political compromise definitely has been stimulated the Burdwan people irrespective of their community affiliation. Recollects about the non-cooperation movements and Khilafat agitations, Benoy Chaudhury wrote :

‘On the way to our school, in the Muslim Hotel and tea-shop at Tentultala, I saw the pictures of Mahammad Ali and Saukat Ali. I came to hear of Khilafat Movement too. In 1921, I also heard of non-cooperation movement but I did not have any clear ideas about these movements. During the years 1921-22, mass meeting were held frequently in the open space at Kalitala and the meeting were preceded by distribution of leaflets which I used to collect before hand. Gradually, I started attending these meeting. Although I could not

understand everything very clearly, I was able to sense that some large-scale activities were going on to make our country independent.’³⁰

Undoubtedly Benoy Krishna Chaudhury was deeply impressed by the political activities that was going on during his school days. But his doubts and enquiries not totally disappear, he felt that here was a situation prevailing due to foreign colonial subjugation.

‘In our text books, we were reading poems like “Swadhinata Hinatay Ke Bachite Chay”, etc. composed by Rangalal Bandhopadhayay. Beggars moving from door to door use to sing in their own style “Ekbar Biday De Ma Ghure Asi” – a composition based on the story of Kshudiram when he was sent to the gallows. The songs were moving and full of pathos and aroused in our adolescent minds and intense desire to make the country free. When I grew a bit older and attained the age of twelve or thirteen, I discovered among the books stacked in a big wooden trunk kept in our reading room (most of which were the old text books of our uncles) the biographies of Mazzini and Garibaldi and some othe books of allied nature. These books I carried to my school together with my regular text books, and went through them during the leisure hours. I developed an ardent desire to read books of similar kind. In the mean time, I was able to collect “Chayanika” by Rabindra Nath and one of “Sanchita” by Nazrul. These books I enjoyed immensely. I also read story of Rana Pratap and tales heroism of the Rajputs. Two poems which I liked most were : “Ebar Phirao More” by Rabindranath and “Durgama Girin Kanatara Maru” by Nazrul. The determination to dedicate myself to the emancipation the country gradually to hold of my mind.’³¹

Benoy Chaudhury brought up in an family of enlightened educational environment which had some space for quite advanced nationalist thinking. Initially none of Chaudhury families lady members was formally educated enough to gone through the newspapers and periodicals. Later on one of Benoy Chaudhury's aunt came in his family. She had the necessary educational background to read books and magazines. At the same time one of his close relative Banajaksha Chaudhury was able to get his graduate degree from K.N. College, Berhampore. Chaudhury family subscribed to popular periodicals "Bharatbarsha" and "Prabashi". At that time a lot of significant essays and articles published in "Prabashi" were of superior quality and Benoy Chaudhury was used to read them all. From local Raj Public Library, too he had borrowed books for reading. During colonial period there are five public libraries in the Burdwan district : The Burdwan Raj Public Library, The Kalna Mayo Library, The Katwa Shyamlal Library and Ranigunj Public Library. Of these the Burdwan Raj Library is largest and most important. It was established in 1881 and 1908-1909 was visited by seventy thousand four thirty five persons. These important institution entirely patronized by the Zamindari House of Burdwan.³²

On 5th February, 1922 irritated by the behaviour of some policemen a section of people attacked them. The police opened fire. Then the angry mob has been burn down the Chauri Chaura Police Station in Gorkhpore district of united province. All 22 policemen were done to death. Aftermath of the incident, Mahatma Gandhi decided to withdraw the movement. The Congress working committee has been ratified it's supreme leader's decision. Thus on 12th February 1922 the non-cooperation movement came to an end³³.

“The withdrawal of Non-Cooperation movement in February 1922 was followed by the arrest of Gandhiji in March and his conviction and imprisonment for six years for the crime of spreading disaffection against the Government. The result was the spread of disintegration, disorganization and demoralization in the nationalist ranks. Their arrows the danger of the movement lapsing into passivity. Many began to question the wisdom of the total Gandhian strategy. Others started looking for ways out to the impasses.”³⁴

At that time two eminent national level Congress leaders Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru suggested that the nationalist’s should end the boycott of legislative councils. They argued through the council entry of nationalist’s the popular expression will get it’s effective and fast tempo against the oppressive colonial bureaucratic machinery. It would be opening a new avenue in the freedom struggle. On 1st January, 1923 the Swaraj party was formed under Nehru one of the Security of the new party or the pro-changers group.³⁵

The Swarajist activity in the legislative politics was splendid. It inspired the nations politicized individuals. The powerful British bureaucracy was humbled in the councils due to Swarajist vigorous political articulations. During 1923-1924 due to Chittaranjan Motilal led proactive successful political campaign the Swarajist captured a large number of seats within the representative public bodies across the countries.³⁶

In the mid twenties of the 20th Century the Swaraj party’s Bengal branch had been organized frequently numerous public

meeting throughout the undivided Bengal. At Burdwan district many public meeting were also held quite frequently during the years in 1924-1925 in Burdwan. In this context, Benoy Chaudhuy reminiscing about Swarajist supremo Chittaranjan Das's memorable and untiring political campaign in Burdwan.

'Sometime in the middle of 1924, a public meeting was called on the ground adjoining the Town Hall. A platform was erected on the verandah at the southern side of the hall. Chittaranjan Das addressed the meeting from that verandah. With Saroj and some other friends, I attended the meeting in the course of his speech, Deshbandhu's attention suddenly turn to a parasitic creeper that surrounded a tamarind tree which stood on his left. Deshbandhu compared India to the big tree and told the audience that just like the creeper the British rule entangled our country from all sides and was darning off all our resources. Independence was the only way out. Then he gave a clarion call to everybody present – especially the students and the youths, to come forward and joined the freedom struggle. The speech of Deshbandhu left a deep impression on our minds and we resolved to develop ourselves for the emancipation of the country'.³⁷

In the mean time revolutionaries of Bengal gradually became disillusioned by the political failure of the Gandhian congress. Bipin Behari Ganguly, Hari Narayan Chanda, Surya Sen, Ananta Singh tried to reorganize and revitalized the revolutionary terrorism in Bengal. On 1st March, 1924 revolutionary Gopinath Saha the assailant of E day was executed.³⁸

On the other front the Bengal politics felt a severe jolt and the Swarajist suffered a major loss when C.R. Das died on 16th June, 1925. After his permanent departure from the political arena of

Bengal and India. The communalism and factionalism raised its ugly head and the political frustration of the common man began to find its expression in communal strife.³⁹

The momentous changes that were taking place and had become manifest by the early 20th century, inevitably caught the imagination of juvenile, young reception minds, especially of those who had received English education and were more exposed to the new volatile political climate. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury came from such a background. He belongs to that generation of young men who had before them many questions, enquiries, challenges and options in life.

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**A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF
BENOY KRISHNA
CHOWDHURY
(1911-2000)**

**CHAPTER-II : STRUGGLING YEARS
(1925-1947)**

Struggling Years

CHAPTER – 2

(1925-1947)

Since his early schooling days Benoy Krishna Chaudhury's mind really has been electrified by the pro-nationalist sentiments. In this context it is needed to say that he was successfully came out in the matriculation examination in 1927. However, his initial political career with the revolutionary terrorism was practically began in 1928. At that time he was pursuing his inter-mediate studies at Baptist Mission College of Srirampore along with his intimate friend Saroj Mukherjee. ¹

In undivided Bengal, the educated middle class students were always in the forefront of the struggle for political emancipation from oppressive colonial regime. They were emotionally and intellectually prepared by the profound influence of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's "Anandamath", the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, the patriotic songs of Rabindra Nath Tagore, the clarion call of Aurobindo Ghosh & Bipin Chandra Pal. Basically they were played a front runners role in the Anti-partition and Swadeshi, Revolutionary and all major Gandhian mass movements. Even, a Non-Congress Movement was also greatly indebted to the militant and vibrant student's initiatives. "According to a specific estimate that more than 90% of the active workers of the revolutionary parties were belonged to the student fold" ². But until 1928 the students had no organizations of their own. Ultimately in the same year the All Bengal Students Associations was formally set up.

Within two months after his admission at Srirampore College, Benoy Chaudhury came in an intimate contact with the revolutionary Panchu Gopal Bhaduri. One or Two months later he has enrolled as a member of the Jugantar Party. He also got acquainted with Nibaron Mitra, Dharanath Bhattacharya and many other revolutionary activists. In the fag end of 1928 he fortunately mate the eminent revolutionary leader Bipin Bihari Ganguly of Jugantar group in Calcutta. Almost at the same time his close linkage has been established with the two famous Congress activists Atulya Ghosh and Panchanan Basu 3.

“In 1927 Benoy Chaudhury, Saroj Mukherjee and others were frequent visitor to the Congress office at Burdwan Town. Benoy Krishna’s along with Fakir Roy initially concentrated all their attention on a unified student-youth combined movement in the district. Benoy Krishna’s had always maintained very intimate connection with Fakir Roy. At that time Fakir Roy devoted himself preach for the preparation of an armed and militant type struggle against the colonial administration among his close-young and energetic associates. During this time onwards Benoy Krishna’s mind was very much infused with the armed revolutionary plans and programme. He also try to inspired his intimate friend Saroj and others by the revolutionary ideas and its possible implementation. Saroj himself and other friends, associates were regularly assembled at Bardhaman town in the Benoy Krishna’s residence, where they had taken and avid interest on different proscribed titles such as Pather Dabi, Life and Activities of Mazzini, Garibaldi, Dunbrin etc. including many novels an dramas also. Benoy Krishna was a sincere, studious young man, but not at all careerist type. He is developed a curious indifference to

temporal matters for the time being. At times even he had an aspiration to lead his future life as a saint. During that particular phase of his life his mind basically moulded by the introvert spiritual traits” 4.

During the late twenties and early thirties generally three specific type of group assemble regularly at different locations in Calcutta, these groups were; i) Congress activists, ii) Revolutionary workers and iii) Trades Unionist. These groups were habitually discussed among themselves on political matters, its related problems and possible solutions. Benoy Krishna occasionally accompanied with Saroj Mukherjee and others to meet many metropolis based political leaders and workers in Calcutta. Saroj and Benoy mainly maintained their intimate connections with the Jugantar group a revolutionary out fit of the then Bengal. Of course they were definitely frequented in the Jugantar office, but they also visited in the other places of political importance like; residence of C.R. Das – Basanti Devi, J.M. Sengupta – Nelly Sengupta, Sarat Chandra Bose – Subhas Chandra Bose, J.C. Gupta, B.B. Ganguly, B.S. Nahar etc., a temporary shelter of Anushilan Samity – another eminent revolutionary out fit of Bengal. The duo not so often met trade union leaders who at that time took up their shelter in two different locations in Calcutta; one was situated at Mechua Bazar area and another was exits just behind the Basumati office at Boubazar.

Benoy Krishna, Saroj and other young political activists were less frequented to the Atma Shakti Library, Shakti Press, Saraswati library, Book Company, Indian Publishers Association, Barman Publishing House etc. These were located in North and

Central Calcutta. Apart from different publication houses, whenever get an opportunity they occasionally visited also Khadi Bhandar, Abhoy Ashram, Khadi Pratishthan of staunch Gandhian Satish Dasgupta.

During that particular phase in Howrah Benoy Krishna and Fakir Roy always maintained a very close connection with the Bahgat Singh's group name Hindustan Socialist Republican Association Party and Army (HSRP and HSRA) through Jliban Maity. One particular revolutionary and a very close associates of Bhagat Singh's is certainly worth mentioned here non other than Batukeshwar Dutta hails from Bardhaman district. Later he was convicted along with other revolutionaries in the Lahore Conspiracy Case during thirties 5.

After the certain suspension of the Gandhi led mainstream Non-Cooperation Movement many shattered young people began to look for violent alternatives. They were not attracted by the Parliamentary politics of the Swarajists and gradually they became to enthusiastic about violent revolutionary terrorism, so their active motivation and hard work certainly culminated through the set up of different secret societies in many districts of Bengal. In this regard Bardhaman was no exception. Here aftermath of the non-cooperation movement the Gandhi of Ranigunj Bhima Charan Roy, Fakir Chandra Roy combined had been sincerely trying to formed a separate secret society in Bardhaman district.

Manmatha Nath Sen, Radha Kanta Dixit, Bhima Charan Roy, Fakir Chandra Roy were present in a secret meeting held at Manmatha Nath's residence on a specific night. Manmatha Nath Sen conducted the meeting and then a new revolutionary

secret society was born. In its embryonic stage Manmatha Nath took over his charge as a president, Fakir Charan became the Secretary and Radha Kanta crowned as a Treasurer of this society. The organizing committee tries to made elaborate preparation for the mobilization of youth forces in different segments in the district.

As far as possible enterprising Fakir Charan toured entire Bardhaman district to consolidate this secret organization with profusion of young and energetic blood. His persistence effort definitely produced some results. Young Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Saroj Mukherjee, Jagannath Sen, Kala Chand Banerjee, Rama Pada Patra, Durga Das Halder, Mukti Pada Chatterjee, Pramatha Nath Basu, Helaram Chatterjee, Dharendra Nath Chatterjee and many others associated themselves with the newly born revolutionary society 6.

In 1925 an All India Student Conference was organized at Calcutta. From Bardhaman District the two political activists Fakir Charan Roy and Sudhindra Nath Sarkar participated in it as their capacity of the student representative respectively. By the untiring efforts of Fakir Charan Roy the student-youth organization was took its formal shape and simultaneously the leftist revolutionary endeavour also had been gets acceleration.

Patriotic youths of Bardhaman organized a revolutionary outfit named as the Gupta Samity in 1928. Manmatha Nath Sen, Fakir Charan Roy, Nibaran Ghatak, Dukuribala Devi, Saroj Mukherjee, Helaram Chatterjee, Benoy Krishna chaudhury and other congress workers were enrolled their membership with the revolutionary organization. Strong presence and sound existence of

Gupta Samity has been never allowed Sri Sangha or Anushilan Samity like alternative revolutionary functionaries to gain and easy access fro their active operation in Bardhaman town. Gupta samity of Bardhaman always maintained its closed organization rapport with Jugantar group ⁷. In order to understand the nature of the Jugantar activists adventure better, we must get form a clearer conception of the group's objectives from R.E.A. Spl. Superintendent IB, CID, Bengal's report in 1926 (1st Jan to 30th June).

“The Jugantar party has adhered to his policy non-violence, but there is no reason to believe that this policy is dictated by anything other than expediency for members of this party were among those who expressed their joy at the murder of Rai Bahadur Bhupendra Nath Chatterjee. Like that of other parties the ultimate aim of this party is revolution. It is, however realized that the whole country must be prepared for it and that the only way to do this is to established influence in political and social bodies and slowly work towards this end. These views are those expressed by the leaders, but they can be taken as the views of the party as a whole for those members who strongly favour immediate violence would be very soon joined the New Violence Party ⁸.

The hidden agenda of the Jugantar revolutionary outfit has been clearly reflected through the R.E.A. Spl. Superintendent IB, CID, Bengal's report in 1926. He categorically stated;

“As stated in previous notes the present policy of Jugantar party is non-violent, but it has arms and its aim is to established influence in political and social bodies and prepare the

country for revolution against British Rule, to which end it is organizing a secret party under cover of its political activities. The energies of the party are now directed towards the consolidation of its influence in the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and in the last note mention was made of the formation of a definite party in the congress called The Karmi Sangha or Workers League, representing the interest of this revolutionary group. Branches of the league have been formed in the mufassal and in a few districts.”

The sudden suspension of the Non-cooperation Movement disheartened the high aspiration of Indian people about the much visualized independence from foreign colonial subjugation. Especially many young people began to question the very basic strategy of the Congress led national leadership and its blind emphasis on non-violence tactics. Consequently the younger generation of political activists began to look for certain alternatives to challenge the foreign political dominance. They were repulsed by the parliamentary politics of the Swarajists or Pro Changer Group and as well as the undramatic constructive work of the No-Changer band. Numerous young activists were certainly drawn to the idea that violent tactics alone would successfully emancipate and decolonized India. At that time Revolutionary Terrorism again became very much attractive under the shadow of tremendous disillusionment and frustration. Eventually too district strands of revolutionary terrorism sprang-up-one in Punjab, United Province and Bihar and the other in Bengal. But both these stands came under the spell of several emerging new social forces. One was the upswing trade unionism after the First World War. The rebellious leaders of revolutionary terrorism see the revolutionary

potential of the new class and desired to mobilize it for the national liberation movement. The second major influence was that of the Russian Revolution and the success of the budding Bolshevik led Socialist States consolidation. The third influence was that of the newly sprouting Communist groups with their emphasis on Marxism, Socialism and the indomitable power house of proletariat. ¹⁰

Eminent historian Bipan Chandra rightly observed;

*“The retreat of 1922 proved to be temporary political apathy began to disappear in 1927-1928 when students and other young people, inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, once again became active. All over the country, left oriented youth league and students associations were formed and their conferences held. In 1925 the Communist Party of India came in to existence. In many parts of the country, strong peasant movement against Zaminder’s oppression and high land revenue demand were organized. The famous Bardouli Satyagraha organized 1928. There was also rapid growth of trade unionism, and labours strikes occurred on large-scale between 1928-1929”.*¹¹

In Northern India the revolutionary terrorist movement took a radical turn towards socialism under the leadership of Chandra Shekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh. A dramatic manifestation of their valiant activity was the murder of a British officer Saunders by Bhagat Singh and his associates at Lahore in December 1928 and the throwing of a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly in April 1929 by Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta. ¹²

In Bengal, too the revolutionary terrorists started re-organizing and developing their revolutionary activities after 1925. At the same time many of them continued to work in the different Congress organization as an officially enrolled member. In April'1930 Bengal's revolutionaries organized a raid on the police armoury at Chittagong under the leadership of Surya Sen. The Chittagong affair was followed in rapid succession by several major events like the 25th August bomb incident occurred at Dalhousie Square by the Calcutta Jugantar Group, the murder of Lowman at Dacca by Bengal volunteers members on 29th August and another Bengal Volunteers sensational raid on the Writers Buildings the administrative nerve centre of Bengal – on 8th December. In the course of the year eleven British officials and ten Non-Officials were killed, Twelve British officers and Fourteenth Non-officials were injured. Four hundred and fifty four were held under preventive detention. The colonial government came down heavily on the revolutionaries. Many of them were arrested and tried in series of famous cases. The heroic statements of the young revolutionaries in the court and their fearless and defied attitude won the sympathy and admiration of the entire nation. Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru became household names. Common mass literally wept when these valiant revolutionary fighters of the mother land were executed in March'1931. Chandra Shekhar Azad was also dead in a shooting encounter with the police at Alahabad in the same year. Surya Sen was also arrested and hanged in January'1934. Many of his associates were caught and sentenced to long - term imprisonment. A large number of both Bengal and North – Indian revolutionaries were send exile in Andaman's. 13

Renewed tremendous nationalist discontent found reflection in early 1928 in the powerful mass upsurge against the all-White Simon Commission, sent to India to investigate India's fitness for the further installment of constitutional reforms. Wherever the Commission went, it was greeted with strikes and black-flag popular demonstrations. The Simon Boycott Movement provided the first acid test of political maneuverability for the new generation of youth. The youths were played the most active role in this agitation and through their energetic endeavor the movement took its shape along a militant line. ¹⁴

Apart from the political activities which the Congress carried on at different segments of our society, there were a number of other trends that kept political euphoria 1929 at fever-pitch on March 20'1929 in a major operation, the Colonial Government arrested 31 labour leaders, most of them belonged to the communist fold. The arrested labour activists were taken to Meerut, in United Province, for trial. This repressive administrative action by the British Government was condemned by the sections of Nationalist Leadership. ¹⁵

The new radial spirit was also reflected at the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress in December'1929. Under the Presidentship of Jawharlal Nehru the Congress declared that full independence was to be the Congress ultimate goal on 31st December of the same year. And to achieve it a civil disobedient movement would be launched under the stewardship of Mahatma Gandhi. ¹⁶

Keeping this contemporary historical back drop in mind it is possible to throw sufficient light on the prolific and multifaceted political activities of Benoy Krishna Chowdhury's struggling years in un-divided Bengal. At the time Benoy Krishna was actively involved in revolutionary activities with quiet communist tinge that were going on in South-western Bengal. He reminiscing about the polyphonic revolutionary endeavors in the above mention geographical segment of the province;

“During the thirties, apart from the communist party, several other national revolutionary groups in undivided Bengal gradually became attracted to Marxism and Leninism and started working for social transformation. Here I mention the names of only those groups which were at work in Burdwan and Hooghly districts, as I, too, was intimately connected with this groups. In 1927, according to the plan of the revolutionary leader Jatish Ch. Ghosh, and organization named ‘Shilpa Samavaya’ grew up in Chandernagore through the active support of Durga Das Seth. Those who were closely associated with this organization included Kali Charan Ghosh, Tin Kari Mukhopadhyay, Balai Chakraborty, Jatish Singha and some others under the editorship of Durga Das Seth, a journal named ‘Swadeshi Bazar’ was published from Calcutta in 1928, and its office became the centre for the cultivation of socialist ideas relevant to the contemporary situation. In the same year (i.e.1928) was founded the ‘Chandernagore Juba Samity’ of which Kali Charan Ghosh was the Precident and Sidheswar Mallick the Secretary. Person who joined this were among others talk to Hiren Chatterjee, Tushar Chattejee, Dayal Kumar, Santosh Bharh, Santosh Nandy, Ananda Pal, Bhabani Mukherjee, Tin Kari

Mukherjee, Jatish Singha and Mahitash Nandi. Publication of 'Sphulinga', a fortnightly journal was also one of the task undertaken by this organization. In fact Chandernagore Juba Samity played a significant role in spreading the idea if socialism in Hooghly district.

