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## The Great Patriotic Benoy Kumar Sarkar: His Role in the Anti-Partition Movement in Malda District (1905-1911)

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**Abstract:** *When the partition of Bengal took place on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1905, all the people of the whole Bengal started protesting against it. In Malda district there was an extreme reaction against the partition of Bengal movement. Acharya Benoy Kumar Sarkar, the proud son of Malda District, played the most important role during this movement. Swadeshi movement was formed in protest of the partition of Bengal movement. One of the constructive works of the Swadeshi movement was the establishment of the National Council of Education. Acharya Benoy Kumar Sarkar was sent to Malda district with the responsibility of expanding national education. On the other hand, he instilled Swadeshi thought in the people of the district through various newspapers. When the British Government was reluctant to expand education, he worked tirelessly to make education accessible to the people. This article discusses selected aspects of the Acharya Benoy Kumar Sarkar role in anti-partition movement in Malda district.*

**Keywords:** *Anti-Partition Movement, Education, Malda, Nationalism, Newspaper, Swadeshi.*

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**Introduction**

Before coming to India to take charge of the administration, Lord Curzon declared at a banquet in England, I will defend what the English have one day achieved with the help of force, with the

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help of justice. Further he said that he would rule the country in the Indian interest without using India for the commercial or social interests of the British nation. The Indian people were initially quite happy with all these words of the future ruler. But the hopes of the Indians, especially the Bengalis, were soon turned into a mirage by Lord Curzon's Partition of Bengal.

Curzon's partition of Bengal provoked what a famous the Swadeshi movement which upset the 'settled fact' of partition and during which various new techniques of political mobilization were successfully attempted<sup>1</sup>. Bengali both Hindus and Muslims in western Bengal and mainly Hindus in East Bengal came out against the imperial policy and developed the ideology of Swadeshi nationalism. It permeated large areas of Bengal and introduced hitherto unknown defaces of political mobilization to India's freedom struggle by directly confronting the British Raj. Muffasil district of Bengal played there due role in the Swadeshi movement. The district of Malda did not lag behind in this phase of Nationalist movement. The district itself was included in the newly created province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. In Malda, anti-partition movement began as an urban middle class movement in which leader and inspiration provided by Benoy Kumar Sarkar.

### **Personal Profile**

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was an Indian great patriotic as well as professor. He was not a sociologist merely but an expert in pedagogy, a historian, a political scientist, an economist, a demographer, a journalist - all combined in one. He was not a scholar only but an excellent organizer and a great nationalist<sup>2</sup>. Nationalist Benoy Kumar Sarkar founded several institutes in Calcutta including Bengali Institute of Sociology, Bengali Asia Academy, Bengali Dante Society and Bengali Institute of American culture. Great patriotic Benoy Kumar Sarkar was born in 1887 on 26 December at Poratolly in Malda, Bengal presidency. His parents are Sudhanya Kumar Sarkar and Monomohini Debi. Benoy early education is started in Malda Zilla School. Benoy Kumar Sarkar entered the University of Calcutta at the age of 13 after standing first at entrance examination from Malda Zilla School<sup>3</sup>. He graduated dual degrees in English and History

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in 1905. The following year he received his Master's degree. In 1925 Sarkar started as a lecturer at the Department of Economics of University of Calcutta. He praised Nazism as 'form of benevolent dictatorship', and advocated the establishment of a fascist dictatorship in India<sup>4</sup>. In 1947 he became a professor and head of the department in University of Calcutta. Sarkar wrote in five languages, his native Bengali, English, German, French and Italian<sup>5</sup>. Publishing a large volume of work on a variety of topics, including 53 books and booklets in English alone, his written production amounting in all to some 30,000 pages<sup>6</sup>. In October 1949, he was diagnosed with the Coronary Thrombosis on his way back from a lecture in Washington, DC, and died on November 24 of the same year.

### **Partition Movement of Bengal and Benoy Kumar Sarkar**

Lord Curzon expressed his desire to form a new province by connecting the districts of Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Malda of the divided Bengal with the Chief Commissioner of Assam. But the people of all these regions did not want to be associated with an underdeveloped district like Assam. Because it will not be possible to get the benefits that are available with the capital Calcutta. In spite of strong opposition from all over the country, on 16 October 1905, the Bengal Disintegration Act came into force. As a result, Bengal was divided and the eastern part was connected with Assam and the western part with Bihar. According to calculations, Malda district is connected with Bihar. From the pain caused by this traumatic injury was born the activism of the independence movement or the anti-partition movement, Rabindranath Tagore introduced the Hindu Mela in Calcutta. Rabindranath, the world poet, introduced the Rakhibandhan festival by writing the song (Banglar Mati Banglar Jal) of Bengal. Arandhan Dey was celebrated in every house. The motto of independence is Bandemataram. The most important role in this agitation was played by Acharya Benoy Kumar Sarkar, the proud son of Malda district.

