

Re-construction of West Bengal: Role of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy with Special Reference to His Education and Health Policy

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Abstract: *In spite of becoming a physician per-excellence throughout the globe, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy gave his consent to take the responsibility of the most problematic state in India i.e. West Bengal in his capacity as the chief minister of the state on and from 23rd January 1948 to 1st July 1962. During his tenure as an administrative head of the state - Dr. Roy had tried his best to re-construct West Bengal to make the number one state in India. Among the numerous developmental activities, he was able to perpetuate his name and fame into the minds of the vast population of West Bengal through his contribution to the field of education and health. The name of various prestigious Medical Colleges and Hospitals along with general Colleges, IITs and Universities in West Bengal are nothing but bearing the testimony of his life-long devotion for the sake of West Bengal.*

Keywords: Physician Chief Minister, problem state, refugee, polio clinic, IIT, hospital, university

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (henceforth Dr. Roy) was never a professional politician, but he entered into the arena of politics only when he was called for; otherwise, he was devoting himself to his medical profession. According to Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, “politics meant doing something for the betterment of the people, their conditions of life and the improvement in their environments. He had always felt that a medical practitioner should take a real interest in the condition of the society in which he lives, and along with the cure he effects and diseases he prevents”.¹ As a medical man, he had always been against the group politics. “No medical man”, says Dr. Roy, “can engage himself in party politics, because to a doctor, there is no distinction between friend and foe, rich and poor, white and black. He has to serve everyone and look after the interests of all, no matter to what class or race they belonged”.²

Group Politics in West Bengal Congress

Incidentally, due to factional conflict in the Congress Party in West Bengal among the Gandhian, Jugantar and Hooghly Groups and thereupon taking advantage of the partition of Bengal the Hooghly Group became able to sideline the former two and Atulya Ghosh, the undisputed leader of the Hooghly Group had become a very influential leader of the West Bengal congress politics and subsequently became the president of the Pradesh Congress Committee.³

Dr. Roy, Conditional Chief-Minister

In the meantime, as a result of the factional hostilities over the supremacy in West Bengal Congress politics, the Congress Legislative Party expressed its no-confidence in Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, the first Chief Minister of West Bengal and selected Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy as the leader of the Congress Legislative Party.⁴ In that context, according to the advice of Gandhiji, Dr. Roy, at last, decided to accept the decision of the Congress Legislative Party of West Bengal on the condition that there would be no party interference in the field of the choice of his colleagues as well as control of the administration. Eventually, with the agreeable of the Congress Legislative Party along with the Pradesh Congress Committee, Dr. Roy also agreed to become the next Chief Minister of West Bengal.⁵

Resignation of Dr. Shyamaprasad Mookherejee and Election of Dr. Roy as MLA

It must be noted that at the time of the transfer of power as well as the partition of India Dr. Roy was abroad for medical purposes, especially for his eye treatment. Dr. Roy returned to India on the 1st of November, 1947, with no intention to participate in active politics.⁶ He went to Delhi towards the middle of December 1947, to meet Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookherjee who was suffering from gall-bladder trouble. It is mention-worthy that Shyama Prasad and Bidhan Chandra were very inmost friends and not only that Dr. Roy was considered as an elder brother to Dr. Shyama Prasad and Sir Ashutosh Mookherjee had also great affection to Dr. Roy. However, in course of their discussion Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookherjee expressed his desire to resign from the membership of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and in his place I.e, registered graduates of the Calcutta University's constituency he suggested Dr. Roy should get in. Accordingly, Dr. Roy was elected from the constituency of the registered graduate of the Calcutta University unopposed towards the end of December, 1947.⁷

Dr. Roy, the Chief Minister and the Condition of West Bengal

However, on the 23rd day of January 1948, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy took the oath as Chief Minister of West Bengal which was then known to all as the 'problem state of India'.⁸ The problems of the state are varied, some peculiar to itself and mostly constituting the heritage or legacy of the past. The war, famine, outbursts of communal furiousness, inter-district shifts of the population in panic, huge loss of territory due to partition, massive and uncontrollable movements of the dispossessed as well as uprooted -- all collectively created numerous problems for the state. Frustration was universal. The land was inadequate and industries were mostly in the hands of the non-Bengalis and thereupon production was at low ebb. The prices of the essential commodities were high and the basic necessities of life were unavailable and unemployment among the middle class educated population- altogether developed West Bengal into a chaotic situation at the time of oath-taking of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy as the second Chief Minister of West Bengal.⁹