The Uttarpara group was led by the revolutionary leader Amrandra Nath Chattopadhyay (brother of Amar Da), Styabrata Chattopadhyay (son of Amar Da), Fanindra Nath Bandyopadhyay, Sritish Bandyopadhyay, Drubesh Chatterjee were some of the persons associated with this groups. The Srirampore group of Bipin Bihari Ganguly was yet another organization of revolutionary youths. This group included, among others, Pachu Gopal Badhuri, Nirapada Mukherjee, Pramatha Dutta and Manaranjan Hazra. That I was in touch with this group has been stated before. The Hooghly group of Jatish Da and Bhupati Majumdar inducted person's life Bijoy Modak, Hamidul Haque, Shirajul Haque, Pranatosh Chattopadhyay, Dhiren Ghosh and a few others. The Chandernagore used to operate in French India and the other three had their sphere of activities in British India.”¹⁷

Revolutionary terrorism resurfaced as a serious political force after four years of almost complete inactivity. The Governor of Bengal Sir Stanley Jackson insisted on a gradual release of revolutionary activists from March'1927. Eventually all political prisoners had been released by 1928. Therefore, a revolutionary re-organization became a virtual reality. In Bengal a further re-grouping, re-thinking and planning along with new strategy took place. This then was a phase of alignment, adjustment and preparation had begun. Undoubtedly many congress leaders of

Bengal made no secret of their sympathy for the terrorist or the revolutionaries. The leaders openly mourned terrorist martyrs like Gopinath Saha in 1925 and Jatin Das in 1929, but officially Bengal Congress had always maintained its apprehension about the possible ideological emotional and organizational linkages between a revolutionary terrorist and the Bengal Congress. ¹⁸

Brilliant revolutionary organizer Surya Sen led Chittagong armoury raid had created an immense impact on every secret societies in different districts of undivided Bengal. Now these societies tried their best to set aside intra-group difference for common revolutionary objective. They realized that the unified approach at the intra-and inter district level was the need of the hour, unnecessary internal or factional squabbles had been only complicated the situation further. So in that case Burdwan district was no exception. Bhima Charan Roy of Raniganj's Swarasati Mandir, Kala Chand Banerjee of Asansol and Fakir Charan Roy made extensive preparation for the unity and expansion of the revolutionary networks through out the district. Benoy Krishna Choudhury and Ashwini Kumar Mandal did their best to organize. The different active splinter group mainly comprised of students under one umbrella in Burdwan. Bimal Chaudhury of Okarsha (Burdwan) and engineering student of the then Jadavpur Engineering College has been actively played a very significant role among various students groups towards their political unity. Bimal had a close family relationship with the Benoy Krishna Chaudhury. During that phase of political activity either overt or underground, but definitely it maintained a very intimate linkages with the district congress organization. ¹⁹

Newly organized secret society made elaborate preparations for the consolidation of the revolutionary movement. Young revolutionary took, keen, and endeavours to set up student society, youth organization, library at the local level. They also build up a centre for physical culture and recruitment centre for volunteers. Simultaneously they also put great emphasis on specific revolutionary propaganda. The secret society of Burdwan regularly published a revolutionary organ 'Shakti' under the editorship of eminent Congress leader of the district named Jadabendra Nath Panja. When on 6th April'1930 mahatma Gandhi inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement through the defiance of Salt Laws imposed by the colonial regime, in Burdwan district a large scale participation of young revolutionaries was became a visible reality. Benoy Krishna Caudhury and other band of young revolutionaries at that time had been busy to full field arduous organizational-task of enrolling volunteers and touring villages and towns to spread the nationalist agenda and ensured the mass participation for the on going main stream movement. During that phase it was interesting to note that the Atmaunnoti Samity had major influence up on young revolutionary mind of the district. Prof. Jatish Chandra Ghosh and Bipin Bihari Ganguly became idol among the insiders or outsiders of this revolutionary outfit. Throughout the district Prof. Ghosh's name was always in a reverential tone, but B.B.Ganguly was the most popular revolutionary leader in the districts populace. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury in an intimate touch with the revolutionary activities during the turbulent thirties. At that time, the bomb manufacturing experiment with in the district was successful and it could not be materialized with out Benoy Krishna's tireless effort to overcome some specific difficulties involved in it. In that particular case a close associate of

B.B.Ganguly and post graduate student belong to Calcutta University named Ganesh Chandra Mitra did an excellent job for bomb manufacturing enterprise in Burdwan. He actually associated with the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. As a Student of chemistry he knew very well how to manufacture a bomb and what the requisite ingredients for that specific purpose were. During those days it was highly dangerous to procure raw materials like bomb sails etc. from Calcutta and other districts due to strict and stringent police surveillance. Arms Act still in force. But another important reason was imported materials were highly expensive and not easily procurable. Nevertheless Calcutta-Burdwan revolutionary supply line not entirely cut off. Reciprocate attitude and cooperative approach among different revolutionary outfits solved the problem quite successfully. ²⁰

In 1928 a district level youth and student conference had been successfully organized by the untiring efforts Fakir Charan Roy and other Burdwan revolutionaries. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta presided over the student conference and the same roles performed by Dr. Kanai Ganguly at Youth Conference. Revolutionary leader B.B.Ganguly also actively had been present in both the venues as well. A brilliant among student-youth community in Burdwan named Pranabeshwar Sarkar played vital role in it. The occasion opened up the opportunity for very close intimate interaction among various students and youth groups within the district for the first time. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Saroj Mukherjee, Abdus Sttar, Dasurathi Ta actually represented with their capacity as the members of the Burdwan student community. Along with the other prominent local clubs of different parts in Burdwan, the active participation of Friends Sporting Club situated

at Borhat deserves a special mention because Benoy Krishna Chaudhury-Ajit Kumar Sen combine the real soul force behind its vital function and prolific activity. ²¹

District administration of Burdwan band district label youth and organization set up under the congress party, where as District Congress Organization not declared an unlawful political body. After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931) came in to effect, according to terms of the agreement all political prisoners associated with the Civil Disobedience Movement were immediately released. Official ban on Congresses activities was also lifted. But in Burdwan district administration still observed official ban against the districts students and youth organization. Therefore, absences of imprisoned senior leaders of the district Benoy Krishna Chaudhury go ahead to organized the new comer youth segment of the Congress and baptized them with a new radical ideology. His ardent endeavor was supported by compatriot Jagannath Sen, Saroj Mukherjee and Hela Ram Chattarjee. During the thirties in Burdwan district a several students and youths became slowly attracted to the socialist ideas. They also secretly planed and voluntarily mobilized a military type organization named 'Lal Paltan'. That endeavor was directly inspired by the functions of the Russian, Red Army. During their interment period at Dumdum, Jail Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta and Bankim Chandra Mukherjee has been found a brilliant opportunity to discuss with the other prisoners and revolutionary activists on basis tenets to Socialism. Through that discussion they were gradually attracted towards the socialist ideology. After prolonged discussion with the Bhupendra Nath Dutta a decision were taken to organize a youth

conference of socialist in Burdwan districts by the Burdwan's front ranking young leaders like Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Saroj Mukherjee, Jagannath Sen and Bijoy Kumar Bhattacharjee aftermath of their release. ²²

After March'1929 when Meerut Conspiracy case was unfolded before them, Benoy, Saroj and other leftist oriented political activists of Bardhaman district gradually abundant their earlier belief in terrorist action and individual show-down. They had been slowly but surely turn to the idea of Mass revolution led by the labour-Peasant force through out India. Inotherwards effective revolution could be a successful conclusion by the violent mass upsurge across the country. It was beyond any doubt that Benoy, Saroj and their associates acquainted the Meerut Conspiracy Case, early stage of Socialist-communist activities and its leadership in India, Violent and Mass based struggle and revolution, preparatory stage of armed struggle by the labour peasant-combined force etc. Through the elaborate news coverage of Hindu Dailies. At that time Benoy Chaudhury and his co-revolutionaries of Bardhaman intimately involved with the revolutionary training and practices. He was very much active at the revolutionary training centre in this district, actually if was situated in to the garden house of 'Mayur Mahal'. Benoy Krishna himself sincerely shoudered the entire responsibility of procurement of revolver, bullet like essential arms for the revolutionary purpose. His close associates Saroj, Kalo, Gadai and another one took up their temporary underground shelter here for some time. ²³

Under the Congress organization platform and through that particular political body leftist minded youths and other politically energized persons could activate themselves in Bardhaman districts Helaram Chatterjee, Pramatha Banerjee, Jadabendra Nath Panja took up their leadership to actively mobilize the rural masses along nationalistic line. Tarapada Modak, Kalo and their other friends were also a regular participant in a various political programmes launched during the late twenties and early thirties in this district. Benoy Krishna supplied a lot of information about the whereabouts of young activists hailed from Rajbandh, Ranigunj and Asansol where Saroj Mukherjee and others arranged many political meetings. ²⁴

] Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutta duo secretly took part in the Calcutta Congress Session which was held in 1928. At the same time they also participated in the youth conference launched by the Congress organization. HSRP activist Jiban Maity and others supplied their organizations pamphlet to youth community of Bardhaman those were present at the venue. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury was more inclined towards a revolutionary terrorism than his fellow political workers in the district. He himself successfully accumulated the bulk of revolver, pistol and cartridge. He had been also able to preserve these incriminating materials at safe custody for purposeful future revolutionary action. An intimate classmate of Benoy Krishna Chaudhury named Amaresh Roy extended his whole hearted co-operation in this entire operation related to arm storage. It is striking to note that initially Benoy's response was very much cold towards the theoretical discussion on a socialism which was propagated by Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta in

Calcutta. At that time he irresistibly felt an immediate attraction towards an action-packed preparation for Arm Struggle in India. ²⁵

In Bengal the last half of the twenties onwards the revolutionary started their re-organizing drive and developing their underground activities. At the same time many of them closely connected with the Congress overt organizational work. This trend enabled 'Anushilan-Jugantar' leaders to gain wide access to the vast congress followers in the small district town and the rural tracts. In Bardhaman districts Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Saroj Mukherjee, Kala Chand Banerjee, Banwarilal Balutia, Amulya Karmakar, Baidyanath Halder, Ramen Dutta, Sachi Adhikari, Amod Bihari Basu, Bhujanga Bhushan Sen, Biraj Pati Bhattacharya, Hela Ram Banerjee, Tara Pada Modak, Fakir Roy, Tinkari Konar, Bholanath Konar, Maha Nanad Khan, Bipad Baran Roy, Uma Pada Konar, Sailesh Banerjee, Mukti Chatterjee, Gunen Mukherjee, Abul Hayat, Hara Krishna Konar, Jotish Singha, Jitendra Nath Mitra, Ananda Mondal and Purna Pal were engaged themselves for various type of organization works that were already has been formulated by the Anti and Pro-Revolutionary leadership of a Congress party. The young political activist of Bardhaman has been intimately involved with the different type of political task. Under their active endeavours many mass meeting, mass rallies, mass demonstrations were took place in different localities of Bardhaman districts. Recruitment drive among the district youth for overt and covert political actions was an important agenda of their political programme. ²⁶

Aftermath of the Karachi congress Session (1930) Benoy, Saroj and Kalo (Shib Shankar Chowdhury), Jagannath Sen, Pramatha Banerjee were present in a meeting which was held in Bardhaman town. These young activists formed their Bardhaman group and decided to set up a centre where that they could stay together and carry on their political activities without any hindrance. At Kuchutgram, at that time there was a junior school building exists. According to Shib Shankar Chowdhury insistence this group took up an effort to upgrade the institution and gave it the status of a National High School level. The insiders of the group appointed Jagannath Sen as a head master of this institution. Amod Bihari Basu, Shib Shankar Chowdhury, Gopi Krishna Roy, Dasu Rathi Ta, Durga Nanadi another's also agreed to perform their noble duty as a teacher in this school accept Amod & Jagannath all the other teacher were used to stay in the upper floor of a two storied Building of Narasingha Chowdhury located in the proximity of the institute. This dwelling place was given the name as 'Samyabas'. Within this institute Benoy and other teachers were regularly took part in the physical exercise, drill along with the students. Samya the vernacular organ of this particular group was also published regularly and its copies were secretly circulated in different parts of the district. 'Samyabas' was also treated as hidden hub of underground revolutionary activities. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta & Bamkim Mukherjee had been contributes some of their articles in Samya, the specific mouthpiece of Bardhaman groups. The mouthpiece was published from a printing press situated at Shambhupore. Benoy and his close compatriots were specifically engaged themselves with three fold activities- 1) Propagation of socialist-communist ideal, 2) Preparatory work for revolutionary terrorism, 3) Initiation of rural reconstruction as virtualized by the Indian National Congress. Orthodox district congress leaders like

Jadabendra Nath Panja & Bijoy Bhattacharya greatly impressed on them their sincere endeavours to build up an educational system which was entirely based on the principles of National Educational Policy framed by the Indian National Congress. Even these leaders has been delighted to see that Benoy, Saroj and others had been enthusiastically devoted their youthful energy and vigour for the upliftment of the rural areas along with the Gandhian ethos. After all when the Civil Disobedience Movement was formally withdrawn during the mid-thirties Mahatma Gandhi emphasized on constructive work that in the vast rural sectors of India. He categorically ventilated his view that through this constructive endeavours really open the way or open the door to the much awaited and desired social reform movement in the numerous villages.

Despite their constructive activities along with the prescribed Gandhian techniques it was clearly visible from available sources that a move towards the formation of a pro leftist peasant organization was made by the Bardhaman group who were much disenchanted with the Gandhian policy leadership an attracted by the communist ideology. This group used to have frequent discussion with Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta and they also developed a close acquaintance with Abdul Halim a trade union leader of the Communist Party of India. They also have been maintained close contact with the Samyraj Party of Aghar Sen & Badal Ganguly. But one important point need to raised here that was in the initial stages of Bardhaman campaign for Communist consolidation leadership by the then undivided Bengal's communist leadership due to their revolutionary terrorist linkages. Especially Benoy Krishna cousin brother Abani Chowdhury and Ranen Sen specifically maintained their antagonistic approach against this group for some time, but Abdul Halim always had been

showing his generosity towards them, even he has been offered his theoretical guidance about Communist Ideology. ²⁷

During colonial period a secret revolutionary hideout was situated at Barabazar locality in Ranigunj where different revolutionary group of Bardhaman were assembled and frequently has been communicated to each other for the purpose of immediate action plan and elaborate programmes through this nationalistic activities of the revolutionary organizer quite successfully inspired the local people to embraced the revolutionary nationalist spirit whole heartedly. This revolutionary centre also treated by the revolutionaries as hidden store house for the secrete revolutionary correspondences and incriminating arms-ammunition. Bhima Charan Roy, Amulya Ghosh, Khitish Ghosh, Prafulla Kumar Singha, Baidya Nath Das, Kashi Nath Singh, Mati Lal Das, Kamakhyay Sengupta, Sekh Kallu, Shanti Ghosh, M. Bhattacharya and other revolutionaries of Bardhaman were actively affiliated with this centre. A very close rapport has been exits between Amulya Ghosh and Benoy Krishna Chaudhury. At that time Ranigunj town was the nerve center of revolutionary activities of Bardhaman District. Many revolutionary belong to this town and its outskirts were regularly met here and formulate their future course of a revolutionary action. Dr. Bipin Bihari Banerjee and Rash Bihari Nandi have been played as a vital and generous benefactor to the revolutionary centers funs generation. Undoubtedly they were the indispensable spine of Ranigunj revolutionary organization. At that time local leaders with their revolutionary mindset of this district were quite successful to instill self- confidence and indomitable courage in to the young political campaigner's mind. ²⁸

Saroj Mukherjee reminiscing about the revolutionary activities in Bardhaman district:

“Revolutionary young workers like Durgadas, Amulyaratan, Panchugopal, Benoy Krishna, Jagannath, Hare Krishna, Bipadbaran, Jagadish and others were convicted for different revolutionary activities such as Ranigunj Bomb Case, Begut Dacoity Case and Birbhum Conspiracy Case. “ 29

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury was arrested in the month of May'1933 when he has been actively associated himself in the revolutionary activities of the Indian Proletarian Revolutionary Party (I.P.R.P.). This party was a secrete revolutionary organization and it has been maintained an intimate relationship with the Atma Shkrti Group a renowned militant outfit of undivided Bengal. Under the leadership of Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta and Bankim Mukherjee, the party during the thirties specifically emphasized on proletarian led revolution and mass violence. But the main organizers of this party has been failed to mobilize the common masses with the help of broad based constructive policies and programmes. Most of its members were the firm believer on militant type of terrorist adventurism. Therefore we may have been called this organization a revolutionary toned proto-communist political platform. Pran Gopal Mukherjee, Dharani Dhar Roy, Rajat Dutta, Samyadhish Roy, Satay Chanda, Jagdish Ghosh, Prabhat Kusum Ghosh and above all Benoy Krishna Chaudhury were the active members of this political organization. At that time, I.P.R.P. organization was financially too impoverished. So the affiliated

members of this organization compel to have recourse to political dacoities. ³⁰

The first belligerent revolutionary move was took place at Mankundu were some of I.P.R.P. members forcibly occupied a taxi and proceeded towards Sreerampore Treasury for the purpose of looting but unfortunately they were arrested in the middle of the road. They were sentenced to ten years in the second incident and armed political dacoity was committed in Beguit village under Memary Police Station of Bardhaman district. Benoy Krishna's close associates Hare Krishna Konar was arrested at very place of the incident. HE was sentenced to six year rigorous imprisonment and was transported to the Andamans. Benoy Krishna was himself accused of having link with this incident and arrest warrant was issued in his name. A prize money was also officially declared for arresting him but from August'1932 to the first part of May'1933 he successfully have been evade the imprisonment. In the second half of May'1933 at last he was arrested and also imprisoned under the B.C.L.A. (Bengal Criminal Law Amendments). Pran Gopal Mukherjee, Dharani Dhar Roy, Rajat Dutta, Stay Chanda and other active members of the I.P.R.P. were also tried in the Birbhum Conspiracy Case. The trial of this case continued for eight months. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury was sentenced to four and half year rigorous imprisonment. During that particular phase of his political life, according to colonial administrative decision Benoy Krishna Chaudhury have been compel to roam from one jail to another jail in undivided Bengal. Initially he was send to Burdwan jail and then after three months he was transferred from this jail to Dhumut Police Station of Bogra. From there he was brought to Suri Jail at Birbhum. A Fakir Charan Roy and Benoy Krishna Chaudhury's recollection about the Birbhum Conspiracy Case was corroborated

By the intelligence branches report constructed by J.C.Nixson (I.C.S.).³¹

As it appears from Saroj Mukherjee's memoirs that during the early thirties he himself have been successfully made his close acquaintance with Abdul Halim and Muzaffar Ahmed. At that time Saroj was determined to join the Communist Party. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury in principle agreed to the Saroj's political stand and accepted his point of view about the Bardhaman groups futures would be intimately embedded with the Socialist-Communist Principle. So the members of the group were needed a concrete step to take side the Communist Party as early as possible. At the same time Benoy Krishna frankly expressed to his close friend Saroj that this time was not ripe for joining the Communist Party en masse. It is clearly visible from Saroj's candid statements that over the particular agenda the perceptual difference was surfaced within the duos the then political mindset.³² So during the mid-thirties Benoy Krishna Chaudhury have been suffered from political vacillation in between sporadic terrorist action and mass based organized Socialist Maneuvering. Since his student days he has been greatly inspired by the biographies of Irish revolutionaries like De Velara, Danbrin and Collins. He also had found the opportunity of going through the book written by Nirbashiter Atmakatha by Upendra Nath Bandopadhyay a famous revolutionary of Bengal and similar other revolutionary minded literature.³³

Eminent revolutionary of Bengal Yadu Gopal Mukherjee admitted in his memoirs that during twenties the single

reason guided the revolutionaries in large numbers to join Gandhi led Congress organization was that the Congress led movements would inject fresh impetus to the frustrated a revolutionary workers. They entire the Congress as a new fountain head of activity and surely not out of reverence for Gandhian Non-violent method or principle, actually they would set their mind to valorizing their own groups under cover of main stream political endeavors. Undoubtedly, an important function performed by the Congress led mainstream movement was that of grooming nationalist workers and leaders at many different labels and areas in undivided Bengal. ³⁴

During mid-thirties necessity had thirst upon revolutionaries a more sudden and pressing need for help different quarters. That gradually created a new understanding of mass communication and a wider concept of the real meaning and purpose of revolution. Prolonged existence in the rural tracts depend their reliance on organized mass intensive struggle against the established colonial authority. From 1933 onwards a large number of political prisoners imprisoned in various jails and detention camps were drawn to the ideals of communism and the became members of Communist Consolidation. Most of them came from the Anushilan Samity and Jugantar Party. It is no accident after all, that almost all Chittagong convicts turn to the communist fold when they were officially released. So the revolutionary terrorist got absorbed within the Communist Party of India. ³⁵ As it appears from Govt. reports that the entire machinery of depression and propaganda of the Bengal Government was deployed to flush out a handful of young men & women with their terrorist linkage. Through out the years 1928-1932, there was no

room for official complacency about revolutionary terrorism. The fortnightly report on undivided Bengal observed in the first half of September'1932, the terrorism of Bengal was on the wane.³⁶

In the young India issue of January 30'1930 Mahatma Gandhi placed his specific eleven point programme before the British Administration. These included release of political prisoners, reduction of rents and salary of high paid Govt. employees, revocation of salt tax and others. He also made it clear that he would launch the Civil Disobedience Movement if these justified demands were not considered by the Government. But the colonial Govt. under Lord Irwin's Viceroyalty did not pay any heed to the demands already put forward by Mahatma Gandhi. Ultimately the decision of Civil Disobedience Movement was adopted at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee held February 14-16' 1930 at Sabarmati Ashram. On March 2' 1930 Gandhi informed the Viceroy that he would formally launch the Civil Disobedience Movement by violating the Salt Act at Dandi on the sea-coast of Gujrat. The famous Dandi march of Gandhi started on March 12' 1930 from the Sabarmati Ashram with 78 chosen followers. The procession proceeded towards Dandi a little known rural hub on the oceanic coast of Gujrat. At that time the production of salt a daily necessity of every day life, was entirely monopolized by the colonial Government. Gandhi reached the coast of Dandi on April 5'1930 covering nearly 241 miles within 24 days and broke the Salt Laws. Here Gandhi and his associates made salt in violation of the Salt Laws to symbolized peoples refusal to leave under the British rule. The movement was spread far and wide as

people joined Hartals, Demonstration and the Campaign to Boycott foreign goods. In many parts of the country the peasants withheld payment land revenue and rent. This was a historical march and people belong from all segments of society including students, farmers, women, workers and others participated in this movement. It drew the attention not only of the whole India but also of the world. Gandhi slowly but firmly proceeded with his stick, barefooted and almost half naked. Thousands of women came out of four walls of their homes and plunged in to the freedom movement. Bengal, Bihar, Delhi, Bombay, Madras, U.P., Gujrat, Karnataka, North Western Frontier Province witness the spontaneous outburst of Civil Disobedience Movement. Where ever there was sea, content of the Salt Act was resorted to and where there was no sea, people started reading out proscribed political literature, discarding wine, boycotting drug and liquor shops, and picketing educational institutions, Govt. offices and Law courts. No tax campaigns were launched in Gujrat, U.P., Malabar. In Bengal large number of people was went on in defiance of the Salt Laws. In eminent Congress Leader and Mayor of Calcutta Municipal Corporation Jotindra Mohan Sengupta read out proscriptive literatures in public thoroughfare in Calcutta and quoted arrest. The British Government on India adopted stringent repressive measures to terrorize the people of India but it was of no avail. On April 1st 1930 the Bengal Criminal Law was passed and Press Ordinance of 1910 was re introduced. The India National Congress Organization was prohibited and its property, movable and immovable was confiscated. There was a large-scale arrest of Congress activist. Meeting, demonstration, rallies and processions were banned. Despite all these repressive measures as many years sixty thousand people quoted arrest across the country but

according to the estimate of the Congress Party, surely the figure cross one lakh. In many places property of many Congress workers were forfeited. Lathi charges and firing of bullets became a regular event in undivided Bengal. The students of the University of Calcutta were also assaulted. At that time the Bengal Congress was peculiarly faction ridden, provincial organization. Subhas Chandra Bose and Jatindra Mohan Sengupta already were setting up rival machinery to conduct the Civil Disobedience Movement in Bengal, but due to their political squabble the Bengal congress wasting a lot of their vigour and energy. Fractional strifes within the provincial Congress organization of Bengal has been undoubtedly alienated of most Calcutta based Metropolitan bhadraloke leaders from the vast, rural, populace. Yet Bengal provided the largest contingent of political workers in 1930-31 during the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Almost sixteen thousand activists were arrested; even highest rate of violent incident has been took place here. All the Congress leaders including Gandhi were released from the jail on January 26' 1931. The negotiation between Mahatma Gandhi & Viceroy Irwin's started and Gandhi-Irwin's pact was linked on March 5' 1931. It was also popularly called the Delhi Pact. This particular had the following provisions: 1) the colonial government would revoke all draconian laws and ordinances. All political prisoners excepting those guilty of violence were to be set free. 2) The confiscated property of the non-violence political activist was to be restored. 3) Mahatma Gandhi agree to withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement and participate at the Second Round Table Conference. At that time, undoubtedly, Gandhi renounced the demand of complete independence and so the left minded activist among the Congress and the out side the Congress were very much disillusioned. The Second Round Table conference started its

deliberations in London in September'1931. The Indian National congress was represented by Mahatma Gandhi himself, while Sarojini Naidu represented the India women. Gandhiji demanded responsible government both in the provinces and at the centre and full power in finance, army, defense and foreign policy. According to him, the Viceroy would be the only constitutional supreme and nothing else. The British Government obviously disagreed, but Gandhi remained adamant. On the other hand the Muslim League, the backward or depressed community, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, the European Merchants and other minority communities raised various demands. Gandhi fails to unite them. Consequently, the Second Round Table Conference was a dismal failure on the part of the Congress organization and Gandhi came back to India with an empty hand. The Third Round Table Conference in 1932, but the Congress did not participate it.