### **Swadeshi Movement and his Patriotic Zeal**

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Benoy Kumar Sarkar came under the direct influence of Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the founder of the Down society and a prominent leader of Swadeshi movement. Benoy Kumar Sarkar became a member of the Down society. He had also developed a close relation with Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya. He thus imbued with zeal for the Swadeshi. At the moment, Benoy Kumar is being recognized as a National professor and a popular teacher in many universities around the world. On the other hand he establishes himself with a number of revolutionary activities. It was milieu of Satish Chandra Mukherjee and his Down Society that young Benoy Kumar Sarkar found himself while still a student. Soon he along with Radhakamal Mukherjee, Rabindranarayan Ghosh and others became a disciple of Satish Chandra Mukherjee who thought them the first lessons in Nationalism<sup>7</sup>. The extent to which he was influenced by this old man is revealed in some of his activities in his early life. First, despite having a brilliant academic record behind him, Benoy Kumar refused to be rewarded by the British government in any form. Not only did he decline the offer of a state scholarship for higher studies abroad but he also turned down the offer of the post of a Deputy Magistrate. Instead he joined the teaching staff of the Bengal National College in 1907 on an honorary basis. Second, as a member of the Down Society he participated in the propagation of 'swadeshi' and 'boycott' in the towns and districts of Bengal. Third, he took national education as his life's creed and worked heart and soul for strengthening and popularizing the National Council of Education (N.C.E). He was also instrumental in carrying the movement for national education in the districts and organizing many national schools, the most important of which was the Malda District Council of Education founded in 1907. Fourth, Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Radhakamal Mukherjee created a fund for sending young scholars of the N.C.E. abroad to the study social and physical science in the leading universities of the U.S.A. Fifth, Benoy Sarkar was also an ardent supporter of introducing Bengali as the medium of instruction in the schools and colleges of Bengal and encouraged the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad to create a fund for translating important Western books into Bengali.<sup>8</sup>

### **Boycott of Education and Establishment of National Schools**

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The student society of Bengal was the first to unite against the government decision to partition Bengal. It is forbidden for student to join the movement, it is also forbidden to utter *Bandematram* sounds. When the students protested against the government ban, the government issued a notification saying that the students who would make the noise would have to pay a fine of five rupees for entering the school the next day. The parents were angry and decided to boycott the government school. The students adopted the resolution against the Carlyle circular, saying that the only to get rid of the students in the independence movement is set up a National School. A meeting was convened on November 4th in *Goldighi* to implement the initiative to establish a National School. It was decided that a national education society would be established for the provision of literature, science and technical education under national supervision. Bengal Technical was opened under the leadership of Pramathanath Basu. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, son of Malda, was elected professor of History and Finance at the Bengal National College. Benoy Kumar Sarkar was sent to Malda with the responsibility of expanding national education. A revulsion against western education became a major strand in the Swadeshi movement, taking the two forms of calls for boycott of official schools and colleges, and attempts to build up a parallel and independent system of 'national education'<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile in Calcutta a group of bright young students associated with Satish Chandra Mukherjee's Down Society had issued a manifesto in September 1905 calling for a boycott of the coming M.A. and P.R.S examinations. Benoy Kumar Sarkar of Malda, holder of the Ishan scholarship was among these Swadeshi activists<sup>10</sup>. He also made efforts to organize several meetings in Malda advocating educational boycott. In this endeavor, Benoy Kumar Sarkar got the support of Radheshchandra Seth and Bepinbehari Ghosh, the two pioneer nationalists of Malda<sup>11</sup>.

### **National Education and Malda Jatiya Siksha Samiti**

The rate of education in Malda district was deplorable when the National Education Council started the work of expanding the national Education. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, a rare genius,

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voluntarily took on the difficult task of taking this backward district forward. Over the next few years the picture became clearer as to how accurate and encouraging his advice was.