Character and Determination of Dr. Roy

It is mention-worthy that Dr. Roy all along of his career came to occupy positions of distinction because whatever entrusted to him or any work his sole objective was to do his best. The Chief Ministership of West Bengal was not a bed of roses at that time. Almost all the problems that Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh faced remained there. Additional problems also arose. But having taken up the ribbons of the Ministry of West Bengal, Dr. Roy was not the man to be frightened by animosity or adversities rather put his heart and soul into the work. While the general condition of the administration was sufficiently confusing, the party situation was also in a way of depressing. In the Congress Party organization of West Bengal, there were many groups and sections. There were many aspirants to power and position in this changing setup, but the man at the steering wheel had shown his strength of character and a will of determination to carry on the activities at the time of disorder, opposition and party maneuver.¹⁰ The main advantage of Dr. Roy was that he became the Chief Minister at the request of the West Bengal Congress Legislature Party, not out of his seeking. Therefore, he could stand above party and side by side he manifested it in the choice of his Ministers and many cases they did not belong to the Congress Party as well as a member of the Legislature.¹¹

Understanding the Necessities of Common People

His knowledge of facts and practical commonsense, firmness, as well as a sympathetic understanding of every situation along with the human approach, helped him to handle the 'Ship

of State' firmly forward without allowing it to blunder in the troubled water of Bengal. The most remarkable criterion in him was that he had a temper that never tires, even during depressing conditions he never showed any symbol of irritation or mental agitation. His power lies in his tremendous intelligence, depth of knowledge and his passion for accuracy as well as the amazing orderliness of his mind.¹² He had an extraordinary capacity and a clear conception of the problems that confronting him as the head of the administrator of a state. As like as rest of India, West Bengal was also under a system of administrative control run by the British for nearly two centuries, wherein state enterprises, as well as state trading, were unknown. In the British administration, the trading system was in the control of their cousin – the industrialists. But after independence present administration based on the will of the people especially the voters those who expressed their views during the general election. Their basic needs are food, clothes and shelter along with of course medical facilities at the time of diseases. They felt the requirement of more education, higher economic status and better health condition.¹³

Dr. Roy's Approach towards Agitators

Dr. Roy's experience in many affairs taught him how to handle the inharmonious claims of rival groups. As result of the partition and the influx of refugees along with considerable labour unrest created an unstable situation in the state. Most of the days there was a demonstration for this or that. The forces of the disorder as well as indiscipline works aimed to discredit the Government and at the same time shake the stability of the administration. After becoming Chief-Minister, in the first few years, Dr. Roy had to face a huge number of critical situations. Almost every day, demonstrations were held just opposite his house and people shouting slogans against the Congress Party and the Government. Even on some occasions, the crowds surrounded his house and the Writers' Buildings. But Dr. Roy remained calm and dispassionate with his indomitable spirit to conquer every difficulty. Keeping in mind the dignity and status of the administration Dr. Roy used to meet and discussed with the representatives of the demonstrators about their demands. On many occasions, they convinced of the sincerity of Dr. Roy and fully perceived the difficulties of the Government. But Dr. Roy never succumbed to any threats and indiscipline.¹⁴

Dr. Roy's Move towards Reconstruction

However, at the very beginning of his Chief Ministership, Dr. Roy was not consuming all the time merely handling the problems arising out of mass immigration of people from East Pakistan and fighting the lawless elements in the State of West Bengal, moreover, he thought about positive side i.e, the reconstruction of the province. During the most depressing circumstances, he continued silently his tireless efforts towards the planning and uplifting the standard of living of Bengalis and to make his 'problematic state' is the most advanced one in India.¹⁵

It is important to mention here that after the curse of the partition of India along with Bengal, naturally there was an urgent need for reconstruction of the newly created state in India i.e. West Bengal immediately after the end of colonial hegemony. In that case, for the all-round development in the form of reconstruction of West Bengal, the most 'problem province of India', Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy in his efforts, as well as his capacity as the second Chief Minister (23rd January, 1948 to 1st July, 1962) of the state, did his best for the well- being of its people through various highly progressive activities. In this research paper it is my humble attempt to explore his contribution in the field of education and health, the two important aspects or indicator of

the development of modern human civilization, which led to West Bengal is one of the advanced as well as prosperous states in India during his time, have been discussed in the following way:

Education Policy of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy

The Chief Ministership of Bidhan Chandra Roy, particularly the decade of the 1950s is still considered to be the 'era of nation-building' because the budget figures for the development purpose under any head were impressive. It is an example that the expenditure for the Education Department was increased by the State Government from Rs.2.55 crores in the year of 1948-49 to Rs. 6.59 crores in 1954-55. It is noteworthy that, though the concept of the Basic School was developed in 1937, up to the year of 1947, there was not a single Basic School throughout the state of West Bengal. As a result of giving the proper attention to the development of education as many as 275 Basic Schools were set up by the State Government within the year 1954. Not only that during the year of 1947 to 1954, but the number of primary schools was also increased from 13,772 to 16,689, the Junior High Schools from 985 to 1,407, the High Schools from 761 to 1,402, the Colleges from 54 to 89 and the Technical Schools and Colleges from 90 to 144 respectively.¹⁶ Another remarkable achievement of B.C. Roy was to the establishment of a Marine Engineering College in Calcutta, 1950.¹⁷

Birth of Kalyani University

Birla College of Agriculture at Kalyani, the biggest Agricultural College in West Bengal was opened by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India in 1954. B.C. Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal earlier persuaded his friend G. D. Birla for the construction of that college and urged him to pay the total amount for running the institution. This institution was developed later on as the nucleus of a University, named Kalyani University with agriculture and animal husbandry as its base. This was also another example of B.C. Roy's diverse activities for the development of West Bengal in the field of education.¹⁸

Birth of IIT, Kharagpur

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of free India, was also the personal friend of Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal. In course of discussion between the two, the former approached the latter to locate a site for setting up one of the five regional engineering colleges sometime in the year 1950-51. The Chief Minister B.C. Roy accepted the offer at once and selected Hijli at Kharagpur in the district of Midnapur which is a distance of 100 miles from Calcutta to set up an engineering college. Due to the insistence of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad before the approval of I.I.T. Kharagpur B.C. Roy had to agree to take overall charge of the Institute as its Chairman in his capacity. With the help of his sagacity and indomitable spirit for doing something for the betterment of the state, B.C. Roy selected Jnan Chandra Ghosh, an eminent scholar and scientist as its first Director. B.C. Roy along with Jnan Chandra Ghosh jointly did the groundwork to bring the life of the present day's well-known magnificent engineering college which earned world-wide name with fame as I.I. Kharagpur.¹⁹

Creation of Four New Universities

The meeting of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly was held on 22nd February 1960 to listen to the announcement of Governor Padmaja Naidu regarding the state venture towards the direction of education and employment opportunities using the process of industrialization. In the previous session, the Legislative Assembly already passed the Burdwan University Bill and the University started its functioning from the next academic session. Proposal for the setting

up of a new University in North Bengal was then already underway, and a new Bill providing for the establishment of another University for study in Humanities and Science in particular at Kalyani, not very far from Calcutta was already in due consideration in that session of the legislative assembly.²⁰

Opening of Jadavpur and Rabindra Bharati University

Moreover, B.C. Roy was a great planner for the improvement of the education and culture of West Bengal. Due to the efforts of B.C. Roy Viswa Bharati, (established by Rabindra Nath Tagore in 1921) was elevated as Viswa Bharati University under the Governance of the Government of India in 1951. It may be noted here that the planning for the establishment of the above mentioned Kalyani University was initiated by B.C. Roy in 1954. It was B.C. Roy who took the special drive for the passing of the Jadavpur University Bill in the Legislative Assembly in 1955. As a President of the National Education Council, B.C. Roy himself moved the Jadavpur University Bill in September 1955. Jadavpur University was occasionally opened by Dr. Sarvapally Radhakrishnan, the then Vice- President of India on 18th March 1956 for opening up a new era in the history of higher education in India particularly in West Bengal. 'Academy of Dance, Drama, and Music' was established in 1955. As a result of B.C. Roy's vision for commemorating to Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore a plan was formulated for establishing Rabindra Bharati University in 1959. He was also the founder President of the Indian Institute of Social Welfare and Business Management in Calcutta.²¹