Aftermath of the failure of the Gandhi-Irwin's pact the Government of India became more despotic than before. Particularly in Bengal the colonial repression was carried on in its barbaric form. The colonial administration ruthlessly imposed various repressive laws in different parts of India. At last on January'1932 Mahatma Gandhi gave the call of the non-violent struggle and readily responded to it. Numerous meeting, Rallies, processions, boycott of foreign goods and government agencies were held in different parts of the country. At an early dawn of January 4' 1932 Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel were arrested. Mass arrest of the Congress workers and leaders were immediately followed. The British administration introduced four repressive ordinances and the Viceroy Lord Willingdon delivered a public speech in favour of such despotic measures. Through the country

ninety thousand people were arrested. The Congress organization, its various branches and even national schools, health care establishments and other service centers under the direction of the Congress were seized. Their property, papers and funds were also forfeited. The press censorship was reintroduced. Caning, firing, lathi charges, imposition of fine were practiced intermittently. The colonial state sponsored brutal Police Raj was created in India during 1932 through the introduction of ten specific ordinances. The total number of arrested persons stood at one lakh twenty thousand nineteen thirty three. However, this repressive policy could not undermine the spirit of indomitable resistance of Indian people for quite some time. Aftermath of his release from the Yervada prison Mahatma Gandhi wholeheartedly devoted himself to the constructive works among the depressed classes. At the same time, after withdrawing mass non-violent struggle he resorted to individual non-violent struggle. This struggle was in force from August 1st 1933 to March 1934. Then gradually it lost its efficacy. The meeting of the all India Congress Committee on May'1934 official suspended the main stream Civil Disobedience Movement.³⁷

Recent micro level study clearly shows us that in Bengal, the peasant community considered Civil Disobedience Movement to be a religious mission to participate in it. Actually, those peasant who were in large number joined the Gandhian Movement mostly belong to the upwardly mobile rural folds. Due to colonial governments stringent retaliatory action from mid-thirty onwards the movement literally began to decline. The middle class breed had been not so much enthusiastic for euphoric from the beginning of the Gandhi led Non Violent Movement against the colonial

authority, and after the suspension of the movement, especially in Bengal the educated youth felt more attracted to the revolutionary terrorism. 38 Thus, the last wave of traditional type revolutionary adventurism was began in many parts of India. However, that particular radical trend was definitely not getting its long lease of life.

Civil Disobedience Movement in Bardhaman district emerged out of the matrix of national level movement which has been already discussed at a length. This districts bound movement was historically and emotionally linked with the All India Level Struggle for freedom under the political stewardship of India National Congress. The sentiments of the district populous and its leadership was naturally shaped and moulded by the Nationalist Ideology and Modulations of the Congress organization.

In between 1925-1930 Sarojini Naidu and Mahatma Gandhi toured the Bardhaman district. This historic tour helped to generate the nationalist spirit once more among the different section of people. 39

Most probably on 8th May'1925 Mahatma Gandhi for the first time arrived at Bardhaman town. His arrival had been creates a tremendous euphoria across the district. Large numbers of common folk from different corners of the district were assembled here. Considerable amount of money has been accumulated for the Congress fund and numerous volunteers were recruited by the district Congress organization. Bhamini Ranjan Sen, the President of the Bardhaman District Congress Reception Committee was entrusted to look-after the historic tour of Mahatma Gandhi. His presence as a Congress Supremo undoubtedly instilled

a new energy vitality within the organic structure of the district level congress organization. Therefore a political platform has been already created for the most significant mass upsurge of thirties. 40

During the decade of 1930 Bijay Kumar Bhattacharya has been played a very courageous role to built up the district congress organizational strength and its wide spread expansion across the Bardhaman district, but since 1925 onwards a dedicated band of congress workers inspired by the Gandhian principle and they whole heartedly took up the duty to preach the Gandhian sermon and the ideal of nationalism in different rural pocket of the particular region. In this context it is absolutely true that the past large scale main stream Gandhi and non-cooperation movement 1922 was not able to garner the popular support in Bardhaman due to the ineffectual organizational party structure of the district Congress. 41

Under the action leadership and truly proper guidance of the renowned congress leader Jadabendra Nath Panja, The duo young congress activist Benoy Krishna Chaudhury and his intimate friend Saroj Mukherjee enthusiastically devoted themselves to the intensive organizational preparation for the launch of an imminent Civil Disobedience Movement during early 1930. As a frontraking youth activist Benoy and Saroj has been shouldered the burden for mobilization of common people on behalf of the Congress organization. Their allotted task was to enrolling volunteers-members, collecting funds, touring different localities, forming local groups etc. On 6th April 1930, by picking up a handful of salt, Mahatma Gandhi inaugurated Civil disobedience Movement through out the country. At that time, according to Jadadendra

Panja instruction Benoy and Saroj took up their leading role in the Civil Disobedience Movement at Bardhaman district. ⁴²

In 1930 when Gandhi was again arrested, there were more less complete Hartals at Bardhaman and at the administrative headquarters and of its sub-divisions. There were a number of convictions during the first half of June'1930 in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement. The picketing of liquor shops were carried out with great vigour. In the second half of June' 1930 causing a loss of about forty three thousand in he excise revenue for that month as compared with the revenue realized in June'1929. The number of persons arrested due to their active involvement with the movement was figured hundred fifteen in the first half of August' 1930. ⁴³

The first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-31) marked a critically important stage kin the progress of the anti-imperialist struggle in Bardhaman district with its wide spread intensity and popularity. Large number of people went to jail. Many men and women political activist used to take as a sacred duty to propagate the nationalist message among the villagers and the towns men by their incessant tours. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Sukumar Banerjee, Saroj Mukherjee, Hare Krishna Konar, Syed Sahedullah, Abdul Sattar, Hela Ram Chatterjee, Mukkti Pada Chatterjee and others practically gained their first ever major political experience through this Gandhi led main stream national level movement. Later this band of energetic young political workers of Bardhaman gradually has been attracted towards the Socialist-Communist ideals. ⁴⁴

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury reminiscing about the Salt Act violation during the Civil Disobedience Movement in his memoirs:

On our return, we contacted Shri Panja, Binoy Da and others and expressed our intention to join the movement. They were extremely glad and apprised us of the programme they have chalked out for Burdwan. According to this programme Shri Panja was to lead a batch of 25 volunteers and proceed along the Kanla road and preach the idea of Satyagraha through out the route. From Kalna the batch would reach Calcutta by train and violate the Salt Act at MahishBathan. Another batch under the guidance of Shri Shankar Chaudhury would break the act at Pichabani in Contai sub-division at Midnapore district. After the departure of the two batches I was to write a letter to the District Magistrate of Burdwan informing him that I would sell illegal salt on the main road of Burdwan.

The volunteers under Shri Panja would, it was decided have mid day meals and some rest at Raipur. I went to Raipur for making the necessary arrangement. At Raipur I talk to many people but found, to my dismay, that most of the well to do persons were getting afraid, and on one pretext or other they tried to avoid me. But finally the widowed elder sister of Jiten Hazra of Raipur village volunteer to make all arrangements for about thirty Satayagrahi's and asked me not to request others any more. Subsequently, on many occasions I had noticed that the relatively better off persons did not dare to under take any risk by helping the freedom fighters. They always apprehended that they might be in the bad books of Government for this kind of help. On the other hand the poorer section of the people came forward in the large numbers for the helping the freedom fighters. ⁴⁵ Here he dispassionately

encapsulates the prevalent divergent responses among strata ridden society of undivided Bengal about main-stream nationalist upsurge.

Again he recalls: *According to schedule my turn for violating the Salt Act came next. It was planed that Saroj would hand over the letter to the district magistrate. Leave Burdwan and would go to Asansol for staying there as in-charge of the work of that town. So I started selling contraband salt unlawfully on the main road and moved towards Burabazar. The police did not arrest me on the first day. A few days later when I was picketing at the college gate. I was arrested and send to Burdwan jail for six months imprisonment. Here I found Hare Krishna and a few hundreds of young men-all know t me. Among the elderly person I met Guni Badu of Katwa, Hare Krishna Mondol, Khuduram Modak, Aghar Saha of Dainhat and many others. Some time there after, Saroj too, was arrested from Ranigunj area and sent to Dum Dum Central Jail where Sattar Saheb, Dasu Rathi Ta and some others were already kept imprisoned. Shi Shankar Chaudhury (Kalo Da) too, arrested from Contai and send to Dum Dum jail. Subsequently, owing to his refusal to put the thumb-impressions on some paper in the jail he was beaten so mercilessly that he was almost on the verge of death.* ⁴⁶

During the yearly years of 1930 a large number of people including women, student, youths and villagers were took the prominent part in the Civil Disobedience Movement of the Bardhaman under the able guidance of Jadabendra Nath Panja, a new form of Satayagraha was eagerly adopted by the local people. It became familiar sight as they stood from morning to night out

side the liquor shops and stores selling foreign cloth, quietly but firmly persuading the customers and shop keepers to change their ways. Therefore the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor campaign was quite successful through their persistence picketing. Bardhaman Congress activists were never confined their anti-colonial mission within the home district, they also spread it beyond the territorial limit of Bardhaman. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Saroj Mukherjee, Ashima Nanda Chaudhury, Dasu Rathi Ta and other firebrand nationalist youths of Bardhaman not only extended their whole hearted support to the movement, even they also actively participated in it and upheld the spirit of nationalism. ⁴⁷

Civil Disobedience Movement was practically at a low-ebb by the end of 1930's and there were indications that young activists disillusioned were gradually attracted to the revolutionary terrorism. But within a very short period a quite a large number of Burdwan youths turn their attention to the socialist-communist ideology and its operation.

During the 1930's in different parts of India a new nation wide political awareness has been grew among the Indian Peasant Community. They became gradually more conscious about their betterment of communities living conditions. This awareness was largely a result of the combination of particular economic and political developments. The world wide A Great Depression that began to hit India from 1929-30 onwards and at the same time a new phase of peasant mobilization also took place. Now Indian peasantry felt a need to organize themselves in more systematic manner. The depression which brought agricultural prices crashing

down to half or less of its normal levels death a severe blow to the poor- peasants' burden with exorbitant taxes and rents. The dehumanized colonial administration was obdurate in refusing to scale down its own arbitral fixed rates taxation. At the Same time the Zaminder class also has been refused to bring down their land rents. Simultaneously the prices of manufacture goods too did not register comparable decreases. So the Indian peasantry were placed in a critical situation where they have compelled to continue to pay taxes, rents and debts at pre-depression rates. While their earning continued to took downwards trains. 48

The formation of Congress Ministries on majority of a British Provinces in early 1937 marked the beginning of a new period in the growth and acceleration of the peasant agitation. The political scenarios in colonial India underwent a significant change. Awareness about the civil liberties of the common people was gradually increased. A new sense of liberty has been sprang-up within the common mass through the pro-people measures initiated by the provincial Congress Governments would create a sense of high expectation among common folk. Understandably, the last leg of 1930's undoubtedly met the high water mark of the peasant's manoeurs virility in Indian sub continent. 49

In Bengal and other parts of the country as well, the insecurity of tenured right, exorbitant rate of Feudal Levis, high rate of Govt. taxes and severe burden of debt. All collectively made a common denominator of the peasant upsurge during the penultimate phase of 1930's. 50

In the middle of August'1934 a torrential local rainfall and phenomenally rapid rise in the level of the Damodar as the natural fall out of rain storms in the Chotanag Pur hills caused devastating floods in the adjacent of the Bardhaman district. The Bardhaman town was for time being under several feet of water, there were six feet of water on portions of the Grand Trunk Road and an area of 200 square miles (578 square kilometers) in the district was completely submerged. The principle damaged in the affected area was confined to huts and kutchha residences, of which 19,250 were entirely destroyed. Fortunately food stocks were not serious damaged. In some places the flood water facilitated the transplantation of paddy. A some of rupees twenty two thousand were distribution as a relief, mainly for reconstruction of houses, and in each case government provided approximately half of the amounts, the reminder being contributed by the district board. The Damodar flood however, could not compensate for the continued lack of rain. The failure of crops in Bardhaman continued to cause anxiety and the position of peasantry became a matter of serious concern of November and December. Apprehension failed at the end of 1935 the acute distressed would later prevail in the district proved unfortunately true, and official relief measures had to be undertaken by the Government over a wide area through out the first nine months of the tear. The persistent distress was due to two successive bad harvest of Aman Paddy in 1934-35. ⁵¹

In the late 1930's a serious popular discontent gathered force on the canal areas of the river Damodar over the question of the Bengal Development Act and the levy imposed b the colonial administration. A local upsurge Crystallized and awakened the rural

folk of Burdwan. Therefore, thus the first Damodar Canal Tax Movement was begun. 52

Even cursory glance at the Bengal Development Act 1935 would have been definitely suggest that despite the certain provisions of the act were practically sugar coated. It was undoubtedly detrimental to the specific interest of the impoverished and poor agriculturists. The difficulties facing the colonial government as regards the costs of construction, upkeep and establishment of the Damodar Canal were attained to be over come by bringing the canal region under the operation of the above mentioned act. Within the region notified as benefited by the canal, water was supplied, through no application was made under section-74 of the Bengal Irrigation Act and the Government imposed a levy at the rate of 5-8-0 per acre, per year irrespective of the benefits derived or likely to be derived from the irrigation facilities the Damodar Canal. The primary motive behind the first Damodar Canal Tax Agitation (1935-1937) was undoubtedly political. It was aimed at stimulating resistance against the colonial operation. Secondly the movement was based on the grievances of the local peasantry burden with an exorbitant rate of improvement levy. The Bengal Development Act 1935 and tax imposed their under were clearly being inter-linked and inter-locked. Both the ingredient together sowed the seeds of agitation among the primary producers of the canal area. 53

Benoy Chaudhury unveiled the inherent contradictions involved with the Bengal Development Act of 1935 that was created so much disappointment among the cultivators of Burdwan district:

“The peasants of Burdwan started movement against the water tax, levied on peasants using the Damodar Canal water. Before the implementation the Damodar Valley Project a low dam was constructed Randhat (Panagar) after the name of Anderson to supply water for irrigating about one lakh seventy five thousand acres of land. The prevailing law regarding distribution of water for irrigation was that one had to take water on lease-either on a short term or a long term basis. The government initially fixed the water tax at rupees four and a half for the short term lessees, coming under Galsi, Burdwan Sadar, Memari and Bhatar Police Station water was available for irrigation. But the farmers of these areas argued that from the remote past they used to get water containing fertile alluvial deposits of the Damodar. That is why they had to pay much higher land rent than the farmers of other areas. But the Government, in order to protect the Grand Trunk Road, railways Lines and Calcutta had erected a dam on the southern side of the Damodar and had so long kept the peasants deprived of that water. The problem had been solve partially with a new irrigation project but the peasants were not obliged to pay taxes at the new rates. As a protest, the peasants did not sign the lease bonds. The government, on the other hand, past in 1935 the Bengal Development Act that made it obligatory for the peasants to receive water for the irrigated areas and fixed a tax rupee five and eight anas for the purpose. A committee for the prevention of Canal Tax formed under the leadership of Krishak Shabha started movement against this law.” 54

Shortly after the Bengal Development Bill was proposed, the drastic provisions of the bill already stirred the members of the Burdwan Bar Association and also educated community of the

Burdwan town. When a exorbitant burden of tax was imposed under the new law it had a cursing effect on the poor cultivated class. At that time District Congress Organization was not so much vocal against the anti- peasant measures what has been taken by the colonial administration. But Burdwan Bar Association came forward and under their active initiative and association was formed, namely the Burdwan district Raiyats Association. The association has been played a very vital role to fight against the regressive measures as embodied in the aforementioned law. ⁵⁵

Three months earlier (September 1936) the district Congress had already started his selection campaign in Burdwan district. But the Congress had not yet successfully established any separate organization exclusively meant for the Anti-Canal Tax agitation. The district Congress leaders discussed Canal Tax issues at several election meetings with and I on the forthcoming election process. The Congress led campaign continued till the fag end of January'1937. Understandably the district wide Congress campaign certainly helped the community of canal area to form a specific public opinion about the canal Tax Act imposed by the British Administration. By the beginning of February (1937) the peasants of the canal area were severely affected on account of the enforcement of the Canal Act. Te colonial administration started harassing poor peasants for the realization of the Canal Tax and begun to recover the arrears of taxes by official notice of demand, certificate procedure and the like. ⁵⁶

On 24th February'1937 a meeting attended by about three thousand people was held at Bhatar Bazar area under the active initiative of the Raiyats Association. This popular demonstration too resolved to fight the anti-peasants colonial measures which were irrationally adopted by administrative machinery. ⁵⁷

Meanwhile with the intensification of peoples remonstrance against the Canal Tax the official bureaucracy at the local level begun to resort to oppressive measures like issue certificates and attachment of movable properties for the realization of taxes. In the mid-May'1937 the Burdwan District Krishak Conference was held at Ghushkura under the president ship of Muzaffar Ahmed. The conference lends its support to the resolutions past at the meeting of the present representatives and tenants deluded in the Damodar Canal Area at the Burdwan Town Hall. Through his recollections Benoy Krishna Chaudhury adequately reflected on first Anti-Canal Tax Movement in Burdwan district:

“Colonial Government enacted the Bengal Development Act in 1935. According to this particular act the administration made it mandatory to bring water from Damodar Canal in exchange of five rupees eight anas in the irrigated areas. But the peasants of Bardhaman were threatening to agitate for revision of the exorbitant rate of water tax & canal in the respective areas.

The second convention of the Bardhaman District Krishak Sadha was held at Alutia village. Shiba Prasad Dutta, Dasu Rathi Chowdhury, Ashwini Mondal, Sukumar Banerjee and other comrades were the prime initiator of the Krishak Covention.

The years from 1937-38 marked by the intense preparedness for the first Anti-Canal Tax Movement on a large scale. In 1939 the movement soon formally took on the form of a no tax-no rent campaign through large scale Satyagraha. Bardhaman peasants join the protest in large number. In the meanwhile a canal authority had been forcefully issued seventeen thousand certificates with specific intention for the smooth collections of the due canal tax without any interruption. But the peasants were jointly refused to reciprocate with the local administration by applying oppressive and violent methods the administrative machinery failed to break the united postures of the peasant community.” ⁵⁸

The Burdwan district Raiyats Association fast started the Anti-Canal Tax agitation and took up the peasants cause in right earnest. The reason was that the lawyers who were the most influential members of the association had landed interest in the canal region. So naturally they apprehended about the possible financial gain when the administration decided to impose a heavy burden of mandatory levy on peasants of the Canal Zone. The members of the association constantly interacted with the common folk through direct personal approach and propaganda by means of pamphlets, booklets and issuing appeals and statement in dailies. With a view to attracting their attention to the genuine grievances of the cultivators they regularly interacted with members of the legislature and furnished memorandum to them with facts and figures the Congress actively participated the movement after its defeat in the provincial elections, and stood by the side of the peasants till its acceptance of the modified rate of canal tax imposed by the Government. ⁵⁹

The Krishak Samity which mainly conducted the Satyagraha Movement differed from the Raiyats Association and the Congress in respects of the issues and objective of the movement. The members of the Krishak Samity mainly constituted the left minded people of the Congress. They tried to press the Canal issue on the Congress leadership after the Congress debacle in the provincial election and persuade it to form a join platform. ⁶⁰

Bardhaman villagers were successfully set up their Satyagraha Camps at ausha village. According to Comrade Rabi Majumder statement which was published in the Ananda Bazar Patrika, that in spite of large scale combative administrative arrangement against the rebellious peasants, the five thousand peasants ever ready to resist the official measures about the Canal Tax imposition. They wholeheartedly remonstrated with the officials about the anti-peasant decision that was already made by the colonial administration. ⁶¹

Benoy Chaudhury recalls:

“After the election of 1937 the Congress also join the movement and constituted an enquiry committee which observed that there had not been any improvement in the situation, only the possibility of getting water in the dry years have been created and for this Government could claim at best maund of paddy with eighty bundles of hay-stack. But the Government ignored this recommendation.

Moreover, the ploughing cattler of Manibdr Mukherjee of Kadra village were seized. The peasants built up a strong resistance movement against this action of the government, and there was no purchaser to buy the seized cattle when these were tried to sale by auction. Ultimately, for face-saving, the government had to make forced sale of the cattle to the bailiff of the court. As a subsequent step the cattle of many other peasants were seized and were kept confined in the cattle-pound of ausha village.

Under the leadership of Nalini Di of Sayagram village about five hundred women from the neighboring areas surrounded the cattle pound of ausha and started a-stay-in Satyagraha. Several thousand volunteer kept watch on the villages. As a counter measure the government deployed gorkha and European soldiers and they resorted to atrocious action on villages. During this period I used to visit the villages from Ranigunj under the cover of night and tried to embolden the villagers. More than eighty people were arrested and send to jail. A secrete meeting was convened in the residence Ahad Sahed of Ichlabad with a view to deciding the tactics of the guiding the movement. Comrade Ajoy Ghosh who was present at that meeting advised us on what to do in prevailing situation. In support of this movement the Provincial Krishak Sabha requested the different district to send volunteers. Rabi Majumder came from Jessore and he was placed in over all charges of the volunteer groups. From Malda came Ramen Mitra; Nirad Dasgupta (cousin of Sailen Dasgupta arrived from Barishal. Persons thus assembled were sent to different volunteer camps. Nirod Dasguopta was sent to Jiara village, some distance away from Khajana Station where, in one night he died of snake biting. When I got this news I reached Jiara, brought the dead body to Burdwan

and made arrangement for informing his relatives. The dead body was burnt after the arrival his elder brother. Nirod Dasgupta died a martyr's death.

Such a big movement did not end in vain. Ultimately, the peasants did not have to bear the financial burden for digging the Canal. The government was forced to make exemption, and the peasants had to pay taxes only for the annual maintenance of the canal. According to this principle, the annual irrigation tax came down from five and a half rupees to two rupees and nine anas.”⁶²

Dr. Buddhdev Bhattacharya has been made an assessment of the First Canal Tax agitation in Burdwan through his scholarly analysis;

“We may divide the First Damodar Canal Tax Movement in to two stages. The first stage started with the introduction of the Bengal Development Act and the imposition of the compulsory Canal Levy of Rs. 5-8-0 their under. The next stage begun with the launching the Styagraha Movement by the Krishak Samity. In so far as the aim of a Raiyats Association and also of the Congress was to compel to government to reduce the canal rate to an acceptable minimum, the movement was successful in the first stage. The government was forced to institute an enquiry, modify the canal rates, withdraw the compulsory levy and reintroduce the lease system. But since it was the goal of the Krishak Samity in the second stage to bring down the canal rates Rs. 1-8-0. It was no doubt a failure. The failure may be partially attributed to the fact that though the Congress urged the people not to sign the lease from for taking canal water at the rate of Rs. 2-9-0 for a few

months and condemned the repressive measures of the government, it did not provide any organizational support to Satyagraha Movement,. Its luke warm attitude and half hearted participation in the later stagedamped the spirit of the local people. The left wing, on the other hand, stuck to their decision even when they realized that they had no sufficient mass base to carry on the movement with out Congress support. However, the Damodar Canal Tax Movement considered as a whole was a partially successful. It goes to the credit of the organizer of the Satyagraha Movement that they set in motion the politically inert peasants and taught them to remain alert, even when engaged in a movement, about the leadership which was often guided by its own class interests. Finally, it must be recorded that the Communist while committed to an ideology of their own adopted the Non-Violent Technique of Satyatagraha, for it proved the most effective weapon in a particular historical context.” ⁶³

An economic historian rightly pointed out the internal contradictions with in the peasant’s movements that were launched during the depression period of the 1930’s. The elements of witness in the peasant’s movements were partly genesis from the particulars composition of the community itself. At that time in undivided Bengal not a single village has been composed entirely a mass of poor cultivators and truly and they never have been united in opposition to the absentee landlords and their coteries. The peasant community was failed to make itself as a homogeneous group. Actually it was a complicated agrarian structure composed of certain ingredients which were some times mutually hostile. The Kishan Sabha organizers therefore, found it difficult to unite and mobilize all the groups in a common platform. ⁶⁴

Despite of critical observation by some scholars, Benoy Krishna Chowdhury categorically reflected through his memories: he said that “The stupendous success of the First Damodar Canal Tax agitation was greatly contributed to strengthen the popular bases of the Krishak Sabha in the Burdwan district. Districts local authority has launched a desperate on slot to stop the movement but it could not break the peasant communities moral and to some extent their solidarity. 65

Since the second half of the nineteen century Indian intellectual luminaries came in contact with the progressive forces of the western world. They included Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Aurobinda Ghosh, Shibnath Shastri and others. Bankim Chandra’s article Samaya and Tagore’s Essays on Socialism clearly unveiled their socialist moorings. Swami Vivekananda described himself as a socialist. In 1903 the Amritabazar Patrika of Calcutta for the first time specifically mentioned about Karl Marx. 1911 a Gadar revolutionary Lala Hardayal wrote an article entitled Karl Marx, A Modern Rishi and which was published in the Modern Review, a eminent monthly periodicals of Calcutta. Ramakrishna Pillai also constructed a biography of Karl Marx in vernacular language. In the meanwhile, the Great Russian Revolution (1917) which was led by Vladimir Ilitch Lenin created a great euphoria in the entire world. In India the nationalist, a section of the working class people and disillusioned revolutionaries were profoundly moved and electrified by this historical event. Depressed with the negative politics of the Congress organization, they begum to dream of the emancipation of the Indian mass through the revolution of labourers and peasants, according to the Russian prescription during that particular period numerous information and essays

regarding Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin begun to be published in different dailies and ;periodicals at various places across India. On the other hand Lenin's interest in the Indian Nationalist Movement dates from the dawn of the twentieth century when in an article entitled 'Inflammable Material in War Politics', he unhesitatingly expressed that in India the proletariat class had already emerged as a conscious political element within the society. Numerous subjugated people of India where definitely awakening to life, light and liberty and no aggressive force on earth ultimately could prevent their emancipation. 66

In the history of the Communist Movement and its political formation in India the name of Manabendra Nath Roy is absolutely unforgettable. He is generally looked up on as the harbinger and pioneer of the Communist Movement in Indian subcontinent. As a revolutionary during the First World War at the instruction of Bagha- Jatin in order to procure arms and ammunition for organizing a Anti-Colonial Revolt in India. So he reached Maxico and after visiting United States of America subsequently baptized himself in to Marxism. Scholars said that Manabendra Nath Roy arrived Mexico as a nationalist but became a hardcore Maxist when he left Mexico. Under his able and energetic leadership 24 non-resident Indian revolutionaries including Abani Mukherjee and Muhammad Siddique founded the Communist Party in India in Tashkhand on October'17th, 1920 but apart from Central Asia another independent effort to set up a separate Communist organization was also initiate. The communist minded personalities assembled at Kanpur from different parts of India on December'1925 and established an All India Organization under the name of The Communist Party of India

(CPI. After some time S.V.Ghate emerged as the first General Secretary of the newly born political body. Of course the CPI called upon all its affiliated members to enroll themselves as member of the Congress because the parties' main aim was to form a strong left wing base within the Congress organizations and launch an effort to convert the Congress in to more radical mass oriented organization. Almost at the same time another communist organization named labour Swaraj Party was set up by Muzaffar Ahmed, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar and others in Bengal in November'1925. In 1930 the communist Party of India was formally affiliated to the communist international. Aftermath of the Meerat Conspiracy Case the Calcutta-Bombay combined communist groups has been started to communicated and cooperated to each other and under their initiative a secrete conference of the Party was held in Calcutta in December'1933. At that conference, a new political resolution and the new constitution of the party were adopted and the Central Committee was also elected. Dr. Ganga Dhar Adhikari became thye General Secretary. Comrade Ben Bradley went to Europe with this report about the formulation of the Communist Party of India and submitted it to Communist International. ⁶⁷

In 1930 the Calcutta committee of the communist Party had been to some extend successfully mobilized its influences across undivided Bengal. Party committees were set up at different district. The Calcutta Committee was ultimately transformed itself in to the Bengal provincial committee during 1935-36. The release of political prisoner helped the communist activists to expand the desired organizational support base in undivided Bengal. The newly recruited party cadres went to their respective districts to form party units there. In this way the communist party would have

been consolidated its populist image from district level to village level. ⁶⁸

Last leg of the twenties and the first phase of the thirties when a large number of political prisoners or a revolutionary terrorist detained in various jails and detention camps were drawn to the ideals of communism. At that time a process of rethinking about the limitations of terrorist tactics has been begun. The communist consolidation was formed in the Andaman Cellular Jail, Buxacamp, Deuli Detention Camp, Berhampur Detention Camp, Presidency Jail, Dumdum Central Jail etc. Imprisoned revolutionaries organized classes on Marxism and they have been engaged with the serious studies on that ideology. A large section of revolutionaries ultimately gave up terrorism as a political creed and embraced Marxism-Leninism. On 1st May 1935 Dr. Narayan Roy, Niranjan Sen, Gopal Acharya, Ranabir Dasgupta, Bangeshwar Roy, Nalini Das, Bijoy Kumar Singha, B.K. Dutta, Harekrishna Konar and others joined the Communist Consolidation. In between 1935-39 communists were able to set up their party unit in almost all the districts of undivided Bengal. ⁶⁹

Aftermath of the Karachi Congress (1931) the Burdwan Political Conference was held. Karachi Congress session passed a memorable resolution on fundamental rights. Amod Bihari Basu and other younger people have demanded that resolution should be framed with a broader objective. A.B. Bose made a specific resolution and Benoy Krishna Chowdhury wholeheartedly supported it. Benoy Krishna's radical approach about fundamental rights has been creating a reaction among hardcore Gandhians at the conference. President Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, the eminent Congress leader made an appeal to A.B. Bose and B.K. Chowdhury

with a request for withdrawal the particular resolution because it was involved the Anti-Gandhian polemical. He felt it could be a detrimental effect on Congress image at the forthcoming Round Table Conference. Younger section of Burdwan Congress of course never succumbed to the old guards pressure. Resolution was passed with a majority vote. Saroj Mukherjee's oratory skill was remarkable for not only its polemis rather than its substance. At the venue Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta and Bankim Chandra Mukherjee speech was held the audience spell bound, their observations and analyses were structured essentially on the basis of their meticulous study of Politics, Science and above all Social Science. The Burdwan Political Conference under the banner of the Congress was held definitely, but for the first time a red flag was also hosted at the conference site side by side with the Indian National Congresses Flag. ⁷⁰

Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta was well known as the tallest, intellectual among the intellectuals of undivided Bengal during the most important decade from 1926-36. Dr. Dutta was very much popular and irrespective of group affiliation. He universally respected political ideologue. People of all section used to keep touch with him. No body failed to see him while he in Calcutta. Among the Indian revolutionaries who went abroad during the First World War and those who made an opportunity to meet leaders of Germany and Russia, Dr. Dutta was the only person who came back to India and engaged himself in whole time politics. He also used to speak regularly about the message of the Russian Revolution, Lenin's methods and socialist ideas elaborately at the assembly of young people and political activists. He also advised and as well as directed them about their immediate political goal and action. Dr. Dutta's utmost initiatives played a major role within

the younger generations of Bengal to take up socialism as a political creed. He almost everyday use to discuss with the young band of political activists constantly on Sociology, Political Science, History of National Liberation Movement, War Politics and Socialism. During those days leaders and workers affiliated of not less than fourteen revolutionary groups has been maintained regular inter-personal contact with Dr. Dutta. Undoubtedly he often criticized all type of conventional terrorist tactics and inspired young political activists to take up the communist leader Dr. Narayan Roy and Bankim Mukherjee revered him most respectfully. At that time Dr. Dutta substantially explained to younger generation about the contradictions related to the revolutionary terrorism, the viable alternative, urgent need for mass base movement and necessity of socialism. His tremendous influence has been irresistibly felt by budding communist like Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Saroj Mukherjee and many others. ⁷¹

Morally inspired by Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta the Burdwan trio Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Jagannath Sen and Saroj Mukherjee had been trying to forge an intimate cooperation among different communist minded group in Bardhaman, but due to Begut Dacoity Case and Birbhum Conspiracy Case their endeavours for the time being suffered a major setback in regard to the formal formation of the Communist Party in the district. At that time Benoy Krishna Chaudhury, Jagannath Sen and Saroj Mukherjee were taken to prison. In the meanwhile virtually the Burdwan group already merged with the Muzaffar Ahmad led communist group. Historically Hela Ram Chatterjee was a real pioneer for the formation of Communist Party in Burdwan Districts. ⁷²

In this context Benoy Krishna Chaudhury recalls:

“The Communist Party was formed in Burdwan district on October’5th ‘1935 with Sahedullah as the secretary and Hela Ram Chatterjee, Shiba Pada Dutta, Mrityunjoy Konar and Mahendra Khan as members, I was admitted to membership in October’1938, after I had come out of the jail.” ⁷³

There is no scope for denial that Benoy Krishna Chaudhury’s life long association and affiliation with the Communist Movement undoubtedly ensured by the Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta’s great inspiration. In this context Benoy Krishna Chaudhury himself unhesitatingly confessed through one of his recollections that he maintained close contact with Bhupendra Nath Dutta till the end of his life. He had learnt many things about socialism from him. Through him he came in to touch with Braja Bihari Barman of Barman Publishing House. In those days the main source of getting books on socialism had been available in this publishing house. Bhupendra Nath Dutta used to take classes at different venues in College Street Area regularly. Along with Muzaffar Ahmed, Abdul Halim, the pioneers of Communist Party, there was impossible to denying the fact that Bhupendra Nath Dutta definitely took a prominent part in disseminating socialist ideas in Colonial Bengal. ⁷⁴

It was in the second half of the 1920’s that a consolidation of various left ideological trends occurred and begun to have a significant impact on the Indian Freedom Struggle. Specifically since 1923 the communist became active in different parts of India and communist groups were set up at various provinces. Between

the year 1926-1928 they formed the workers and peasants parties in UP, Bihar, Punjab, Bombay, Bengal and other regions and became active in the labour and as well as peasants fronts. They demanded reduction of Working hours of the laboures, fixations of minimum wages for workers, solidification the working class and peasant community, abolition of the feudal type, Zamindari system and many more. Eminent leftist leaders like Muzaffar Ahmed, S.A.Dange, P.C.Joshi and Sohan Singh Josh were the main functionaries of the party. ⁷⁵

An agrarian historian rightly observed:

“After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the congress leader advocated a policy of individual civil disobedience rather than Mass Civil Disobedience. However, in rural areas peasants continued to refuse to any taxes and rents. This was party motivated by their pressing material interest, due to their depression. Radical nationalist unhappy with the official policy, supported peasants and continued to organized in Midnapore, Nadia, 24 Parganas, Bogra, Dinajpore, Malda, Noakhali, Hooghly, Purbna, Jassore, Dhaka, Khulna, Bankura and Burdwan agitations for non payments of rent, taxes continued in 1932-33.

The militancy of the peasants during the agitation of the early 1930’s caused anxiety for some sections of Congress. The Indian National Congress aimed to represent All Indian interest, and involved poor peasants in agitation but it remained unable to accommodate their specific interest for fear of alienating their supporters among the rural elite until the mid 1930’s when semi-autonomous Kishan Sabha were established.” ⁷⁶

The great depression affected all strata of rural society in undivided Bengal. Numerous cultivators has been faced many hard ships. At that rural tensions were gradually accelerated. Political activists those were active at the rural sector Bengal who were taking up the peasant issues and try to organize them along with more radical line. In Burdwan local socialist minded Congress activists has been frustrated in their attempts to organize a no rent campaign during the Civil Disobedience Movement by other hardcore Congressites, sympathetic Zamindari interest. They realized that there was need for a separate peasant organization that could properly represent and streamlined the interest of the peasants. Therefore, a conference was organized by the pro-present political activist at Hatgobindapur in 1933 to set up a Krishak Samity. The organizer argued that the peasants had to organize around their own agendas, but that this would also strengthen the Nationalist Movements. Hela ram Chatterjee, Benoy Krishna Chowdhury and others were the main back-bone for this particular political endeavour. ⁷⁷

M.A.Rasul categorically stated about the earlier efforts for the mobilization of peasants through Kishan Sabha:

“A general secretary of the All Indian Krishan Sabha Swami Sahajanand submitted his report on the activities of the sabha in the various provinces in 1937-38 as received by him from the respective provincial Krishan Committees. Here is a brief account of these activities at that early period taken from the report of the general secretary:

Activities in Provinces

1. *Bengal: Lucknow conference (1936) some organizing work was done in the districts and 200 delegates from twenty different*

districts gathered in Calcutta on 16th -17th August, 1936 to form a provincial Kishan organizing committee. This was followed a regular Provincial Kishan Conference, its first session in Bankura district on 27th-28th March'1937. It adopted its own constitution and a comprehensive political- organizational resolution. Bankim Mukherjee was elected general secretary. This conference was preceded by district conference in a number of districts and even local conferences in sub-divisions and thana areas in certain districts. Police repressions prevented holding them in to districts.

The following days were observed: May day, Kishan Day, Legalization of the Communist Party Day, Debt Cancellation Day, Bihar Kishan Day and China Day. A big campaign for abolition of Zamindari was under taken.

The Provincial Kishan Committees office in Calcutta was raided and searched by the police in connection with the issue of the May Day poster.

Several local kishan struggle were conducted the two most important was relating to Khasland in 24 Parganas district and the Canal Tax reduction in the Burdwan district. Several kishan marches were organized in these districts to their respective headquarters while one was taken from 24 Parganas district to the Legislative Assembly of Calcutta on 7th April'1938.”⁷⁸

Eminent economic historian D.N. Dhanagare rightly observed the internal contradictions occurred within the kishan sabha leadership mind set during the late thirties and forties:

“Kishan Sabha leaders, both at the local and districts level came either from the non-cultivating classes- teachers, university graduates, etc. or from sum jotdar families. Initially both the workers and peasant party in the twenties and the Kishan Sabha in the thirties were dominated by a strong pro-rich and middle peasant lobby. But from 1937-1940 or so the Bengal Kishan Sabha drifted gradually to the cause of poor peasants –borgadars and consequently was cut off from the support of rich and middle peasants, although in some places the latter continued to operate within the kishan frame work even after 1940. But by and large different agrarian classes were polarize to different political parties in Bengal by 1940.” ⁷⁹

In this context Adrienne Cooper is also unveiled the internal structural composition related to the peasant leadership which was prevailed during the late thirties and forties in undivided Bengal. He categorically stated the organizational hierarchies of the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha and the Communist Party of India, like all other political bodies in Bengal were dominated by middle class educated men hails from either high cast hindus or those from elite muslim families. This bourgeois leadership was of course criticized in post independence phase. District and Provincial leaders, who were almost exclusively from professional or landed backgrounds and surely they brought valuable skills and schemes by the helps of their academic background within the Peasant Movement. Understandably, with out these elements the peasant mobilization during the colonialphase of Bengal would not have been possible. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury obviously came from a land owing and trading family of the Uggro Kashatrya cast in Burdwan. He was attracted to communism from terrorism and

assisted the establishment of Burdwan Kishan Samity and organization of the Anti-Canal Agitation. ⁸⁰

Natural disasters on form of floods, famine and disease were so frequent from 1941 to 1945 that any follow up on the Land Revenue Commissions recommendations was unthinkable. The conditions of the Bargadars however went on steadily deteriorating, despite the food scarcity, the sharecropper's obligation to surrender half their produce to the Jotdar remained unaltered. Between 1940 & 1942 several leaders of Kishan Sabha were imprisoned which gave them an opportunity to sharpen their understanding of the real agrarian crisis, and the nature of persistent, class conflict in the rural sector. A clearer articulation an understanding of the notion of peasant and the class base of the party emerged through that process of intellectual maturation. The Kishan Sabha by 1945 had become a pre-dominantly frontal poor peasant organization. At the time of natural disasters the communist units and Kishan Sabha workers who were already released, engaged themselves in massive scale famine relief operation. Dedicated band of communist set up relief committees and grain cooperatives in the districts. These relief operations enabled the Communist Party of India and the Kishan Sabha already had enrolled 77,000 members in nearly a thousand villages, and about a thousand whole time workers in rural terrorism of Bengal. ⁸¹

During the thirties and forties as an active communist crusader Benoy Krishna Chaudhury have been whole heartedly participated in various peasant and Labour Movement organized by the Communist Party of India. In 1940-1942 the notable peasant movements were the Kaigram uprising at Adampur agitation to

important peasant movement characteristically directed against the powerful local landlords and zaminders in Bardhaman districts. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury himself played a very significant role to mobilize the peasants in those above mentioned localities.

During the decade of forties the local activists affiliated to the Krishak Sabha were also engaged themselves in the fields of constructive work and different voluntary services. In 1943 large number of people has been affected by devastating flood across a vast area in Bardhaman district. At the same time the district also was fall in the grip of a famine that over shadowed the undivided Bengal along with Bardhaman. This district never manages to escape from this horrible catastrophe. The Krishak Sabha under the leadership of Comrade Shahidullah, Hare Krishna Konar, Shib Shankar Cowdhury successfully mobilized its entire resources, deployed teams and rescued survivors from their endangered position. Members like Comrade Munsur Habib, Bipad Baran Roy, Dasu Rathi Cowdhury, Hare Krishna Konar and others were actively participated in the work for construction of the Ajoy Dam in 1944. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury as a capacity of the Krishak Sabha member he also contributed to the specific constructive work for immediate relief of the peasant community. ⁸²

To quote Benoy Chowdhury:

“We started mobilizing eight to ten thousand people daily for the construction work. Hare Krishna Konar, Munsur, Bipad Baran Roy, Dasu Rathi Chowdhury, Ahad Saheb, Sailesh Banerjee, Daya Maya Gupta, Satya De, Myself and several others supervised the work from a temporary camp set up near Bhedia Station. People

from nearby villages took part in this construction work with a lot of enthusiasm.” ⁸³

In the last leg of the thirties along with other provinces Bengal also witnessed the peasant agitation under the initiatives of the Krishak Sabha. During that particular phase one of the memorable peasant movement was took place at Burdwan under the leadership of Bankim Mukherjee. The peasants of Bardhaman actually agitated against the improper enhancement of the Canal Tax. So the second Anti-Damodar Canal Tax Movement was at last broke out when the canal authority swung back again to its earlier position and subsequently enhanced the canal tax from two rupees nine anas to five rupees eight anas. The immediate demand on which agitation was started by the Krishak Sabha was the early reduction of canal taxes. But the colonial administration ignored its demand and had recourse to punitive actions against the peasant agitators. The police men open fire on the agitators at Karuri village. Quite a large number of peasants were put behind the bars. In this regard the colonial authority maintained their adamant attitude till the penultimate day of British Colonialism. Of course, aftermath of the Indian Independence very soon the first Congress Chief Minister of West Bengal Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh some reconciled with the peasant demands for the reduction of canal taxes on rational basis. His ministry has been decided this tax had to decrease up to one rupee respectively. Simultaneously then the first Congress Government also took up a speedy administrative measures to released all the agitators who were rallied behind the Second Damodar Canal Tax Movement from the prisons. ⁸⁴

The conference of the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha was held at Naltabari in Mymensingh district from 10-12 May'1943. At

that time the provincial membership of the Sabha surpassed one lakh and thirty thousand. That particular conference adopted significant resolutions that demanded specifically harmonious Hindu-Muslim relationship, Indian National Congress-Muslim League Unity, increased food production, rent free distribution fallow and non-cultivated land among the poor and landless peasants, fixation of minimum and the maximum prices of the food crops. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury personally was present at that conference and he has been impressed by the out come of the peasant mobilization at Naltabari. ⁸⁵

Much later Benoy Krishna Chaudhury recounted about one of the most significant Peasant Conference and its all encompassing adopted resolutions that were held at Burdwan through his memoirs:

“The eight conference of the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha was held on 13th -14th March’1945 at Hathgobindapur of Burdwan district. The flag was hosted by Jalaluddin Bokhari, Member of the Central Krishan Council. A three member council consisting of Abul Hayat Saheb, Gopal Haldar and Krishna Binod Roy was formed altogether 325 delegates representing the district participated in the conference. In addition many invitees from the peasantry were present during the deliberation that took place. Not only from the different district of Burdwan district but also from the other districts of Bengal, peasants came in procession to join the conference. From the districts of Nadia, Hooghly, Howrah and Midnapur, many peasants walked for even 70-80 miles to take part in the conference. The open session held in the afternoon of 14th March saw a rally of about thirty thousand peasant including at least seven thousand women.

Through a poster exhibition were depicted the conditions of peasantry in Bengal and their struggle for the attainment of the demands. A medical camp was open for the peasants who came to attend the conference. Trade Unions, Student Federation, Mahila Atmarakkha Samity, even the Muslim League sent their delegates to this conference. In the cultural programme, apart from IPTA, the eminent folk musician Ramesh Shil took part. Membership figure of the Provincial Kishan Sabha at the time of the conference was 2,55,0104. The organization had its wings in about 1000 union boards under 26 districts of the province. There were more than 3000 active members of the kishan sabha at that time and about 1000 of them were whole timer.

The conference made a detailed discursion on the price of paddy. The Govt. instead of fixing the lowest price fixed the highest for selling paddy between 5.75 and rupees 6.75 per mound. Initially they demand to raise the price to rupees 10 per mound was made in the conference, but later on, considering the economic condition of the growers as well as the sellers especially the workers, land labours and poor peasants, the resolution was modified. The modified demand urged the Govt. to fixed the price at rupees 6 to rupees seven for surplus areas and rupees seven to rupees eight in the deficit areas. The problem of cloths reached such an acute stage during this day that the conference had to adopt a resolution to observe a Cloths Day on 18th March through out Bengal. As a measure against bribery and blackmarketteers of foods another resolution demanding formation of a food committee at the provincial level was adopted. It was also demanded that the elected representatives should form the majority in the Provincial Food Committee. At the same time demands for increase supply of food

grains in rural areas and introducing Rationing System were also made. In another resolution related to the sharecroppers and the land labourers, it was demanded that the owners of the land (given to sharecroppers) would get half of the produce, if they bore half of the total cost for cultivation. Otherwise they would receive only 1/3 of the total crop produced. The practice of receiving Nazrana (extra payment) by plot holders at time of allocating plots to must stop. The interest of paddy borrowed during scarcity must be brought down from one and a half times (of the quantity borrowed) to the earlier rate of ten seers per mound. If needed arrangement should be made for lending paddy from Govt. godown at nominal rate of interest. As to the land labourers the resolution demanded that every union board must prepared a list of land labourers under its jurisdiction, keep an eye and how to increase the quantum of products, and arrive at a fair settlement regarding the wage rate. It was also resolute that land labourers belonging to kishan sabha should have a special organizational wing for the purpose of carrying on movement.