Medical and Public Health

It may be mentioned that notable development took place in the field of Medical and Public Health Services (MPHS) in West Bengal during the Chief Ministership of B.C. Roy. In the second year of Independence, there were only less than 70 Health Centres all over the state. The number of Health Centres came into existence up to 166 at the beginning of the year of 1954. As a helmsman of West Bengal, with the help of his world-wide reputation of medical knowledge B.C. Roy chalked out a plan to raise the number of health centre within the years of 1955-56 further up to 271 with 2,762 beds. The number of beds in Sadar Hospital and Sub-Divisional Hospitals were also increased to 2,469 and the tuberculosis beds to 2,353. As many as 16 National Malaria Control Units (NMCU) in West Bengal would function to minimize the disease of malaria in the state. Besides, the number of Maternity Centres was also increased to 96, the T.B. Clinics to 25, the Leprosy Clinics to 92 and of V.D. Clinics to 18. During that time on average, 82 hospital beds would ready for per 1000 population in West Bengal which was comparatively highest in number in India. An idea of taking the proper step for improvement of public health became so effective, it was found that the birth rate increased from 21.3 in 1948 to 22.7 per Milla in 1953 and side by side death rate came down from 18.1 to 10.2.²²

Calcutta's First Polio Clinic:

The diseases named polio became a kind of epidemic in the city of Calcutta. As a Doctor, B.C. Roy had to treat a large number of crippled children suffering from polio and thereby he felt the necessity of establishing a polio hospital as well as a clinic in Calcutta. Out of that feeling B.C. Roy asked Dr. Santosh Bose, one of his former students to go ahead with the plan for a polio hospital at Beliaghata in the north-eastern suburbs of Calcutta. At the very outset it was completely a non-official venture and he by dint of his capacity started collecting necessary equipment for the polio clinic from within the country and abroad. After necessary arrangements about to start treatment of patients, B.C. Roy invited Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister

of India in the occasion to inaugurate the hospital which was named after him as “B. C. Roy Polio Clinic” by the promoters. However, after formally opening up the polio clinic and hospital Jawaharlal Nehru addressed, “I did not generally approve the naming of institutions after living persons but in that particular instance I have no objection to it because Dr. Roy is a great personality and the association of his name with the institution might benefit it immensely”.²³

Dr. Roy, the Guiding Spirit of Different Institutions

An account of Dr. Roy's life would be incomplete without being mentioning the name of the institutions with which he was closely connected. Bidhan Chandra Roy was closely associated with the introduction as well as the management of various institutions throughout the country, particularly in West Bengal. From an early age, he was interested in the betterment of the people and intended in helping and working for various institutions. His activities in this field were numerous and varied. Incidentally, B.C. Roy was the first President of All India Medical Council (AIMC) and continued to be its President for several years.²⁴ There was hardly a meeting of the Council which he did not attend. He was closely associated with the Kamala Nehru Hospital, started by Mahatma Gandhi in memory of the wife of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. He played a very active part in the work of this hospital at Allahabad.

Jadavpur Tuberculosis Hospital

No Indian statesman in the twentieth century has to his credit the building and nurturing of as many institutions as Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and in so many diverse fields. Early in his working life, he developed the propensity to conceive of new Institutions wherever he perceived a need for improvement of people's condition or providing a focus on a neglected area. It is noteworthy that, the Jadavpur Tuberculosis Hospital, the first of its kind in Bengal was started by Dr. B.C. Roy.²⁵ The fascinating story started as early as 1917, when a young man who was suffering from chronic pleurisy and was his long-time patient, wanted to know what he should do to his property. Dr. Roy advised him that “he should leave it for the establishment of an institution for the treatment of the disease for which he was suffering”. At that time, there was no special bed or hospital for treating tuberculosis patients. Naturally, in all such cases, the doctors were compelled to treat these unfortunates in the general wards along with other patients. The young man accepted the beautiful idea of Dr. Roy and thereafter willed his entire property of something above Rs. 2 lakhs for starting a T. B. hospital for treating the ailing humanity within five years of his death. He also constituted a trust with Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Sir P. C. Roy and Shri B. K. Ghosh as trustees for the fulfillment of his dream. The outcome of this great gesture was the Jadavpur T. B. Hospital, the first of its nature in Bengal, which came into being due to the herculean tasks of Dr. Roy and he nurtured the development of this hospital with great care for many years.²⁶

R.G. Kar Medical and Aghore Kamini Maternity Centre

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was one of the chief initiators behind the foundation of the Indian Medical Association and he shouldered almost every possible administrative responsibility during his lifetime. His role in the very formative stage of the R.G. Kar Medical College, formerly Carmichael Medical College is noteworthy. He was also instrumental in setting up the ‘Aghore Kamini Maternity Centre’- as per the name of his mother and ‘Health Centre’ of Digha. He was also involved with the ‘Indian Red Cross’ for many years and was the founder Chairman of the Indian Society of Physicians and continued as such for many years.²⁷

Chittaranjan Seva Sadan, Sishu Sadan and Cancer Hospital

Another great institution behind which Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy played his role as the main architect was Chittaranjan Seva Sadan (CSS). It was started in Deshbandhu Chittaranjan's house which Deshbandhu himself had bequeathed to the nation before his death. Not only that in the meantime, but Deshbandhu also selected the name of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy as a trustee to his endowment. After the death of Chittaranjan Das, Gandhiji requested Dr. Roy to undertake the task of turning Chittaranjan's house into a home for suffering humanity. As a result of that 'Chittaranjan Seva Sadan' came into being and this was inaugurated by Motilal Nehru on 14th April, 1926.²⁸ It is noteworthy that after the collection of Rs. 8 lakhs, the entire amount was handed over to Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the secretary of the Deshbandhu Memorial Trust. The self-respect along with national pride and personal dignity prevented Dr. Roy from seeking any assistance from the foreign Government; rather he went on collecting donations from the public to finance for opening every new unit or wing added to the hospital one after another. Chittaranjan Seva Sadan may be considered as one of the biggest maternity hospitals in India having sister institutions like Sishu Sadan, Hydro- Radiological Institute, and lately Cancer Hospital within its vast campus.²⁹ "Dr. Roy knows every brick of this institution and every brick knows that but for Dr. Roy, it may not have been possible for it to be added to the structure to make this magnificent hospital or home of service for the suffering humanity".³⁰ It was only after independence especially during his chief ministership Government assistance was started coming and thereupon Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India inaugurated the 'Radioactive Isotopes Laboratory' in the Chittaranjan Cancer Hospital.³¹

Victoria Institution

Hospitals and Schools apart, Dr. Roy was associated with Engineering and Technical education in the State of West Bengal. Bidhan Chandra Roy was also the guiding spirit behind the Victoria Institution in Calcutta, later on, renamed Victoria College. It is noteworthy that the Victoria Institution came into being out of the property of Lily Cottage belonging to Sunity Devi, the Dowager Maharani of Cooch Behar. Sunity Devi made a trust of her property with Dr. Roy as trustee to carry on the Victoria School, initiated by her father, Brahmananda Kesheb Chandra Sen. Dr. Roy had to arrange even a loan for the said purpose and eventually the present day the Victoria Institution came up.³²

Dr. Roy's Association with Others Institution

Some of the other institutions which Dr. Roy helped starting and developing were - Kancharapara Hospital for Tuberculosis, Engineering and Technical Education in the State of West Bengal, the Indian School of Social Welfare and Business Management (ISWBM), the Indian Institute of Management (Calcutta), etc. The Jadavpur Engineering College to its present position owes a lot to Dr. Roy. He had also been primarily responsible for having started the Technological Institute at Kharagpur. Then there were numerous other Institutions and Homes which he had patronized. No one man of the whole of Bengal had ever been intimately connected with so many institutions as Dr. Roy. They range from Homes for the destitute to Hospitals and Colleges. Even **Nirmal Hriday Home** started by Mother Teresa, Now Saint Teresa of the Missionaries of Charity received Dr. Roy's Patronage.³³

Dr. Roy's Will His Own House for a Polio Clinic and Hospital

Based on the above discussion, it is found that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was one of the most prolific institution builders in the history of our country, particularly in West Bengal. His creativity was active even till his death. Shortly before it, “he changed his Will to exclude his own house at 36 Wellington Street in which he had left all his property to his nephew, Justice Subimal Roy and bequeathed it for a Polio Clinic and Hospital for children to be run by a Trust that included apart from relations like Subimal Roy and eminent people like B. M. Birla (Chairman). Thus by a coincidence, the last of the institutions that he promoted was also a hospital as was the very first one he had created viz. the Jadavpur T.B. Hospital. Unfortunately, this institution did not have the benefit of being nurtured by its great founder. It received neither effective government support nor much public charity and maintains a precarious existence today”.³⁴

Lastly, it may be said that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was one of the rarest personalities who left his mortal life with full consciousness after devoted his whole life to the welfare of humanity. He had no dissatisfaction in terms of performing his duties rather satisfied enough which has been reflected in his own words. “I have lived a full life. I have fulfilled my mission; there is nothing more for me to do”.³⁵ He was a symbol of indomitable spirit with the urge of the fulfillment of a dream, that is why, as a mark of respect as well as recognition to his enormous contribution in the field of Health and the medical profession, even to-day his birthday (both birthday and day of death - 1st July) is being observed throughout the country as ‘Doctors Day’.

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