During the days of the famine and distressed economic condition of the workers, women in some places had to sell their bodies as the only means of subsistence. The conference demanded that these women must be rehabilitated in the normal life. The Govt. it was demanded must set up work houses where these women should be trained in different handicrafts in order to make them self sufficient. Demand was also made for the abolition of taxes on ground nuts, seeds and fertilizers. It was further demanded that pisciculture should be encouraged and Government assistance for increase production of fish should be arranged. At the same time a resolution was adopted to form an organization of fisherman.”⁸⁶

Needless to say the end of the Second World War, followed by the political negotiation in between Colonial Government and Indian Leadership for the transfer of power and the natural anticipation of liberation, marked a qualitatively new stage in the acceleration of the peasant agitation. A spirit was evident and the certainty of approaching independence with the great promises of a new social alignment inspired peasants community, to assert their basic rights and rightful claims with a new vigour. Many struggles that had been left of in 1939 under the new emerging situation were renewed. ⁸⁷

There was a dip in the Labour Movement between 1931-36. The next wave of labour related trade union activity sprang up when the formation of popular ministry's took up their limited administrative responsibilities in different provinces during 1937-39. Left influence in nationalist politics and the trade union movement once again begun to accelerate rapidly. ⁸⁸

The communist played a significant role in mobilizing the workers strikes in the industrial sectors during the late thirties and early forties. At the same time non-communist labour leaders and trade unionist were also became very much active to address the labour causes. But Bankim Mukherjee, Muzzaffar Ahmed, Niharendu Dutta Majumder, Shib Nath Banerjee and other notable left minded labour organizers were obviously done their great job to accelerate the Working Class movement in the penultimate period of British Raj. ⁸⁹

The Labour Movement of workers of Ranigunj Bengal Paper Mill on the last quarter of 1938 was significant in the history of

labour activity in Bengal. Benoy Krishna Chaudhury after his formal enrollment with the Communist Party of India, he immediately went to Raniganj and with the help of other trade union organizer like Amulya Ghosh, Durga Halder, Banwari Lal Valutia mobilized the labour forces against depressive mill authority on 12th November'1938. Comrade Bankim Mukherjee arrived at Raniganj and on the sprawling area in front of the union office addressed a huge gathering of labourers for about an hour in an inspiring over tone. On November 13'1938 one thousand five hundred workers of the mill downed machine tools in protest against arbitrary retrenchment of some of their fellow workers. They had other grievances too as usual the mill authority sought police help and the police department as usual sends a big contingent. The plan of the mill authority was to run the factory by the loyal workers with the help of the local administration. The workers union, therefore, resorted to picketing in order to foil the evil gain of the authorities. While picketing in front of the entrance of the gate to prevent loyal workers to enter in to the factory, the assistant secretary of the union young Sukumar Banerjee was put to death by a lorry run over which was carrying the loyal labour force of the mill authority. So through this unfortunate happening at the mill's gate Sukumar Banerjee ultimately met a martyr's death. Despite of that barbaric incident the labour strike continued. Unable to break the morale of the workers the insensitive authorities resorted to the method of oppression in collaboration with the police machinery. On January 21'1939 eight strikers, including the secretaries of the Asansol Congress Committee, The Bengal Paper Mill Workers Union, Khidirpore, were arrested by the police. Two women picketers were also arrested. The situation became grave. The oppressive measures also did not produce the desired results. The remained calm despite official

provocation. But ultimately the Ranigunj Paper Mill strike fizzled out, because the lack of irregular interactions among the labour leaders of their different shade of opinion. But there is a no scope for a denial that the persistent diabolic act by the authorities and local administration the workers definitely fought a long drawn struggle against the far more stronger establishment despite of their heavy odds. ⁹⁰

In 1939 immediately after the out break of the Second World War the Communist Party of India declared the war as an Imperialist War and started an all out Anti0-War Campaign across the country. That kind of belligerent move by the Communist Party of India the colonial government had to take a firm measure to tackle the communist. Large number of party members and leaders were arrested. Many others forced went underground and became engaged themselves to build up the parties organizational work at different front including laboure front also. During that particular phase Benoy Krishna Chaudhury became very much active at Kharagpur locality and he took up a whole hearted effort to build up the communist parties support base with in the Railway Workers Union. Since 1941 he also devoted to mobilize the coal workers of Dhanbad and Jharia coal belts. Benoy Krishna Chaudhuri's trade union activities also extended to the Victoria Colliery, Burnpur Colliery areas. Comrade Hare Krishna Konar wife Biva Konar, Fani Mukherjee, Chinu Mukherjee, Chaturanan Mishra and Purnendu Mukherjee were extended their red support to his t4rsade union endeavors in those locality. ⁹¹

At Kumardubi Benoy Krishna Chaudhury made and intimate contacts with the workers of the Ceramic Factories. Within a month with the help of a very efficient party cadre named Harris, he has

been successfully established a very reciprocal inter personal contact with the ceramic workers. Due to his untiring effort the communist party succeeds to build up its trade union base in the Ceramic Factories in 1940-41. ⁹²

He also sincerely engaged himself with the organizational trade union work of the communist party at Kulti. He had, during the early forties he made an attempt to organized and mobilize the workers of Eastern Light Casting Factory. Bijoy Pal as a supportive fellow comrade has been played a very vital role to his organizational work. In 1944 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury was elected as the Secretary of the Bengal Coal Workers Union. ⁹³

The 21st session of the All Indian Trade Union Congress was held at Madras on 18th 23rd January'1945 under the presidentship of Fazal Ilahi Kurbani in the absence of S.A.Dange, The Second World war was then in its last phase. In the mean time after the German aggression on the Socialist Soviet Union in the winter of 1941 the Communist Party of India positional shift about the war has been already took place, for the shake of socialism the party then characterized the war as a People War. Needless to say, at that critical juncture of world history without the characterization of war the party definitely had no viable alternative to tackle that kind of aggressive and devastating kind of Nazi menace. Due to its positional shift about the prevailing world situation the party could not mobilized the moral and political support to the Mahatma Gandhi led last mainstream National Movement that was launched in 1942. In this volatile situation of national and international arena, as a close observer the All India Trade Union Congress unanimously adopted a political resolution emphasizing the need for attainment of India independence. The particular session also

adopted another significant resolution demanding immediate release of the Congress leaders. Those who were went behind the bars in connection with the August Movement Benoy Krishna Chaudhury recollects about the Madras session of AITUC in 1945:

“The 21st session of AITUC was held on 18th -23rd January’1945 at Madras along with Nanda Lal Mistri and Madan Patel of Steel Corporation Union (Burnpur), Khsetra Nanth mistri of Wagon Company and Mohona Roy of west Victoria Colliery. I attended this conference as one of the delegates. Incidentally except myself all others were industrial workers. At this phase, to form union was not a smooth job- it involved a kind of struggle and persons in the fore front of such struggle were usually recognized as the leaders of the union, (my inclusion in the team of delegates would be understood from this fact). 94

In September 1942, prices appeared to have stable, somewhat. A severe cyclone struck Western Bengal destroying large portions of the aman crop in Midnapore, 24 Parganas and Burdwan. The exception of a poor harvest aggravated the tendency to speculative buying and hoarding. In the winter season of 1942-43, as Amatya Sen observed that a moderate short fall of production was translated in to an exceptional short fall in market release. The wholesale price of rice suddenly jumped from Rs. 10 per maund to Rs. 30 per maund. According to unofficial sources, rice sold at more that Rs. 100 per maund in some districts. 95

The poor in the Bengal’s rural tract appears to have been gripped by a feeling to the helplessness as food disappeared beyond their reach. The Colonial Government and Muslim League led

Provincial Administration remained passive. Denial policy of the colonial masters caused acute problems in the coastal paddy growing regions of Bengal. In the autumn of 1943 rural Bengal bore the horrific spectacle of spiritless creatures trudging towards the metropolis and urban centers in search of food. Some 3 million died as a consequence of the Great Bengal Famine. ⁹⁶

Benoy Chaudhury hailed from a family of upper caste landowners, but he showed his social activism and political commitments from an early age. During turbulent forties he started to relief work among the poor people after he saw the appalling distress due to nature's hostilities and mans handiwork famine occurred in Burdwan district along with othe districts of undivided Bengal. To quote Benoy Chaudhury:

“People were starving everywhere. Under this compelling condition, volunteer groups were organized in towns and villages for searching out the hoarded paddy and rice for running the poors Raina in Burdwan was one of the worst areas. Taking advantage of this situation, some sections of the population instigated the peasants to resort to forcible and violent methods. The relatively better-off peasants of the locality became quite upset. At the stage I visited Raina and with the help of Nemai Daw approached some of the well-off peasants and told them ‘If you can collect fro me 500 maunds of paddy as loan, I will distribute the same among the starving families and assure you to pay up this loan in king after the next harvest. “ ⁹⁷

Under his capable leadership the dedicated band of local volunteers has been quite successfully carried on their relief operation at Raina in a almost peaceful manners. ⁹⁸

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury was actively involved in an effort to maintain harmonious relationship between Hindu and Muslim Community at Burdwan district during the penultimate phase of British Colonialism in 1947. He and his other fellow Communist comrade were put up a great fight to annihilate the communal virus from the body politic of Burdwan's agricultural terrain and industrial belt. 99

But the efforts of the Communists to built up inter-communal solidarity were ultimately frustrated. On 15th August 1947 Bengal was bifurcated and Communal passion triumphed. 100

It we cast even a kaleidoscopic glance over span of his eventful political career for almost twenty years, surely an image of multidimensional political person will be emerge in front of us, who has borne witness almost every significant facet related to the national or regional political drama that have been performed here in India and particularly in Bengal till its end of colonization on 15th August'1947.

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Struggling Years

CHAPTER-3

(1947-1971)

Aftermath of Indian Independence and the genesis of West Bengal State, Benoy Krishna Chaudhury as a dedicated communist has been sustained his political crusade against the Capitalist – Bourgeoisie combine for upliftment of dispossessed proletarian class. He tirelessly engaged himself in Various movements that was launched by the Communist Party Of the India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) along with his fellow comrades. His devotion and commitment to Socialism- Communism was unsurpassed and all pervasive. Pseudo- Leftism went against his grain, and he valiantly fought it through every available forum during Post Independent era.

Immediately after Independence, Communist Party of India (CPI) had gone through a grate deal; of intra-party ideological squabble and disagreement. Initially, the party recognized that India ha decolonized and advised all progressive political elements within Indian Society to lend their supportive hand to Jawaharlal Nehru against the Secessionist- Communal and Pro- Imperialist forces. At that time they could strive for was some amount of respectability in the schemes and policies of the newly installed Nehru led Government. The central committee of the C.P.I. welcomed this transfer of power and urged its support to the first Independent National Administration for materialization the hard task of National Democratic Revolution. ¹ But soon the Party lost its patience and its second Congress held at Calcutta in February 1948, an entirely left-sectarian, too dogmatic and adventurist policy was adopted under Soviet influence. The transfer of

Power and Indian Independent was scathingly criticized as a great national betrayal and that was mitigated by the Congress and the Muslim League leadership. Aftermath of Independent congress had switched over to imperialist-feudal camp. Prime Minister Nehru had become a political pawn of Imperialist Lobby. The Congress Regime was ruling in a Totalitarian manner and the Indian Constitution is a mere replication of charter Slavery. In this context, The party urged the Indian Proletariat to accomplish the People's Democratic Revolution by allying to its faith on poor-middle peasant combine in order to isolate and uproot the Pro- Imperialist and Pro- feudal social monster from Indian soil. So the Communists were ready to traverse through militant warpath and dislodge the Nehru regime at all cost. The Party gave call for a Socialist Revolution and tried to initiate an armed struggle across country. ² The Second Congress Session of CPI was inaugurate by Muzzafar Ahmed and he delivered the welcome address on behalf of Bengal CPI. The political thesis of B.T, Ranadive was placed at the Calcutta Session. Needless to say that the party already chose B.T. Ranadive as its new General Secretary in place of P.C. Joshi. ³ C.P.I. aftermath of its Calcutta conclave organized several adventurist violent actions. It decided to continue the armed peasant struggle in Telengana. The second major drastic step took up by the Party leadership was to declare a national railway strike in 1949. Communist activists also indulged themselves in other terrorist operations according to Party's dictum. But almost all the adventurist endeavours were ended up with their disastrous results. Very soon it got isolated from large sections of Indian People and was organizationally failed to built up itself as a strong and formidable political force against the mighty Congress

regime. The sectarian adventurist stand of the Party brought it in to collision course with the establishment. Numerous Party cadres were thrown behind the bars, many perished as result of stringent police action. At the same time, to eradicate the 'Communist Meance' several state administration outlawed Communist Party of India. Its absurd aspirations has been shattered. As a natural consequence its membership gradually declining from nearly 90,000 to about 18,000 in 1951. 4

On 26th March, 1948, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh led West Bengal State Government banned the Communist Party of India through the imposition of Public Safety Act. The State Home Minister Kiran Shankar Roy declared that the police personnel had located incriminating materials and seized these which sufficiently proved that the Party was preparing for a violent rebellion. The State Government also banned all the legal cells of C.P.I. such as, Trade Union, Party's Health Care Unit, Party Office and Party Mouthpieces Swadhinata. Many frontranking leaders were detained without trial. Large number of Communist leaders and workers went underground. 5 However the Party during its crisis period in between 1947-1952 quite successfully built up its strong support bases in South and South-Western Bengal. Through their indomitable courage and tremendous sacrifice different firebrand leaders and workers were politically penetrated the populace mind in Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, 24-Parganas, Medinipur and above all Burdwan.6 In Post-Independence Phase, the Communist Party of India launched many Pro-People Movements on several major issues of Common Life under extreme hostile atmosphere. In the course of these movements it has built up strong support base among common mass belonged to different social segment y and affiliated to divergent occupational types. 7 As a loyal soldier of the Party along with his

fellow comrades he has been carried on an unflinching warfare in multifarious front.

During the crisis period of his party Benoy Krishna Choudhury somehow managed to evade the imminent police arrest and took up for sometime at Mihijam and Bardhaman town with his close political associate like comrade Tarapada, Shahedullah. From their hidden shelter they had been covertly engaged themselves to mobilized the students, unorganized workers and poor peasants. When their hide and sick political game was enacted, the common people of Bardhaman unhesitatingly extended a helping hand to them irrespective of their community affiliation. However in some locality the comrades unfortunately has confronted with the hostile conservative social forces. At that time numerous young vibrant students of the district were greatly inspired by the secret pro-people activities of the out-lawed party. Many students came into contact with Benoy Krishna Choudhury. He was also instrumental in building an alliance of the rickshaw pullers in Bardhaman with the trade union unit of the Communist Party of India. During the summer of 1948 Benoy Krishna Choudhury, Syed Shahedullah, Sheik Gulu, Niranjana Dihidar and Patel of Burnpur went to Bombay and joined the All India Trade Union Conference which was held here. In the meantime the obdurate Congress regime of West Bengal has been tried hard to capture the important district Communist leaders, but its initiative were not immediately successful. Districts intelligence branch could not trace their whereabouts due to the existence of Party's very efficient hidden political network. So, Benoy Krishna and his fellow comrades were able to save themselves from police's net for almost two consecutive years. 8

In early 1948 the CPI adopted plans and programmes for militant type all-out class struggle against the bourgeois- landlord domination in west Bengal. Thus Krishak Sabha also adopted a sectarian policy and this political measures alienated landlords, rice peasants, middle peasants from its organizational fold. Many Krishak Sabha activists pursued a policy of terror and intimidation. In 1948 the Sabha had a membership of 1,02,000, but in 1962 it decimated to 30,000. However, the campaign of the Sabha has been generation the people's awareness about the injustice and exploitation of the landlord and moneylender in rural tracts. The Sabha activists could mobilize poor agricultural workers under the enchanting slogan of land to the tillers and their movements also spilled over 24-Parganas, Medinipur, Hooghly, Howrah and Bardhaman district. 9 As it appears from Shahedullah's personal observation that the peasants of Raina under the leadership of Benoy Krishna Chowdhury and B.B.Roy built up organized movement to resist the landlord's unjust exploitation along with the Tebhaga Line. Communist Valiantly intervened into the movement and very soon it spread rapidly. Out of apprehension, the district administration took up stringent measures to quell the peasant unrest, There were frequent clashes with the police it became a regular event, even bullet firing took place, Two comrades were died on the spot .The Raina peasant upsurge took a quite serious turn under the active initiative of Benoy Krishna Chowdhury.¹⁰

In 1979 Zamindari Abolition Bills or land tenure legislation were introduced in a number of states such as UP, Bihar, MP, Assam, Madras and Bombay. The G.B.Pant Committee's report on Zamindari Abolition was acting as the initial model for many states. Despite lot of major difficulties, inadequacies and intricacies the act passed in

most states by 1956 after, prolonged and discussions during the intermittent period from 1949 to 1956. ¹¹

On 2nd February, 1953 West Bengal Governor Dr. Harendra Nath Mukherjee's inaugural budget speech listed the most significant legislative endeavour was the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Bill 1953 or popularly known as the Zamindari Abolition Bill and which was introduced on 7th May, 1953 with altogether 53 clauses by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy led second Congress Government of West Bengal. This historic bill provided for State acquisition of Zamindari estates, rights of intermediaries in these estates and of certain specific land tenure rights of peasants and under-peasants. The bill aimed at elimination of interest of all Zamindaries and parasitic intermediaries within agrarian hierarchy by acquisition on payment of compensation, to permit intermediaries to retain possession of their Khas lands up to certain limits and to treat them as tenants holding directly under the State Supervision. The four fundamental principles of the Bill were: 1) All land should belong to State, 2) there would be no intervening rent-receiving interest, 3) land would be held by the tiller, 4) the state would eliminate and acquire enter zamindari and intermediate rent-receiving interests and such interests in mines and that certain types and amounts of land would be allowed to be retained under tenancy directly under the Government on payment of requisite mandatory rent. ¹² Along with some other state the revolutionary land reform measure known as the Zamindari Abolition Act was promulgated in West Bengal. With the passage of Bill, it was clearly observed by everybody that the power and grandeur of the landed aristocracy began steadily to abysmal decline. The entire legislative and administrative processes related to dilution of zamindaries were remarkably completed within a very short time span.

That kind of history land reform endeavours were speed up in a democratic framework. 13

There is no doubt that since 1950 the Krishana Sabha Started its campaign' against the Congress Governments unjust cordon system and levy collection in many districts of West Bengal. Anti-peasant programmes of the Congress Regime was entirely detrimental to the peasant's interests. It could only encourage the black Market's dirty game for achieving their aspired success. The prices of agricultural produces were sky-high. Without properly considering the peasants per-capita income, size of there land holding and its variation, the authority imposed a fixed levy on them. But the Krishak Sabha's relentless and persistent agitation against this arbitrary measures at last produced some beneficial results. The B.C.Roy led Congress Government has been completed to change its anti-peasant stance. Ultimately in 1956 an act was passed for abolition of Zamindari system across the state. However the progress made in the early years of Congress Regime related to peasant question was inadequate for the growing needs of them. 14

Penultimate phase of the 1951 when Ajoy Ghosh became the general secretary of the C.P.I., a new tactical line were adopted according to the advice of Stalin and it envisioned an broadbased alliance of workers, peasants, middle classes and the non-big bourgeoisie inside the pale of te People's Democratic Front. The new tactical line rejected the Ranadive's proposition that the entire bourgeoisie was outside the ambit of the People's Democratic Revolution. The new elements introduced in C.P.I. policy was that the toppled of the undemocratic and authoritarian State was to be part of the future agenda because the Indian people were not yet prepared for the endeavour, they

still suffered from an optical illusion about Congress Organization and Nehru's Charismatic leadership. However, CPI still have not grapped the ground reality of Indian Society and the true nature of Indian Politics; But immediately the Party withdrew its armed struggle in Telengana against the Nehru Government, postponed the revolution making programmes and took up an initiative to participate in the approaching first ever general election in independent India. In the meantime Nehru also accepted the Communist party's credentials within the Indian polity and he reciprocated accordingly. The restrictions on Communist activities has been lifted and the Party was legalized. So, CPI participated enthusiastically in the maiden franchise in 1952. ¹⁵

In 1952 State elections, the CPI captured 28 seats in the West Bengal Assembly. The CPI emerged as the largest opposition group in the electoral arena. The Communists were mainly successful in the district of Calcutta, 24 Parganas, Medinipur, Hooghly, Howrah and Burdwan. The Party secured 10.3% of the popular votes. Needless to say that in undivided Bengal the Communists had only three representative in Bengal Legislative Assembly. ¹⁶

In this context, the veteran Marxist leader Joyti Basu dispassionately admitted that just before the first ever general election the Communist Party of India already bogged down with multiple difficulties such as;

- 1) Lack of proper organizational consolidation.
- 2) Inadequate overhaul of entire party's organizational structure
- 3) Absence of quite a large number of efficient party comrades who could shouldered the party's political responsibility.

- 4) Numerous Party activists were either in prison or in underground shelters.
- 5) Acute financial crisis and insured fund position.

But, the Communist of India as an the opposition to the Congress Party was to some extent came out with a success in electoral battle in post-independent West Bengal. At that time the party's social bases were actually strictly confined within urban or semi-urban local in different districts and organization has been failed to penetrate in to vast rural tracts of the State. However, during that particular phase the party enjoyed very strong and concrete support in various industrial belts because its definitive ideological stand and programmatic commitments.¹⁷

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury as a CPI candidate contested from Bardhaman Seat in 1952 State Assembly election and stunningly won it. His electoral opponent the heavy weight Congress candidate Sir Uday Chand Mahatab was miraculously defeated. Benoy Krishna's first ever major electoral success in the State politics was a real spellbinder to all. Congress intellectuals were experienced a rude Shock. His sensational win made possible due to very caution, well calculated and people oriented electoral strategy adoption by the local leaders and workers of the district CPI. Barring 1972 election, Benoy Krishna altogether elected for nine consecutive times in the West Bengal State Assembly.¹⁸

He sustained the crusade against the Congress Regime's anti-peasant and pro-landlord tendencies aftermath of his entry into the State Assembly along with stalwart Communist leader Bankim Mukherjee. On the floor of the house, he incisively has been shown

the lacunas exists within the much vaunted. Zamindari Abolition Act implemented by the B.C.Roy led Congress administration . After he armed with all facts, brilliantly articulated that the act truly defeated itself by its various ingrained inconsistencies. Acts holistic purpose did not materialize upto desired level. A note of dissent against this act has been entirely ignored by the Congress Regime. So leftist apprehensions paid no heed in this context. The big land lords already has been squeezed enough time either sell their surplus lands or made them as a malafide transfer to the names of Kith and Kins. Even they also involed with the largescale Benami unlawful transfers. Furthermore, the landlords also resorted to resuming their landed possessions at least up to the ceiling limit and even claming often falsely that they have already took up an initiative for cooperative farming. Thus in West Bengal only 1 Lakh 22 Thousand acre surplus land became availableonly for distribution out of total 1 Cror 17 lakh acre cultivable land in West Bengal. Forceful eviction of poor tenants still has been persisted. Instead of proper infrastructural development in the Agricultural sector, overall economic progress of the State would remain a mare day-dream. We need to develop our agriculture by using better quality cattle and seeds, arrangements and applications of adequate manure and fertilizers, availability of irrigated water, provision for agriculture loans, creation of a new and healthy social environments. Benoy Krishna convincingly argued that without conducive social climate the peasant community would not inspired for more increased and more sustainable agriculture production, therefore, the desired agriculture. Clearly Agriculture revolution depended more on social content and less on technological inputs. Surplus lands are needed to be distributed among the large number of landless cultivators, agriculture labourers, sharecroppers and marginal peasants. It was urgent need to distribute the surplus land among the targeted beneficiaries on a warfooting manner and without its

efficient implementation the much announced social revolution remained as a mere political gimmick. 19 From a realistic stand point Benoy Krishna expressed his dissatisfaction and described the bill as a prescription for prophylactic treatment of parasitic disease and virtually it would be an impediment to much desired progress in land reform measures. He and Bankim Mukherjee in their capacity as a member of Assembly's Select Committee submitted note of dissent on the Zamindari Abolition related issue. This document still stand the test of time as a paramount importance attached to the any type of land Reform Policies and Programmes in Post- Independent West Bengal. Former Chief Minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and other eminent Congressmen were so much engrossed with Benoy Krishna Choudhury's Brilliant floor lectures about Land Revenue System and its innate complications when the prolonged assembly debates were going over the Zamindari Abolition issue in early and mid-fifties. In this regard the then ruling Camp has been always appreciated his profound and through knowledge about West Bengal's agrarian situation and its specific nature. 20

In this context what we need to understand that the most tenancies were informal in nature, they were not properly recorded and the tenants therefore could not benefit from the legislation. So more disturbing was the insecurity of poor, landless and marginal cultivators in regard to their occupancy questions were not treated judiciously as was expected. Even after the implementation of Zamindari Abolition under the shadow of personal cultivation the major benefit went to the rich and bigger cultivators and only a minor fraction percolated down to the smaller cultivators. But sharecroppers and other poor agricultural workers has been derived nothing from it. 21

Benoy Krishna Choudhury's commitments to the impoverished peasants and removal their poverty was total. While dealing with all aspects of the land reforms programmes and its implementing methods, he mainly concentrated his criticism on the issues of their deprivation through the state sponsored ill-adopted agrarian policies.

An event of far-reaching significance in the ambit of West Bengal Politics occurred in 1967 and 1969 when Congress was defeated and two successive United Front Ministries were installed for short duration. During these years the major political constituent of the Fronts CPI (M) was able to mobilize massive agrarian movements of tenants and sharecroppers and thus gained popularity in rural pockets in West Bengal.

Immediately after his swearing in Hare Krishna Konar, the Land Revenue Minister of the First United Front Government announced that the policy of quick, speedy distribution of surplus land among the landless and total stopping of eviction of sharecroppers would be properly implemented. Though these two successive United Front Governments were short lived, they could inspire the common and dispossessed people for overhaul the existing social pattern. Under the leadership of Hare Krishna Konar All Bengal Krishak Sabha started a land grab movement across the State for the seizure and distribution of surplus land. ²²

Hare Krishna Konar, during his ministerial tenure, has identified 6 lakh acre surplus land for distribution. At that time as a eminent leader of the CPM (M) Benoy Krishna Chaudhury did devote much time and effort to land reform movement. He was opposed to mindless ultra

radical naxalism and its unrealistic approach towards land reform programmes. At least since 1965 Naxalite (Maoist) leaders such as Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santhal and their other associates gave a call for ending of landlords domination on land through violent armed revolution. But CPM (M) leadership could not ignore the legal constraints involved with the land related officials measures. Ill informed Naxalities and their hysterical sympathizer had no desire to learn the complex pattern of land occupancy system in the State. It was against this extremely tense and volatile political backdrop that the land reform operation of Benoy Krishna began in Bardhaman district. During his specific land reform campaign he always maintained a wide and generous vision on every facet of agrarian reform, he always tried to inculcate the same virtue among the local leaders and workers of the party. Above all humanism and rationalism was properly integrated in his understanding of agrarian questions. Under his able skillful direction the CPI (M) party Comrades has been quite successful to unearth the surplus landed possession and its distribution among the targeted cultivators. The entire operation was conducted in almost peaceful manner. Virtually no coercion or violence being used. Party operators were guided by his legal acumen and moral scale when they engaged themselves in operational zones. Without prior investigation and survey, he never indulged his party comrades for indiscriminate unlawful land seizure and its subsequent distribution.²³

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury categorically ventilated through his note of dissent that the imposition of ceiling on the size of the land holding would not overhaul the entire Feudal agrarian setup in West Bengal. This kind of official step could only little weaken it. At

that juncture; what we urgently need was the necessary political will and determination.²⁴

The elation of political emancipation of India was tinted by intense despair, unprecedented hardships, tremendous distress and untold miseries. Large parts of the two bifurcated nations were engulfed by communal riots. There was mass exodus of common people from both nations across the borders reached at an alarming proportion. But it is difficult to make a comparison of Refugee Problem in Punjab and Bengal. Unlike what occurred in Western Sector, there was a smooth two way traffic which within a shorter time solved the problem. In Eastern Sector the Refugee Problem are juxtaposed with shocking situation. A reliable statistics has been shown to us by mid 1948 the number migrants from East Pakistan has quantified 1.1 million. In 1951 in West Bengal at least 3.5 million refugees took up their shelter here. During the particular phase between 1961-1965 another one million more refugees swelled their ranks. Above all it is striking to note that the intermittent period between February 1950 and October 1971 more than 60 lakh refugees came to West Bengal in search of their security, employment and proper relief and rehabilitation. Initial years after independence there were more than three important interstate bilateral dialogue has been took place and even a international level pact has inked over the refugee issue. Just after partition the first chief minister of West Bengal Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh met his counterparty H.S. Suhrawardy and discussed about the minority problem in 1947. After took over his Chief Minister ship Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy also engaged twice in talks with K. Nazimuddin in 1948 and again with Fazlul Huq in 1950. On massive influse of refugees. The aftermath of Barisal riots and Pakistan Premier Liaquat Ali Khan's tour to riot affected localities in Eastern Part of Pakistan brought an awareness in the minds of the Pakistani Leader

about the gravity of the extremely tense situation. In the meantime Indian Prime Minister Nehru invited Liaquat Ali Khan for a discussion. Nehru- Liaquat Dialogue was held at New Delhi in 1950. An agreement subsequently signed which aimed at the solution of 'Refugee Problem'. But the exodus of the minority Hindus did not cease and the refugee problem still unresolved Pakistani leadership was unable to annihilate the communal virus that already penetrated in to body politic of East Pakistan. Above all the discriminatory and step motherly attitude of the Central Government compounded the situation more worse.²⁵

After overcoming some initial hesitation Communist Party of India along with left and other political opposition forces since mid fifties has been demanded that millions of helpless refugees who had come to West Bengal should be provided adequate relief and rehabilitation on war footing basis. They severely criticized the Central Governments apathy about refugee problem of West Bengal. They further demanded that refugees should be rehabilitated as far as possible within the territorial ambit of the State. The Left and other opposition camp also demanded that the refugee colonies should be regularized and State Government must not evict them and sent to other locations outside West Bengal. CPI and other left opposition always complained against widespread corruption in the department of Relief and Rehabilitation, Bureaucratic callousness, frequent use of police force to quell the refugee movement. A multiparty apex body known as United Central Rehabilitation Council was set up in 1950. Among the Communist leaders who joined the organization and subsequently played a prominent role in mobilizing the refugees were Bijoy Mazumdar, Anil Sinha, Ambika Chakraborty, Prankrishna Chakraborty, Samar Mukherjee and Prasanta Sur. The first refugee colony was started in Calcutta and suburbs, 24 Parganas, Nadia, Howrah, Hooghly and

Burdwan. But Congress Regime of West Bengal came forward with an eviction bill and got it promulgated in 1951. This refugee eviction act officially known as Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act, 1951. The Act aimed at to eliminate the refugee element from West Bengal Politics. Evidently the object of the Regime was to remove the refugee from West Bengal as far as possible and sent them to other States. 26 Benoy Krishna Chowdhary also have contributed to communists endeavours to refugee interests with his active participation. Under the stewardship of Benoy Krishna the Burdwan District Committee of U.C.R.C. was functioned. At that time West Bengal State Government built up some temporary refugee shelter such as Panagar Airfield Accommodation Centre, Fransit Camp, Gopalpur Accommodation Centre, Palla Chachai Camp, Mahesdanga Camp, Mankar Camp and many more in Burdwan. In 1957 the living condition of hapless disposed refugees at Panagar Camp reached a crisis point due to multiple factors, such as 1) total absence of relief operation, 2) inhuman environment, 3) persistant administrative repression on difficult pretexts, 4) scarcity of food and other daily essentials etc. So the refugees or camp-dwellers started for the realization of their just demands. Numerous refugees died at the camp due to starvation. On 6th June, 1957 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury and Prankrishna Chakraborty had a one round discussion over the serious refugee problem with Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and his rehabilitation portfolio holder Prafulla Chandra Sen. But that inter-personal conclave between ruling and opposition failed to end the impasse. Without resort to desirable conciliatory approach the Congress administration has stepped out for a stringent police action against the camp-dwellers. On 24th June 1957 at night the police contingent all on a sudden felled upon refugees at Panagar camp with lathis. Large number of camp-dwellers were injured

by the brutal police attack. An important special Refugee Conference was held at Panagar-Gopalpur Camp in 1959. Benoy Krishna himself has been presided over the Conference. In this Conference Comrade Jyoti Basu was delivered his speech as a principal speaker. Large number of refugees were assembled here despite in presence of very inclement weather. So that U.C.R.C. Burdwan Branch's endeavours ultimately concluded with a success note. ²⁷

The early policy of the Communist Party of India was that of non-intervention in immediate post-independence refugee imbroglio. But since the beginnings of 1949 it has been noticed that there was a gradual shift towards direct intervention in the muddle. According go a Scholar's perception that during fagend of forties the CPI leadership virtually convinced about valuable political potentially in West Bengal Politics. They were certainly realized the inflammable refugee material could be helpful to topple the mighty establishment in near feature. ²⁸

Since 1952 the CPI and other left parties set up a separate committee for food and relief. Communist and other leftists were mobilized Food Marches from rural tracts to the district towns and the Calcutta metropolis. Obdurate Congress Administration as usual repress these, impoverished common folk, landless peasants have to undergo their daily life in acute financial distress. During the pre-puja months of August, September and October these distressed rural people come to towns and cities in search of food and employment. ²⁹

One of the major problems which faced the Bidhan Chandra Roy ministry was the deteriorating food in 1959. Millers had cornered

large quantities of rice in their respective mills. At that State Government had not legally empowered to requisition stocks from them. Of course very soon the State Administration within a short period empowered itself under the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act to requisition stocks from rice mills to prevent hoarding. But certain legal difficulties relating to distribution of stocks requisitioned from the mills has been complicated the situation worse. The State Government introduced a scheme of modified Rationing in Calcutta where rice was to be sold at Rs. 17 ½ per maund. In open market rice was then selling at Rs. 40 per maund. However, the exorbitant prices of foodgrain affected all in West Bengal. Now, the CPI and other allied left political forces were already explored it was a vital issue which offered a great opportunity to mobilize large number poor, unemployed and evicted migrants under their banner. At the same time through this mobilization Leftist force could be successfully launched an all out-regime crusade that may be dislodge it.³⁰

The veteran Communist leader Jyoti Basu aptly described the sequence of event related to the historic Food Movement 1957, through his memoir, he wrote that during 1957 West Bengal State has been suffered from acute food shortage. Food scarcity has been spilled over in many districts of South Bengal. There were various causes of the alarming food crisis: 1) a visitation of drought, 2) late monsoon arrival, 3) severe lack of employment opportunities and 4) sudden price hike in essential commodities. Naturally numerous stream of disgruntled rural poor and hungry people came down to Calcutta in search of food and it was already reported in the Party Office. Along with other left political forces the CPI without any delay was making an appropriate to launch a massive statewide campaign against the established Congress Regime over the food issue. On 18th September 1957 quite large number of

Cultivators from neighboring districts, leftist workers were arrested for violation of Section 144 CRPC at the call of Famine Resistance and Anti-Price Increase Committee comprising CPI and other left parties. Hare Krishna Konar, Leela Ray, Sailaja Sen, Nirranjan Sen, RRanen Sen, Bijoy Modoke, Gopal Basu, Some Nath Lahiri, Samar Mukherjee, Rabin Mukherjee, Joyti Devi, Sukumar Sengupta, Joyti Basu and Benoy Krishna Chaudhury and other were sent behind the bar due to their direct, active pro-people endeavours in the first historic Food Movement in 1957. 31 According to a conservative estimate that total number of arrested people quantified as 726 and at 11 leftist parties were participated in the people's upsurge. 32 Chief Minister Bidhan Chandra Roy even after the incident remained firm and had refused to meet a deputation of the opposition left leaders of the movement. 33

When food situation took a serious turn, the left opposition has been placed their charter of demands before the Congress Government of West Bengal. These specific demands were: 1) Immediate Openings of Fair Price Shops in Urban, Semi-Urban and Rural Belts, 2) Time found Programme for te Proper Implementation of Large Sc ale Relief Operations, 3) To make the Provisions of Regular Police Surveillance and Raids in the Hoarders Dess, 4) Legislation and Promulgation for Anti-Eviction Enactment, 5) To make Arrangements for Adequate Rehabilitation Packages, 6) Immediate Remission of Rent for the Hapless Peasantry in devastated Areas etc. However, the these Chief Minister paid no heed to these reasonable demands and rejected it altogether with his dictatorial indifferent approach. 34

In early March, 1959, Reports reached that hungry villagers from adjacent districts were coming in their thousands to Calcutta in search of Food. According to an official statistics that the daily influx

of starved people was about 3,000. At that time rice was then selling at an average of Rs. 22.75 per maund. Mass scale police action on small retail dealers created a complicated situation. Bulk of marketable surplus of the year had already passed on to wholesalers and millers and subsequently had hidden place. Bidhan Chandra Roy Government was in a constant dilemma. Near famine condition surfaced in the State. The State Government did not know to overcome the grim situation as a deficit ridden regional entity. So it was an opportunity which the leftist seized and they could easily see that the volatile situation was now ripe for organized an radical showdown against the regime's insensitive 'Food Policy'. Leftist leaders were realized that Kind of anti government operation might have an far reaching impact on the entire politico-socio-economic fabric of West Bengal. The leftist therefore built up a fierce attack on the regime. Barring jotedar, millers and food racketeers for the first time in the history of the Post Independent West Bengal the Leftist Group had the support of the vast populace in the food movement which began in August 1959. On august 31,1959 large contingent of food marches came to Calcutta from adjoining Districts of Howrah, Hooghly, 24 Parganas, Nadia, Burdwan and Medinipur and assembled in the Esplanade area to protest against exorbitant price like of food grains and other essential commodities under the slogan 'All to Calcutta. Demonstrators would proceed towards the Writers Buildings and violate the ban under Section 144 CRPC at the entry point. But without any violent provocations from the demonstrators the police suddenly encircled them and giving any warning took recourse to brutal lathi charges. Aftermath of the state sponsored provocation the State Capital went wild and many trams and buses were torched and police had to fire 447 rounds in Calcutta and its suburbs. According to leftist view, 80 persons were killed as a police firing.

In this context Sahedullah recounted quite vividly what was the real conditions prevailing during the penultimate phase of fifties in West Bengal and which culminated through the Food Movement under Leftist umbrella:

“The entire decade of 1950’s witnessed a grim situation due to inadequate food production and its insufficient supply to the local market with an affordable prices for the impoverished peasants, labours and common middle class people. The Post Independent Congress regime had spent little on agricultural development in West Bengal. Poor and middle peasants were being compelled to sell their produces at very cheap rate. At that time Prafulla Chandra sen has been hold the Food and Agriculture portfolio in the B. C. Roy Ministry. He by and large failed to address the genuine grievances of the distressed people. His inflexible and indifferent approach to the fundamental peasant questions was an glaring example of political inconsistency undoubtedly. He did not grapple with the widespread food crisis in the State. So, against that problematic backdrop the Communist party decided to go ahead with a collision course which aimed at to strike back at the root of the regime’s anti-people policies and its interest group’s clandestine operations. The CPI along with other left forces unhesitatingly announced their radical and open mass movements in front of different administrative installations of the Government across the state.” ³⁶

In 1959 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury entrusted by C.P.I. leadership to launch a large scale mass based food movement from Bardhaman on a particular date. But his initiatives and mission

remained unfulfilled due to police operation in the wee hours of dawn at Bardhaman town. As a result of the operation he was arrested again. ³⁷

Joyti Basu decried the food movement as a mighty people's upsurge for people's just demands and at the same time for the removal of the incapable Food Minister. He declared through his statement on 1st September 1959 that despite all the barbaric actions of the Regime, the leftist movement will continue according to the programme to be specified by PIFRC till our demands were conceded. In this statement where he clearly spoke about the leftist intentions and their future course of political action. ³⁸

Those years between 1948-1971 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury's political career embedded with the all major political moves taken up by the Communist Party of India and after 1963 the Communist Party of India (Marxist). His political life undoubtedly felt stirring of some upheavals in the Party and the Communist Movement in the State. CPI finally split in 1964. The group representing the earlier right and centrists trends being known as CPI and the newly emerging group being known after sometime as the CPI (M). The split actually took mainly a doctrinal form. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was officially founded in October; 1964. Immediately after its formation Benoy Krishna Chaudhury joined the fold. The ideological rivalry between the main two Communist Parties divided world Communism and India was an Exception. CPI (M) leaders never supported de-Stalinization and Revisionism trends that took place after Nikita Khrushchev take over in Soviet Union. They were also very determined to take up an all out anti-Congress stand due to its pro-

bourgeoisie and pro-landlord class character. When sudden Chinese Agrarian occurred in the winter of 1962 CPI(M) leadership supported the China's belligerent move. So in this context CPI and (M) reconciliation remained for ever as a distant dream. 39

CPI (M) leadership's new China line had been definitely creates an apprehension within ruling Congress Circle. The West Bengal State Government under Prafulla Chandra Sen was swang in to quick stringent administrative action which aimed at to repress entirely the new political endeavours already has been chalked up by the Party. In early hours of 31st October' 1964 under Section 30 of the Defense of India Rules. Police arrested 250 leaders of this Party. Benoy Krishna Chaudhary along with his comrades like Muzaffar Ahmed, Here Krishna Konar, Promode Das Gupta, Naren Sen and others were sent behind the bars. 40

During 1967 to1971 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury have trying to mobilize the CPI(M) workers against the narrow revisionist trends and intoxicated ultra left militant tendencies in West Bengal. When the Democratic Coalition Government led by the Congress ® was installed in 1971, Benoy Krishan Choudhury was arrested on fabricated and charges. The arrest raised a storm of protest inside the Party Circle. 41

Understandably, solidarity, strengthening and consolidation of the Socialist-Communists ideals among progressive foeces both outside and inside the CPI (M) for the genuine interests and upliftment of numerous struggling masses were his pressing tasks during the embryonic and initial phases of the Party. During the intermittent periods from 1948 to 1971 he stubbornly resisted all

pressures Centrists or Revolutionist or misguided ultra leftists in a valiant manner. At that turbulent times he emerged as a true tireless frontranking Cmapaigner for an visualized egalitarian society against all kind of 'Reacting Temptation'.

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**A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF
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**CHAPTER-IV : A SENTINEL DURING THE SEMI-FASIST TERROR OF
WEST BENGAL
(1972-1976)**

A Sentinel during the semi- Fascist Terror of West Bengal

CHAPTER-4

(1972-1976)

Almost immediately after the state Assembly Election and Subsequently an installation of the Congress (R) led Coalition Ministry in West Bengal, a major political crisis has been broke out within the CPI (M) Camp. The Coalition Ministry purposefully pursued its antagonistic attitude towards Communist activities. However, the Ministry could not remain in power for full four months. Eventually, President Rule was clamped on the State. But Siddhartha Sankar Roy was made Union Minister in Charge of the West Bengal .His first ever belligerent administrative moves was to send the army which aimed at to preventing all types of Communist activities, especially of the Naxalites. With the help of the military Contingent, Central Reserve Police Force, Armed Goons and Political Lumpens the State Administration was not only wiped out naxalites but numerous CPI (M) workers were also exterminated indiscriminately, large number of CPIM (M) leaders and activists had to leave their own localities, many CPI (M) comrades were forcibly detained without legitimate trail. ¹ So, the demoralized CPI (M) activists were inevitably drawn into the political fray. At that time, they were constantly fighting against hardcore reactionary rightist forces for their political survival on West Bengal soil.

The seventies are the most turbulent decade in Indian politics after independence. Indira Gandhi led Congress wins the 1971 lok Sabha elections with a thumping two- third majority. At that time Indira's supremacy is established in the South-Asia Region after the stunning military victory over Pakistan and the emergence of newly

liberated Bangladesh. The energized Congress leadership felt that it was opportune moment to capture powers in the State. Consequently, elections were held in March 1972 for the Legislative Assemblies in all states except Uttar Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala and Orrissa. Once again Congress won a majority in all the States including West Bengal. The Congress had won the Statics Assembly poll with a massive success. Except the Congress's left ally CPI, the all other leftist and non-leftist political forces were virtually eliminated in the electoral battle. The left and other oppositions however complained that the election were entirely vitiated by unprecedented widespread rigging through violent means. On 11th March 1972 marked forever as a black day in the Constitutional History of West Bengale. Wanton and indiscriminate Booth capturing rigging took place through out the day in more then 200 hundred Assembly segment. The Army, C.R.P., B.S.F. and the State Police were all systematically mobilized along with Congress backed anti social ruffians for letting loose a reign of terror. Almost all the Polling Stations were become out of bounds for the CPI- M and others.²

Aftermath of the Siddartha Sankar Roy led Congress Ministries installation in West Bengal the tentacles of Sami- Fascist Terrorism were spreading over leftist body politic even more wider and tighter the Congress Regime decided to suppress the CPI-M activities ruthlessly through undemocratic diabolic administrative actions on all fronts.³

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury through out the crisis phase of the CPI-M Party acted as a traiblazer with incense courage but also with abundant cautions and cool political calculation. At that travel time he also did not went to do anything wrong under the influence of

momentary temptation which would lead to Party being accused of violating political ethics and humane norms. During seventies he always maintain his mental tranquility and persistently carried out the responsibilities to built up the solid support bade among the common struggling people on behalf of the CPI-M.

Twenty Second West Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha Conference was held at Berhampore and Benoy Krishna Choudhury inaugurated it through the flag hosted ceremony .4 At that time, State Sponsored Semi- Fascist Terrorism has gripped West Bengal. Political activists have been persecuted for their Communist beliefs. The State's social fabric and political ambience was then in grave peril. Congress backed hoodlums has been uninterruptedly perpetrated murder, loot, arson, attack, rape across the State. Along with other districts Bardham was suffering from multifarious criminal activities a notorious Congress backed Goon and his criminal associates further intended to create a political bastion of their. own at Guaskura, Auashgram West Bather, West Mongolkot area. After his arrival in those areas Krishna found the whole affairs has become extremely perplexing and local CPI-M organization were thrown into total disarray. After an audience the local CPI-M activists he had verbally drawn up a guide line for Party Workers At that critical juncture he put forward his well calculated three point programme to avert the possible dangerous encounters which became imminent day by day. The three points were :- (1)Maintained regular communication with the local people. Simultaneously sustained the mobilization process among the local masses. 2) Persistent dialogue and discussion with the middle class rural people and sympathetically treated their concurrent problems.3) Maintain an amiable social relationship with the Congress minded few gentlemen on non-partisan

basis. With a view, to avoid the bloody confrontation in the criminal infested areas, Benoy Krishna adopted a very caution political Programme. But being quite sensitive both to local people's needs and to their moods. The common people welcomed and appreciated the CPI (M) Parties approach enthusiastically and ultimately the obnoxious intentions of Congress's local goons were futile. ⁵ So his articulated policy of restraint paid off.

In 1973, when Siddhartha Sankar Roy Regime has been ruthlessly applied the entire brutal administrative machinery to crush the CPI (M) Party's political existence, Benoy Krishna never lost his usual calmness and as far as possible he either overtly or covertly sustained relentlessly the political campaign of the Party. Almost regularly he took up political classes at different localities in West Bengal and even in Tripura. At that time he also organized several educational camp for the Party comrades. Through his vast and varied political experience he certainly convinced that without proper political education and training, all political campaigns which were directed against the hostile opponents doomed to be failure. In this context it would be needless to say that he had a profound understanding on Marxist Philosophy and Marxist Economy. ⁶

During 1973 when in Bankura-Purulia belt has been witnessed the Kendu-Pata Struggle which was mobilized by the poor local people, Biman Basu joined the people's endeavour as a close political associate of Benoy Krishna Chaudhury according to CPI (M) State Committee's decision, where he got an opportunity to how Benoy Krishna Chaudhury for the sake of poor people's cause as a disciplined party comrade through his tremendous perseverance

engaged himself to built up the Kendu Pata Movement in the face of too hostile natural climate and political ambience:

In 1973 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury has been continued his political tour from village to village even in presence of intolerable scorching heat in vast rural terrain of Bankura and Purulia district.”⁷

Suddenly in 1973 the tide changed for Indira Gandhi and Congress Party. The Indian Economy, the Indian Polity and the credibility of Congress Regime started going downhill. The People’s discontent and disillusionment found expression in different movement in different regions. A combination of recession, growing unemployment, rampant inflation and scarcity of foodstuffs created a serious bottleneck in the Country’s social and economic front. The burden of 10 million refugees from Bangladesh during 1971 war had depleted the grain reserves. Due to failure of monsoon rains for two successive seasons during 1972 and 1973, leading to a terrible drought in most parts of the Country and a massive shortage of food grains and fuelling their prices. The price of Commercial cash crop such as cotton, jute, oilseed, sugarcane, and coconut were starting to full. Along with the other states West Bengal also severely affected by the rapid deterioration in Indian economic crisis caused the West Bengal peasantry considerable distress.⁸

On 3 August 1974 the Provincial Krishak Council took up an action plan and programme to accelerate wage struggle which were already going on the rural tract of West Bengal. Five Kisan and Khetmajoor organization affiliated to various left political parties organized a joint convention in which they expressed consternation

at the starvation deaths in the rural belt and severely criticized the administration indifferent attitude to supply food and essential to the impoverished distressed populous at a reasonable price. The convention also took firm stand against the administrative repression meted out to peasant activists by involving them different fabricated cases and also arresting them under Maintenance of Internal Security Act. Again on 8 September, 1974 another joint convention of peasant activists was held. This particular convention raised the demands for fixing Rs. 8.00 as the minimum daily wage of the Khetmajoors. CPI (m) peasant activists along with the other pro-peasant left groups were mobilized mass meeting, conclaves, jathas in support of the just demands. As a active peasant campaigner Benoy Krishna Chaudhury has been tirelently engaged himself for the built up strong and persistent peasant movement in South Western West Bengal according to Swndarryya's specified plan and programme during the mid seventies. At that time Benoy Krishna unhesitatingly told young CPI (M) women workers that the entry of more and ore young communist women as a capacity of a leader and worker would ensure vital energy in sustained peasant activities across the state. 9

During the seventies Benoy Krishna emerged as a tall political person who standing like 'Great Sentinel' over the 'Semi-Fascist' terror on West Bengal's soil with his 'Himalayan Patient'. He has never hankered after populist exhibitionism and luxurious life style. At that time he was an embodiment of simplicity, discipline, morality, idealism and value system .He had withstood all sort of repression, oppression and exploitation. Despite hostile atmosphere he has been carried on his hard task and patiently waiting for the CPI (M) party's good turn.¹⁰

In 1975 Benoy Krishna became the member of the CPI (M) state Secretariat. At the same year he was also elected as President of the West Bengal Sabha. The 24th Conference the WBPKS was held at Bolepur. It has been shown in the Secretary's Report that wage movement spread over 6000 villages out of 38,000 village of West Bengal. In fact, the demand for Rs. 8 as the minimum could not be made effective uniformly, rise in wages did take place in many regions and almost 5 lakh Khetmajors and poor peasants benefited from such administrative decision. Thus the left led Khetmajor movements not only made the particular community politically conscious but created solidarity and cohesion among themselves. Even this time the dispossessed khetmajors with their moral confidence forced the authorities to withdraw repressive administrative measures and could still courage for the distressed ones. ¹¹ Needless to say, that after 1972 the Siddhatha Sankar Roy regime wholeheartedly tried to halt this onward march of the rural peasants and restore Landlord-Moneylender domination in the countryside. ¹²

History drove Indian almost irresistibly to the course of Emergency after 1974. Political challenge to Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Regime suddenly came into surface. Jaiprakash Narayan led Sampurna Kranti (Total Revolution) swept the whole of India and Indian politics was now moving towards specific polarization between pro-and anti-Indira camps. Within the Congress Party some demanded a truce between Mrs. Gandhi and J.P. on the negotiation failed to resolve the

deadlock. The situation became too bleak further when the Allahabad High Court in June 1975 disqualified Mrs. Gandhi for six years from holding any electoral office. This unprecedented historic verdict made her politically vulnerable. A Pressing demand for Mrs. Gandhi's resignation gained momentum. J.P. who was a frontranking leader of the Quit India Movement clarion call for total revolution against the misrule and corruption of Indira Gandhi. J.P. often accused Indira of trying to dismantle all democratic institutions and established a Soviet-sponsored dictatorship through her authoritarian style of functioning. On the other hand J.P. Movement was perceived by Mrs. Gandhi as a real threat to her leadership which made her entirely insensitive to any Opposition demand. She failed to escape from the shadow of intolerance and suspicion. In this volatile political backdrop all the left parties except the CPI supported J.P.'s endeavour. After not finding her way out from the political quagmire, She declared a National Emergency on June 25, 1975 under Article 352. Numerous Opposition leaders were arrested, newspaper censored and all types of protests banned. Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was stringently imposed upon political dissenters and opponents. Several academics, journalists, trade unionist and student leader were also put behind bars. More than 100,000 persons were arrested during a period of 19 months. Number of arrests quantified in West Bengal as 367. Hundreds of political prisoners were mercilessly tortured inside the jails. Every State institution was subordinated to whims and fancies of Mrs. Gandhi and her loyal acolytes. Democracy was replaced by personalism, authoritarianism and rampant nepotism. At that time the infamous 42nd amendment of the Indian Constitution was done.¹³

Aftermath of the enforcement of Emergency in 1975 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury has been forced to take up underground shelter and successfully managed to evade his arrest. During this crisis phase he tirelessly engaged in CPI (M)'s organizational work. For almost two years he had to roaming one underground shelter to another in different locations of Bankura-purulia tribal belt 1977. He suffered many hardships during that prolonged emergency period, but he never lost his faith on optimism about CPI (M) Party's vibrant feature.

Understandably, as a leftist leader and activist Benoy Krishna Chaudhury had to face numerous difficulties during the intermittent phase between 1972-1977. Under the autocratic and reactionary regime in West Bengal, not only working principle of democracy was undermined, even civil liberties were at stake. Despite these hardships and difficulties from political ambience this dedicated soul did not stray away from his goal. He has been valiantly confronted the undesirable contradictory pulls of seventies history when 'Semi-Fascist Regime of Terror' was let loose in West Bengal.

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**CHAPTER-V : CONSOLIDATING YEARS
(1977-2000)**

Consolidating Years**Chapter- V****(1977-2000)**

A man of iron determination, Benoy Krishna Chaudhury dealt with the Herculean task related to 'Land Reform Measures' and implementation of 'Panchayati Raj System' in a masterly manner as far as possible within almost twenty years of his ministerial tenure. It was Benoy Krishna who gave the grass root people's voice a concrete shape through the implementation of land reform policies and programmes. People's self-reliance was also materialized through the organizational cohesion under auspices of him. Benoy Krishna can be justifiably considered an architect of modern West Bengal. He used his strength to consolidate the CPI (M) Party's popular support base and the leftist governance. But his commitment to communism was deeply rooted in common struggling people's faith and will.

As it appears from our earlier discussion in the previous chapter that during decade of early 1967 to mid 1977, West Bengal witnessed increasing violence, wanton chaos, intense floor crossing, rapid factionalism, continuous political instability and above all disintegration of Congress Organizations. Unprecedented levels of State repression were especially directed against the CPI (M) and other Anti-Congress left-oppositions of course ultimately was transformed into an stupendous political success in 1977 when CPI (M) led first ever Left Front came into power after receiving a massive mandate from the people of West Bengal. After assuming office Joyti Basu, the Chief Minister of West Bengal unhesitating

announced that his left-Front Government would run the State administration together with common people. ¹

In 1977, Benoy Krishna Chaudhury became the minister in charge of Land and Land Revenue Department, Government of West Bengal. He changed the nomenclature of the Department from 'Land Revenue' to Land Reform' which aimed at to drop forever the colonial tag that attached for so many years to it. In 1982, he entrusted with Panchayet Portfolio when Left Government again formed its ministry in West Bengal. During his almost twenty year spanned ministerial tenure also adorned with the crown of Acting Chief Minister ship whenever required in absence of Jyoti Basu. Whatever his pressing task, he always went for beyond mere narrow politics. His ultimate goal was to built an equitable and egalitarian society which based upon democratic-socialist plane. In this context we may state. that in 1977 Left Front issued an election manifesto consisting of 36 programmes. The Leftists programmes included among other things proper implem entation of Land Reforms and drastic reorganization of Panchayati Raj in the State. ²

After coming to power CPI(M) led Left Front Government under the ministerial stewardship of Benoy Krishna Chaudhury launched the pro-poor peasant programme called Operation Barga which overhauled the tenancy system in the interests of the sharecroppers or bargadars, who constituted nearly 25% of the West Bengal's rural households. Since colonial heydays and even after thirty years of Independence sharecroppers had suffered from two specific grievances: 1) insecurity of tenure and 2) large quantity of the share of the crops they had to give to jotedar as rent. Through Operation Barga the Left Front Government secured legal registration of the sharecroppers, that kind of steps giving them

permanent lease of the arable land they cultivated and enforced laws regarding the crop share of its entire production they could retain. At the same time through their empowerment they could increase their income also. Out of an estimate 2.4 million sharecroppers or bargadars in West Bengal. About 1.4 million were recorded by November 1990. ³ Even if we go by the most conservative estimate, the Operation Barga Programme was a stupendous success of such magnitude that history of the country or the state had never experienced before. As it appears from a meticulous micro-level study that around 3 million rural people were beneficiaries of Land Reform Programme in West Bengal till 1993. This covers a population of 15 million or around 30% of the total rural populace of West Bengal. Compared to all other State in India, the State's success saga of Operation Barga or Land Reform Programme has been most impressive. Even it comes to the question of taking possession of land declared or identified as surplus, most of the Indians States lag far behind West Bengal. The States accounts for nearly 20% of 5.093 million acres distributed by (as of 1993) all the states of India. Again, according to 1991 statistics, about 43% (1.994 million) of total number of assignees (4.598 million) of ceiling-surplus land in the country hailed from West Bengal. ⁴

The primary objective of land reforms has been to bring about an equitable distribution of land in rural society and curtailed the vicious intermediary interest which aimed at to protect the security of actual cultivators across the State. Necessary legislative measures have been taken for elimination of intermediary interests, imposition of ceiling on holdings, distribution of surplus land to the poor agriculture labours and marginal peasants. Safeguarding the

sharecroppers, prevention of alienation of tribal land and continuous updating of land records etc. ⁵

On assumption of office in 1977 the Left Front Government naturally concentrated all attention and energy on the swift and smooth completion of Land Reforms which the former two United Front Governments had initiated during sixties. The Left Front Government to effectively enlist popular support and cooperation of the reform through the various peasants organization in during the necessary spadework: 1) detection of surplus land and illegal holding and 2) ascertaining the size of big land holding families and fixing the ceiling prior to vesting the surplus land. In fact, over the, last two successive decades the State Government has vested in the State 13.84 lakh acres of surplus land. ⁶

One who cultivates land owned by somebody else on condition of delivering a share of the produce is a sharecroppers, also known as Adhiar, Kisani Bhagidar or Bargadara in the different location of the State. Their specific interest in land was not given any protective provision under any act and they were placed at mercy of the landowners till 1950 when a legal safeguard was made for their interests in cultivating, processing and also in securing their share of the produce. Finally, the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 955, made their cultivating right fully protected and heritable. But evictions were still in force because of non-recording sustainable number of sharecroppers till 1977. Under Benoy Krishna Chaudhury able and skillful direction ROR a unique method was adopted by the State Government by holding daily evening meetings in the villages where bargadars came, to convince them of the grate advantages of such recording and of their specific rights and also their obligations.

People from the Gram Panchayats and Peasants Organizations were intimately involved in such meetings. ⁷

This historic scheme launched in 1978 is known as 'Operation Barga'. Under the scheme the bargadars are not required to go to the Revenue Officials, instead the Revenue Officials themselves have to remain present in the villages to receive the applications, enquire the spots and publish a list of eligible sharecroppers after necessary hearing of the witnesses and the landowners then and there. This innovative method paved the way for successfully recording the names of large number of bargadars in West Bengal. ⁸

The twenty third Conference of the All India Kisan Sabha was held at Varanasi in 1979, where Benoy Krishna Chaudhury in his presidential speech provides a succinct summary of the Land Reform Policies and its implementation that was initiated by the Left Front Government in West Bengal within very short time span:

"In the Present set up and with its limited resources the Left Front Government in West Bengal, installed first in June 1977, was talking some concrete steps to stop eviction of sharecroppers and to protect their rights. For this purpose a Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly in September 1977. The main features of the Bill were the following: The definition of personal cultivation was changed in such a manner that the owner of the land could not resume land for personal cultivation from his sharecroppers unless he could satisfy these three conditions: 1) that he resides for the greater part of the year within eight kilometers of where the land is situated, 2) that his main source of livelihood is that and he has no

other source of sufficient income, and 3) that after resumption he would cultivate the land himself with the help of his family members.

When there is a dispute between landowners and a sharecroppers whose right as much is often denied by the former, the ones of proving that the later is not his sharecropper lies on the owner. The owner of the land has to give a receipt to his sharecropper for the share of the crops he has got from the later. In case he fails to give it, it will be treated as a cognizable offence and he will be punished with a fine of Rs. 1000 or with imprisonment for one year or with both.

The recording of sharecroppers had been undertaken by the Government and was going on in full swing under what was going on in full swing under what had come to be known as 'Operation Barga'. This work was also done with the help of the Local Kisan Sabha and the Panchayat which were elected by the people.

The Left Front Government was trying to provide sharecroppers and other farmers cheap loans from Nationalized Commercial Bank at 4%. Moreover, the interest would be paid for the sharecroppers by the Government provided the loans were duly repaid by March 31 of the following year.

The Left Front Government had fixed Rs. 8.10 as daily minimum wages for agriculture workers under the maximum wages Act. Because of this usual daily wages had increased by 2 or 3 rupees.”⁹

Benoy Krishna has clearly spelled out about people's participation in this Herculean tasks involved with the Land Reform initiatives and without the participation ensured no administrative measures will succeed alone. In his Varanasi lecture he said that Left Front Government attached great importance to associating all segments of the cultivators and other democratic people's with everyone of its steps taken. The administrative machinery, as it had been composed and nurtured, was quite sluggish and was often more a stumbling block. Hence a story and persistent 'Kisan Movement' was imperative to exert pressure on the story administration. ¹⁰

Benoy Krishna played a pivotal role by inspiring the bureaucracy to properly implement the Land Reform Acts in West Bengal. He arranged for back loan, grant, computerizing of entire records related to tenancy rights, reorientation of land revenue administration, promulgation of agricultural labour acts, surplus land acquisition and even formation of land tribunal to safeguard the vital interests of the poor peasantry. ¹¹

Although our state structure is supposed to be a federal one, but within the structural setup too centripetal tendencies were clearly noticeable without any doubt. So practically all power authority is concentrated in the Central Government. The consistent States of the Indian Union enjoy every limited power and opportunities. This constraints makes these states precariously dependent on the central authority, restricts their pro-people policies and their implementations. In this context we may refer the central Government's delaying tactics in regard to Land Reform Bill that was formulated by the Left Front Government of West Bengal. In 1982 the 24th Conference of the AIKS held at Medinipur town and

where through his presidential address Benoy Krishna categorically expressed his deep disappointment over undesirable gestures of Central Government towards the Land Reform Bill. He boldly said that without the legal approval the much awaited radical land reforms could not be visualized and the grave issues of rural poverty and unemployment could not be properly tackled. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1978-1983) had clearly admitted that because of the loopholes in the ceiling laws most of the States these could not be effective and that only 4 million acres has been declared surplus in the whole country, instead of the estimated 63 million acres. So the Union Government has stopped talking about drastic land reforms. Even the Land Reform Bill which plugged the loopholes and which has been adopted by West Bengal State Government was waiting for a year and a half for the Presidents nod to it. ¹²

It may be mentioned that Central Government installed a sub-committee with the Ministerial for the land Reform of the Country under the stewardship of Benoy Krishna Chaudhury. ¹³

During his ministerial stint definitely a significant development has been taking place in the land Reform Programme implementation process, but he did not reluctant to say that all these can not be attribute as 'Total Land Reform', therefore, there is no room for complacency at all. ¹⁴

We have to retrospectively explored that the strong and sustained organized peasant movement under the leftist banner in West Bengal since fifties which incidentally built upon the earlier organizational capacities. Those organizations were always fighting for the interests of small peasant sharecroppers. The leftists were convinced that the abolition of Zamindari had been create an

opportunity for new dominance of Jotedar's system. Therefore ideologically and organizationally urbanite middle class leftist leadership has succeeded to restrict further concentration of land in the hands of the Jotedars. The performance of the CPI (M) led leftist Government of West Bengal in identifying the surplus lands and its acquisitions and then redistributing it to the marginal-poorer segment of the peasantry. No other states in India holds such impressive track record in the sector of Land Reform Operation. The spectacular performance was possible so much due to the district intervention of string and organized left political movements in the rural belt. The role of administrative vigilance was undoubtedly minimal. Though the 'Operation Barga' all attempts to create political and social hegemony of the 'Kulak' interest which exists in many states in Indian have been severely frustrated in West Bengal.¹⁵

During the fifties Panchayati Raj was officially started in West Bengal. The then rural situation was not convenient for the development of Panchayati System. The landlords, rich peasants and moneylenders dominated the rural belt. Majority of the villages were poor, illiterate and unemployed. Village community lacked even basic amenities and infrastructure. There was no direct election in the bottom levels of the panchayati Raj. Congress Governments under Bidhan Chandra Roy, Prafulla Chandra Sen and Siddhartha Sankar Roy tried their best to retain the old-quasi-feudal order in the rural sector. ¹⁶ Although the West Bengal Panchayat Act- 1973 came into force early in 1974, it was not implemented by the Congress Government at that time. The Left Front Government coming to power in 1977 amended the Panchayati Act and immediately made it operational by organizing elections in June 1978 across the State to constitute a three-tier Panchayat System

thus fulfilling a long cherished dream of the Common people. During Benoy Krishna Chaudhuri's fifteen year spanned ministerial tenure in the Panchayat Department the panchayat Act itself has undergone a number of successive amendments bringing in major changes in conceptual approach, structural formations, and operational strategies. Major amendments took place in 1984, 1988, 1992 and 1994. The 1994 on the panchayat is more responsive and attuned to people's needs and aspirations, more unambiguous and more transparent and functionally more useful.¹⁷ Benoy Krishna Chaudhury effectively gave a valuable leadership to decentralize the three-tier Panchayat System in West Bengal.

The Left Front Government after its installation in 1977 was faced with three major tasks on the rural sector: 1) it was required to revive a vibrant rural economy and to promote distributive justice, 2) it was necessary to set the democratic process in rural West Bengal in perfect motion, 3) it had to undermine conservative elitism that was penetrated within the bureaucracy. Left Front Government ideologically committed to Marxism- Leninism and has been always tried to initiate a radical social change. Understandably, it has to operate within the framework of a base and superstructure of the Capitalist order, highly centralized Constitutional and political structure, backward feudal cultural ambience etc. Despite of that West Bengal was the first state in the Country to hold election to the Panchayat institutions on the basis of open participation of political organizations and at regular intervals without break. Panchayats in West Bengal are instrument of socio-economic upliftment in the rural terrain. Panchayats have played very significant role in the implementation of land reform programmes in the state. Undoubtedly the left front Government truly anticipated that the

State urgently need to adopt an integrated system between land Reform Operation and Panchayat Endeavours.¹⁸

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury from his stand point clearly articulated through his speech that how the left Front Government has been projected Panchayat System of West Bengal as an alternative development model for rural reconstruction:

“ while extending maximum possible relief to the people increasingly forced to bear the burden of the economic crisis in the country, utmost restraint is considered necessary to see that people do not suffer from any illusion that their basic needs could be achieved without a radical structural of the existing production relations people learn from their experience of Participation in an organized manner about the limitations inherent in the existing socio-economic structure and thereafter they can unleash struggle for implementation of an alternative development strategy in a nation-wide scale to overcome the limitations.”¹⁹

According to the Left Front Government's Perception the Panchayats are real instrument of struggle for fighting against the vested rural interest and launching pad for rural upliftment. Through the structural orientation of Panchayat bodies common people could be ameliorating their distressed condition.

Under Benoy Krishna Chaudhuri's able direction the Panchayats are involved all sectors of rural development since 1982. Poverty alleviation programmes, environmental sanitation, social security and other programme are implemented directly by the Panchayat bodies. The institution also execute

programmes and schemes related to minor irrigation, non-formal education, village road connectivity, drinking water supply, public health, formation of self help group etc. Other major schemes like the PDS or Public Distribution System, distribution of agriculture land to the weaker sections of the rural community which are executed by the Government Departments on the specific recommendations of the Panchayat Bodies. ²⁰

The implementation of rural development programmes through Panchayats and Operation Barga constituting the core, have produce quite satisfactory results. During eighties Food grain production in West Bengal grew more rapidly than in other STATES IN India. The production in our State averaged 6.5% during the 1983-1984 time periods to 1991-1992 time compared with 2.7% for the entire country as a whole. The then West Bengal emerged as the highest food grain producing State even leaving Punjab and Harayana behind. West Bengal also registered highest rate of growth of percapita cereal consumption while the same had declined for country as a whole. ²¹

With the establishment of three-tier Panchayat Raj, rural economic scenario has been gradually altered over the years. Rural employment has increased by about 63% from 22.24 lakh in 1980 to 36.47 lakh in 1991. The total number of enterprises has increased by 71% from 10.44 lakh to 18.88 lakh during the second phase. As a result the share of agricultural labourers in the total workforce in the State declined from 25.2% in 1981 to 24.5% during the same period in West Bengal. The average daily rate of the agricultural labourers in the State has also increased by more than 71% from Rs. 14.78 in 1986-1987 to 1990-1991 intermittent period.²²

The functional area of the Panchyate bodies now actually encompasses all the 29 items enumerated specifically in the 11th schedule of the Indian Constitution covering all the aspects of rural life Provisions has been made in the State Panchayat Act for transfer of power and functions of the State Government to the Panchayats with respect to all matter for the true materialization of politico-socio-economic development: Concrete major steps have been taken for providing funds and personnel through official transfer process.²³

As historian Bipan Chandra rightly observed:

“The CPI (M) Government and the Party ousted the large landowners and other dominant social groups from the panchayat Raj instructions-district level- ‘Zilla Parishad’, block- level -‘ Panchayat Samities’ and village level- Gram Panchayat’ involved the rural lowers and-middle classes, teachers , and social and political workers, brought the bureaucracy under their control, and strengthened their authority and financial resources,” ²⁴

Political scientist Atul Kohli unhesitatingly expressed that the new Panchayats of West Bengal definitely represent a departure from the past political patterns in rural India. The democratically elected public bodies in West Bengal or in other parts of India have seldom been so free of domination by affluent peasants and village magnets. ²⁵

That there is today a revolutionary rural transformation through Operation Barga and Panchayat Raj to think of and talk about is very largely due to Benoy Krishna Chaudhury’s wisdom,

determination and leadership He gave Left Front Government's pro-people policies a shape and strength. Above all he consolidated the 'Left Rule' in West Bengal countryside in a unique manner. As a minister he performed all his responsibilities conscientiously for almost twenty years.

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury won many prestigious honour and laurels for his outstanding contribution to political sphere and public life during the intermittent phase of 1977-2000. He was inducted into the CPI (M) Central Committee. In 1990 he became the member of the CPI (M) Politbureau Member. In 1992 he took up the Chairmanship of the West Bengal State Planning Board. Bidhan Chandra Agriculture University was conferred an honorary D.Litt degree on him. He was presided over the twenty third Conference of the AIKS which was held at Beneras in 1979. In 1982 and again 1986 he was elected Vice-President of AIKS's 24th and 25th Conference. In 1999 BPKS's 31st Conference was held at Gangarampur in South, Dinajpur district, where he was relinquished voluntarily the responsibilities of President ship Until his death many CPI (M) leaders and activists were went to him for invaluable guidance. Due to old age and ill health he did not participate in the Assembly election 1996 and quite from the post of the CPI (M) politbureau in 1998.

At last on 6th May 2000 Benoy Krishna Chaudhury breathed his last at SSKM Hospital, Kolkata and mortal remains was handed over to the authority of the NRS Hospital according to his wish which was expressed before 'Gana Darpan' an organization on 18th December 1996 for the use of the students of Medical Science for the benefit of the human being. With his death, West Bengal and Leftist Circle lost one of its greatest political person and struggling

common people lost one of their genuine benefactor, the like of whom we may not see for a long time to come.²⁶

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury had dedicated his wonderful organizational talents to the country or more specifically to the State of West Bengal. Perhaps like him very few political person belonged to any political party in West Bengal preached the ideal of integrated rural upliftment with bold consistency and at the same time sincerely fought for its proper implementation through both official or non-official channel in post Independent West Bengal. Whenever, the struggling people or the CPI (M) activists had grown depressed, lethargic, confused, indecisive and oblivious of their demoralization and dark shadow has enveloped West Bengal, he always appeared as a troubleshooter on political horizon and infused into the minds of the populace with self-respect and courage to stand up against all sorts of onslaughts and repression. He is no more, but his life and Struggle continues as an unfailing source of inspiration to the true communists and above' all true humanists.

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**A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF
BENOY KRISHNA
CHOWDHURY
(1911-2000)**

**CHAPTER-VI : Quest for the Historical Evolution of the
Land System in Bengal**

**Quest for the Historical Evolution of the Land System
In Bengal
Chapter- VI**

Benoy Krishna Chaudhury maintained his avid and passionate interest about history, especially history of the Land System in Bengal till the last Phases of his long, eventful public carrier. He never lost his enthusiasm in regard to complexities of peasant question that unalienated from the entire. Land System prevailed or exists in Bengal over the years with its evolutionary mode. Through cast in the Marxist mould, Marxism did not mislead Benoy Krishna. He construct an important populist work in agrarian history which is known as Banglar Bhumi Byabasthar Ruprekha. Fop since its first publication in 1977 it has gone into six editions, and has been used as standard text on Land System and its History in political and as well as non-political circle. His work briefly outlined the history of the 'Land System' in Bengal from the Early Historic time to the Pre-Left Front period. The work more or less based upon few standard secondary printed sources belonged to Marxist and Non-Marxist fold. His long standing personal experience also contributed its worth in this quest. He undoubtedly adopted materialistic interpretation as a tool of understanding the relationship between social and economic organization and its inevitable effect on Bengal's agrarian structure from historical point of view. As it appears from his specific observations that he never been endorsed indiscriminate replication of Marxist idea without prior experimentation on indigenious condition. He argued in favour of persistent debate, through discussion, more investigation and multiple research upon the historical evolution of land system in India and Bengal along with Marxist angle

which is very important for formulating a comprehensive, objective and critical estimate of History of Land System and its inner workings. ¹

Benoy Krishna put stress on Land Questions of India, especially Bengal in a proper historical perspective. According to his observation that in early historic India the 'Tribalism' and 'Cooperative Ownership' over 'Land' were in existence for certain period. Agriculture requires cooperation and sedentary lifestyle at one place, and creates a permanent tribal establishment. But an advanced type of agricultural production would affect the tribal homogeneity. Conditions emerge for the rise of classes based on social status and wealth and above all for the large scale exploitation of the bulk of the kinspeople by a few empowered magnet. In such a changing situation, the tribalism and cooperative ownership on land gradually lost their social significance and paved the way for private ownership but unlike 'West European Way'. Simultaneously Rural Societies Ownership and Private Ownership based upon class-family has been existing in India. That kind of Land System undoubtedly stalled the dialectic process which was envisaged by the Karl Marx and Friedrich Engle in regard Feudal emergence and Capitalistic development within the human history. ² In this context eminent Marxist historian R.S. Sharma categorically expressed his opinion:

'But, in view, tribalism, the stone age, the mental age the advent of the food producing economy are universal phenomena. They do indicate some laws conditioning process and pattern of change. ³

An evident departure from the hardcore Marxist pattern of historical mindset is his refusal to apply mechanically either the Asiatic mode of

Production or the slave intensive Production System to early history of Indian without specific modifications. Marx formulated Asiatic Mode of Production characterized by a static society, total absence of private individual ownership in land, existence of self-sufficient villages, state control over the rural irrigation system etc. The possibility of a Slave Mode of Production in early historic India is equally problematic because slavery for social production may have been smaller or not so significant, therefore, it can not be comparable with the Ancient Greece and Rome. ⁴

Even Benoy Krishna as a committed Marxist unhesitatingly referred well-known Nationalist Historian Radha Kamal Mukherjee's specific observation on Vedic Land System where the eminent scholar shown that during the Vedic period or more specifically the Rig-Vedic period was the first witnessed the genesis of rural society in Indian subcontinent. The kings collected 1/6% of the total crop production as Bali or Revenue from the village community through village headman. The Vedic people may have collectively occupied pieces of land for grazing, cultivation, irrigation, Cooperative or Collective ownerships over waste land and forest land were also exist during Vedic age. Specifically, ancient South Indian inscriptional evidence show that the dominance of community ownership over landed possessions.⁵ The king's claim over land revenue is to be connected with his sovereign authority and not with his proprietary rights during the Mauryan Period. Arthashastra clearly differentiates between Crown Land (Sita) and Private Land. Crown Land were belonged to the State or King. Cultivation of Crown Land directly by the State was done under the supervision of the Chief Superintendent of Crown Lands (Sita-dhyaksha). Land not directly cultivated could be leased out to sharecroppers who get 1/4 or 1/5 of the harvest if they contributed only labour and 1/2 if they provided all inputs. The revenue from Crown Lands was shown separately in the

accounts as 'Sita', Private farmers those were belonged to the villages communities paid an agricultural tax on Bhaga, in kind of 1/6 the [produce, this being shown also separately in accounts as Bhaga. Agricultural taxation on production from privately owned land was the responsibility of Chancellor (Samaharts).⁶ Interestingly Benoy Krishna Did not take up for discussion about Kushana, Gupta, Pale, Sena, Chola, Pallava Land System, even he overlooked the burning theme of Early Medieval Indian History which well-known as 'Feudalism'.⁷ Since mid-sixties of 20th Century the theme overwhelmingly caught the attention of Indian Scholar and generated persistent heated debate under the anspices of leading 'Marxist' historians. Eminent Marxist historian R.S. Sharma convincingly stated that feudalism may be runs through its various phases in different orders of succession. But certain characteristics remain the same. This is also admitted by the critics of Indian Feudalism. Sharma has argued:

'Feudalism has to be seen as a mechanism for the distribution of the means of production and for the appropriation of the Surplus. It may have certain board universal features, and it may have certain traits typical of a time and territory. Through land and agricultural products play a decisive role in pre-capitalist societies, the specificities of land distribution and appropriation of agricultural products differ from region to region. It can not be argued that what developed in pre-capitalist Western Europe was the same as in India and elsewhere. Neither do historical laws work in this manner nor can feudalism be regarded as the monopoly of Western Europe. It is not possible to have clearest formula about Feudalism'.⁸ But for unknown reasons 'Feudalism Debate' has remained outside the purview of his enquiry on the history of 'Land System' in India, especially Bengal. He had shown little interest in Land System and its modification that took place during the Turk-Afgan Period.⁹ However, he admitted that Sher shah

Sur was the real forerunner of Akbar in the field of Land System. Sher Shah practically laid down the main principles which were followed later on in the time of Akbar during the heyday of Mughal Regime.¹⁰

Undoubtedly, Benoy Krishna in his work to some extent concentrated to the developments which was initiated in the Land System during Mughal era. He categorically stated that the Mughal Emperor not as the owner of all land within Empire's territorial limits, but as the owner of all land revenue within the State's boundaries, for he so obviously appropriated what seemed to be the rent of the soil. Secondly, he mentioned the peasantry had its ownership rights in land it was recognized by the Mughal State. Thirdly he has recognized Raja Todar Mal's progressive role in restructuring the entire Land System of Mughal India with his innovative mind-set. The Diwan-i-Ashraf Raja Todar Mal through his meticulous administrative measures thoroughly overhauled the Land System. He fixed rates of converting revenue in kind into revenue in cash. Voluntary payments by cultivators were encouraged and the 'State Force' was employed only as a last resort. All the Parganas, whether cultivated or not were required to be measured by Amalgulzar the important revenue official at the Sarkar or district level. Amalgulzar has been characteristically synonymous with the nomenclature Proto-Zamindar.¹¹

Benoy Krishna, of course, indirectly has referred the existence of categorized Zamindars in Mughal India. In this context we may mention the Nurul Hasan's scholarly observations on the subject. According to his view that during the Mughal Period all agricultural lands in the Imperial territory belong to one sort or type of the Primary Zamindar (Malguzaris). The rights held by the Primary Zamindars were hereditary and alienable. The Second category of Zamindari right was the intermediary right which

is not a proprietary right in strictest sense. It is the right of service. That kind of right holders were described in Medieval documents as Khidmatguzari'. Then there was the third category of Zamindars who were the counterparts of the Chaudhuris, Khuts and Muquddams of the Pre-Mughal Period. They collected land revenue from the Primary Zamindars and subsequently paid it to the Jagirdars or the Mughal Royal Treasury. ¹² As it clearly appears from Benoy Krishna's work that he was acquainted with the enliven theme of Mughal History which is known as Jagidari Crisis, but he did not too engross about internal complexities of the system and natural fallouts which were culminated through sporadic but divergent Peasant resistance and rebellion in different locale of Northern India. ¹³ In the context of Early Modern Bengal he did mention the contribution of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan as an enhancer of land revenue resources in Bengal Province. ¹⁴

Benoy Krishna quite elaborately discussed British colonial policy and its impact on Land System in Bengal. He had shown the victory of the English East India Company in the Battle of Plessey produced far reaching consequences in the history of India, especially Bengal. The province became the nerve centre of the commercial and political activities of the colonialist. But after the Buxar Company strengthened their dominance. With the introduction of the Dewani Settlement (1765) the Company officials stopped importing bullions and huge financial resources of Bengal were invested in their trade and commerce. This caused an enormous drainage of wealth from this province through investment. Robert Clive clearly stated in his letter to the Directors in 1765 that after the grant of Dewani would be accumulated annually not less than 250 lakhs of Sicca Rupees and after fulfilling all the financial obligation the Company could gain 122 lakhs of Sicca Rupees or £ 1,650,900 sterling. House of Commons Select

Committees Ninth Report (1783) unhesitatingly admitted the whole exported produce of the country was taken away without any reciprocal return or payment whatever. Under the Company Rule in on the one hand business has been flourished but on the other hand the upward trend in revenue increase was also visible. As evedent from official statistic that in the last year of Nawabi Rule (1764-1765) in Bengal, the land revenue appropriated was £ 817,000 where as in the first year of the Company's administration (1765-1766) the entire revenue collected was quantified as £ 1,470,000. By 1771-1772 it was £ 2,341,000 and by 1775-1776 it was figured £ 2,818,000. ZWhen Lord Cornwallis fixed the Permanent Settlement in 1793; he fixed it at £ 3,400,000. ¹⁵

While according to P.J. Marshall's estimate the revenue demand in 1793 was just about 20% higher then what prevailed during the Nawabi Rule. ¹⁶ The permanent settlement of land revenue worstly affected the peasants. It made the Zamindars the proprietor of the land and the relation between the Zamindar and cultivators was a relation of owner and tenants. The Zamindars were empowered to evict their tenants according to their whims and operand them for the extraction of maximize land revenue. The condition of the common people become miserable in West Bengal country side due to the land revenue policy of the company and the wanton exploitation by the Government revenue official, zamindars and the money lender, zimindars survived by resorting to the 'Patni' or Subinfudation that complicated the 'Land System' of Bengal, in Barishal district these system proliferated up to 52 subinfudatory tenures between the, Zamindars and Primary Producers. The excessive burden of high demand was shifted to the cultivators.¹⁷ the devastating famine of 1770 in which about 1/3 of the Bengal population was perished.¹⁸

In this important populist title, Benoy Krishna also shows that Peasants resistance and rebellions against the insensitive colonial order those were surfaced in eighteenth Century Bengal. From 1838 to 1848 in Faridpur District under the leadership of Dudu Mian a peasant movement has been organized. The movement known as Faraizi Movement which aimed at to purify, Islam by repudiation all un-Islamic beliefs and practices and by signifying Koran as their sole and supreme spiritual guide. The rural Muslim poor of eastern tract of Bengal under this religions sect revolted against Zamindars, Indigo Planters and the Colonial Masters. ¹⁹

Another peasant movement was developing under the leadership of Titu Mir in North 24 Parganas. His followers came mainly from poor Muslim fold. Titu Mir and his co-activists were organized a movement to resist the oppressive measures which carried out by the colonialist and their collaborators. However, the colonial administration ultimately had crush the resistance with their superior military might in 1831.²⁰

The most significant movement of their period was undoubtedly the Santal Hool or Santal Rebellion of 1855-1856. Under the leadership of brother duo Sidhu and Santals at the field of Bhagadihi in the presence of 10,000 Santals in 1855. At that time the penetration of outsiders completely destroyed their subsistence and livelihood. After their ultimatum went unheeded they started an open insurrection against the Zamindars, Moneylenders and the government. The insurrection spilled over wide region between Bhagalpur to Murshidabad district. At last the Colonial administration has been succeed to quell Santal Insurrection in 1856. According to one estimate, out 30,000 to 50,000 rebels, nearly

15,000 to 20,000 were killed. Poor Hindu and Muslim peasantry rallied to Santals support. This insurrection should have viewed as an unified effort of all exploited class. ²¹

The question of peasants involvement and initiatives in revolt of 1857 was failed to find its place within the parameters of enquiries and investigations which was done by Eminent Peasant Historian Eric Stokes. According to his conclusive view that rural uprising in 1857 was essentially elitist in nature.²² But role of peasantry in the revolt was recognized in Benoy Krishna's work.²³

Aftermath of the revolt of most widespread present movement was the Indigo revolt or Blue Mutiny of 1859-1860. In the 18th and 19th Century indigo and became the most profitable item in the East India Company's export activities. The European indigo planters compelled the poor peasants to grow indigo in factories set up in rural Bengal. From the beginning indigo production was grown under extremely oppressive mechanism. Indigo Planters always used top force the illiterate poor cultivators to cultivate indigo only in the best party of his arable land by giving little advance or 'Dadan'. They also forced the peasants to enter into fraudulent contracts. Indigo merchants even used to beat, murder, burn and loot peasants homes, forcibly confined then in the factory, abduct their women and molest them. Distressed peasantry after paying their rents they would be obliged to borrow from the moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates. Numerous peasants had been evicted and Money lenders garbbed the debt-ridden cultivators lands. Benoy Krishna adequately threw some light on the human coercive practices of indigo planters and its severe impact upon rural peasantry in Bengal. He specifically mentioned that due to alienation from their land, they, the peasants turned to landless labours. By

1872, the figure of landless Agricultural workers had risen to 72 lakh respectively.²⁴ However Benoy Krishna was not separately dealt with the ultimate results and its importance connected with Indigo Revolt within the context of Bengal's Agrarian History.

Not until 1859 the Colonial Government looked at the peasants issue and did anything to protect their tenancy right. But their main grievance of the peasantry was against the evil attempts of the Zamindars to wipe out their occupancy right by denying them leases in the same land continually for 12 years, which would already entitle them to the protection of the Rent Act X Act of 1859. So, the Act X of 1859 failed to consolidate peace and order in rural Bengal. The Rent Act did not alleviate the peasant problem, but it had been passed with the intention of protecting them. Peasants were practically seldom retained proofs of right related to 12 years continual occupation on land. Under this act the Zamindars were legally empowered for enhancement of their land rent and at the same time their entire unearned income has legitimized.²⁵

During the seventies of 19th Century the Agrarian Leagues came up in Pabna, Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Rajshahi, Bogra, Bakarganj and Tripura districts under combined leadership of muslim and Hindus. As a result of the peasant manoeuvres and the mounting rural tensions ultimately paved the way for Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. The Act provided specially that an occupancy raiyat, who had been in possession of any land in a village for twelve years, either himself or through inheritance, would become a settled raiyat of the village with his occupancy rights. But that kind of privileges was empowered to evict non-occupancy raiyats and under-raiyats whenever their need arises. They could enhance the rent an

interval of fifteen years. The Act did not recognize Sharecroppers of Bargadars as raiyat. The abwad collections were not branded with the illegal tag. Under the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 resulted in the alienation of farmers from their lands. The land alienation figure has rose an alarming proportion. As it appears from an official estimate that in 1913 total number of land transfer quantified as 2,50,000.²⁶ However, the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 historically marked by the virtual end of high landlordism and the striking beginning of Petty Landlordism.²⁷

After the 1928 amendment to the Tenancy Act finally legalized the occupancy raiyats right of free transfer or donation. But they should provide for a 20% transfer fee payable to the land lord who was also given a preemptive right to purchase the landed possession. Same legal provision did not extended to the non-occupancy raiyats at all. The landed magnets, who would be the main beneficiaries of these amendment. Bengal Congress remained dominated by a powerful section of big and petty landlords, therefore, the Party leadership overwhelmingly supported the legal modifications that was initiated in favour of their opportunist class interest.²⁸ The impressionistic observation Benoy Krishna on 1928 amendments suggest that how narrow political preferences and insensitivities undermined the poor cultivators interests during the twenties.

Benoy Krishna through his work has been presents the true characteristics of 1938 Amendment with correct perspective. The last leg of 1930s witnessed severe economic dislocation by the impact of World wide Great Depression. That major global crisis also brought disaster to the peasantry of Bengal Agricultural price structure has been collapsed. Both cash crop Jute and food crop Rice came crushing down. Bulk peasantry had to suffer from meager earnings. In the meanwhile Fazlul Huq led Krishak

Praja Party- Muslim League coalition ministry of Undivided Bengal passed the Bengal Tenancy Act Amendment Bill of 1937. It provided for the abolition of landlords fees and the right of pre-emption up on the transfer of raiyats holdings and the suspension of enhancement of raiyats rents for next ten years. The Bill seriously inhibited the power of the landlords to extract rent from his poor tenants. However, the amendment did not addressed the genuine grievances of agricultural labourer, Sharecropper, and Uttbandi Raiyatas. At that time Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha was organized peasants movement on the basis of their just demands. Bengal Kishan leaders were much conscious at the very outset about disposed peasantries appalling conditions during depression phase. He did not failed to mention the Land Revenue Commission of 1938, popularly known as the Floud Commission which was strongly recommended the abolition of the Zamindari System during Colonial Period in Bengal. The Commission was also specifically identified Permanent Settlement as the root cause behind peasants multiple distresses. The Fazlul Huq Ministry also took steps give immediate effect to Bengal Agricultural Debtors Act of 1935, setting up debt Settlement Boards in 3000 villages within short time span. These boards were initiated to provide a forum in rural sector where moneylenders could reach a compromise with their poor peasant debtors. Undoubtedly, the measure came as a great relief among large number of Bengal peasantry. ²⁹

Benoy Krishna has described Bengal Famine of 1943 in his work. Some million people died due to acute food crisis and took of their entitlement. At the same time devastating flood, severe cyclone, denial policy, rampant hoarding, widespread black marketeering, all combined created a hostile force against the survival of common people, especially rural peasantry in Bengal. In the meanwhile big business magnet like Shaw Wallace, Jay Ram Das Daulatram, Ispahani with their large capital has

been penetrated into lucrative rice trade under the auspices of colonial government. Greedy trading community was able to exploit the new emerging situation. Their immoral profiteering motive resulted large horrific death.³⁰

Benoy Krishna also has written an absorbing account of Tebhaga movement in 1946-1947. The greatest historic peasant movement in the late forties undoubtedly was Tebhaga Movement which was launched by the sharecroppers or Bargadars against the Jotedars and Moneylenders under the guidance of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha. The movement has been spilled over districts of Undivided Bengal. Over 60 lakh of Bargadars, marginal farmers and agricultural labourers spontaneously participated in it. The main storm centre of the movement were Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and 24-Parganas. Initially, jotedars were unable to understand the gravity of the situation. But the situation became volatile which police picket was installed in different field areas and some persons were engaged on behalf of the big jotedars in order frustrate the struggle at its beginning. Dwelling hours of numerous peasants were set ablaze with police shoot out in many districts. 1000 peasants were arrested and the warrant was issued against more than 3000 peasants for arrest. Many woken peasant lost their modesty. But Khanpur massacre was remarkable incident in the Peasant History of Bengal. In Khanpur many peasants were killed due to their valiant resistance against the police-jotedars combine. Suhrawardy led Muslim League Ministry of Bengal supported the legitimate demand of sharecroppers for Tebhaga or 2/3 share of the land produce. League Government published the Bengal Bargadars Temporary Regulation Bill in the Calcutta Gazette on 22 January 1947 but failed to pursue the bill in the legislative Assembly.³¹ Aftermath of Independence

the Bidhan Chandra Roy led Congress Ministry passed a Bargadar Bill which incorporated the basic demands of the Tebhaga Campaign.³²

Benoy Krishna without any hesitation categorically pointed out the major drawbacks of the Tebhaga uprising was that it was not able to formulate prior effective political plan and programme. Kisan Council leadership failed to anticipate possible preemptive offensive from class enemies camp. The active peasant organization even showed up its lackadaisical approach on the formation of well trained volunteer bands.³³

Benoy Krishna has drew our attention to the anti-peasant postures of post-independence Congress Regimes. He incisively has been shown the lacunas that exists in the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1955. Under the legal loopholes the Big Landlords in West Bengal has been squeezed enough time either sell their surplus lands in exchange of huge official compensation or made them as a malafide transfers to the names of kiths and kins. Furthermore, the landowners also resorted to resuming their lands at least up to the ceiling limit. Eviction of poor tenants still has been persisted. Even after the implementation of Zamindari Abolition Act, the major benefit went to the affluent agriculturist class. Sharecroppers and other impoverished agricultural workers has been derived nothing from it. Only a negligible fraction of lands were distributed among poor sections of peasantry.³⁴

Author, of course, mentioned that during the first U. Fregime in West Bengal in 1967 total 6 lakh acre land has been identified for the distribution among agricultural workers and poor peasants. Whereas,

Siddhartha Sankar Roy led Congress Regime from 1972 to 1977 has been able to distribute only 2,57,215 acre agricultural land in rural sector. However, S.K. Chakraborty member of the West Bengal Planning Commission has admitted that total number of land less families quantified as 6,87,000 in West Bengal State.³⁴

Benoy Krishna concluded with his pressing remark that no democratically elected government would tolerate the marginalization and disappearance of peasant communities through its policies and developmental programmes. Out urgent need is to acquire all surplus land resources without any compensation from public fund and those land subsequently distribute to the landless labourers and poor peasants, at this juncture without this kind of radical measures the feudalistic-capitalistic predominance over lauded possession never been ended.³⁵

A critical examination of Benoy Krishna's quest for the historical perspective and evolution of the land system in Bengal amply brings out the fact that through this kind endeavour projected him as sympathetic crusader for vast stream of dispossessed peasantry and it is definitely borne out by views expressed by the author

Benoy Krishna was inclined to Marxism no doubt, but his academic quest was not confined within the restricted area of dogmatism. He never endorsed the absolute mechanical transplantation of Marxism in his survey of historical past of the 'Land System in Bengal. The pivot of his observation is that the principal contradiction in land system lay between rural landed opportunists and the poor peasantry. His thin title has expressed itself in revealing the exploitative mechanism that was exists within Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial rural terrain.

Understandably, as a leftist activist he did this colonial and Post Colonial reactionaries in collaboration with their loyal acolytes imputed impoverishment to the poor peasantry in an alarming proportion. The present title has revelatory character is that it arrested the root cause of India's or especially Bengal's agrarian complexities. However he does not seem to be interested in the new innovative methodology like a modern agrarian historian to understand the entire land system from strictly professional angularities. His work is based on few standard printed sources and perhaps his personal first hand knowledge which he accumulated over the year through constant engagement with the peasant movements. His writing style is simple, pleasing and quite accessible to all. He never entering into academic jugglery or pedantic dribbling. Here, in this title, different type of land system prevailed in different phases of Bengal has been discussed but some are more detailed than the others. The work does not throw any light upon the land system of Pre-Moghul Bengal from regional history's point of view. The work undoubtedly has been illustrates how much bloodsucker opportunist deceived poor peasantry in Colonial and Post-Colonial Bengal through official patronages and sponsors.

The greatest defect of Benoy Krishna's was its old fashioned periodization of history as prescribed by the British imperialist historiography, such as Hindu India or Muslim India, and that kind of periodic presentation is outdated now. Secondly, he treated his sources as authoritative to be cited rather than questioned or interpreted. No footnotes has been provided. Thirdly, his work is not constructed along with strict chronological order. Many overlapping tendencies are clearly visible within the pages. Fourthly his works suffered from neat cohesiveness and analytical mode. Lastly, the survey or quest of the author strictly confined

within the secondary sources, not extended to the standard archival records. So, corroboration has not find it space in this important populist title.

Nevertheless, this quest is informative and educative. Perhaps the purpose of the endeavour is not only awaken party comrades, as well as common struggling people also about hoe over the years we have been constantly mislead by superimposed reactionary perception on real agrarian complexities and tensions. He was all for pro-or peasant oriented approach and studied the role of existed and existing system in land, which is very important for formulating an egalitarian society in decolonial West Bengal.

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