On 6th June 1907, The National Education Society was established in Malda district on the initiative of Benoy Kumar Sarkar. The president of this association is two people, Moulavi Mohammad Nurbox and Radheshchandra Seth. Bepinbehari Ghosh was given the responsibility of editor. Speaking at the inaugural function, professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar said, ‘ It seems that we have been born during the revolution in our country ... we do not see darkness of the future’. Radheshchandra Seth and his usual manner enlightened the national education and called upon the people to work for nation building. One of the tasks of the members of the meeting will be to spread education in the society in different ways, to make the lower education unpaid. Encouraging the public by publishing pamphlet and magazines, writing essays on educational literature etc. Benoy Kumar Sarkar later added a few more things because he thinks that education cannot be developed properly if teachers are can't properly train. His advice in this work was to send teacher to the scholars of different countries. Teachers will further improve their teaching work by writing books in their respective topics and in this way national literature will be improved. By creating such a mindset, teachers with the help of parents will help the students to develop humanity by engaging in various good deeds of education, social service and public welfare

### **Establishment of Schools**

Malda Jatiya Sikhsha Samiti had set up eight schools with 738 students by June 1908, three of them primary<sup>12</sup>. These schools are located at Maldah, Kutubpur, Kaligram, Dharampur, Paranpur, Jadupur and Malatipur<sup>13</sup>. In order to spread mass education, the Malda Jatiya Sikhsha Samiti had established night schools at Kutubpur, Kaligram and Dharampur<sup>14</sup>. The Samiti also endeavored to spread female education. A national school was established at Kaligram in 1908 with the inspiration of Benoy Kumar Sarkar. The contribution of Benoy Kumar Sarkar is very important not only for the education of boys but also for the education of girls. Mahakali

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Pathshala was built for girls; this Pathshala was established in a house of Amarendra Krishna Bhaduri with the interest of Benoy Kumar Sarkar.

### **Curriculum and Teaching Methods**

The National Council of Education was constituted 11 March 1906. The National Council of Education drew up in 1906 a curriculum for a three-year primary, seven-year secondary and four-year collegiate course. Literary and scientific studies was proposed to be combined with some amount of technical training up to the fifth year of the secondary course, after which the three streams would be divided<sup>15</sup>. Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar developed a new type of education system for these schools, which included Botany, Zoology, Chemistry, History, Geography, Formulary, Drawing, Painting, Mathematics, English and Bengali. Benoy Kumar himself used to train teachers, but he did not stop there. He decided to go a few steps further and train some teachers from the National Education Association of Malda to pursue higher and advanced technical education in various American universities for higher education. Students who went abroad on behalf of the National Education Association had to promise that they would return to the country after completing their higher education abroad and teach under the National Education Council and they would not demand more money than what the council would pay them. Among those who went abroad from Malda for education were: 1. Vijay Kumar Sarkar (Economics) 2. Dharendra Kumar Sarkar (Applied Chemistry) 3. Rajendra Narayan Chowdhury (Agriculture) 4. Khogendranath Mitra (Zoology) 5. Nabin Chandra Das (Socialism and Education), 6. Baneshwar Das (Chemistry, Engineering). Apart from this, some students were also sent to different centers in Allahabad, Brindaban and Lahore for technical education on behalf of this education association

### **Department of Literary Discussion and Benoy Kumar Sarkar**

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In the Department of Literary Discussion, Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar added many celebrities; among them were Radhesh Chandra Seth, Aditya Nath Maitra, Bidhusekhar Shastri, Haridas Palit Bepinbehari Ghosh, Radhakmal Mukherjee, Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, Monindra Mohan Basu. These professors from different departments used to write research articles on various scientific and historical subjects with the students of the national school. Through historical research he collected ancient statues, coins, artifacts of the copper rule industry and handwritten manuscripts, as well as information on folklore, socio-economic agro-industry and trade. The initiative of the National Education Society was also sincere in the development of folk culture. The journey started by the National Education Association in the national mind awakening has continued till today.

Since its inception, the Malda Samiti has emphasized the need for well-written textbooks in the local language. Radheschandra Seth and Haridas engaged themselves in writing textbooks on celebrated history and geography. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, however, took a leading role in this respect. During this period, he wrote *Prachin Greecer Jatiya Siksha* (1910), *Bhasa Siksha* (1910), *Siksha Sopan* (1912), *Aitihisik Prabandha* (1912), and several other books in vernacular language to address the problem of scarcity of textbooks.

### **Newspapers and Benoy Kumar Sarkar**

From the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the western educated intelligentsia of North Bengal took initiative to publish newspapers in their mother tongue from their respective districts. Benoy Kumar Sarkar also inspired the indigenous people with the idea of Swadeshi through various newspapers. The English translation of this article was published in *Amrit Bazar* in August of that year. In this article, Benoy Kumar Sarkar strongly called on the youth of Bengal to celebrate Swadeshi Shikshabrata. In 1914, a literary magazine called *Gambhira* was published from Malda district. Krishnacharan Sarkar was in charge of editing and publishing this magazine and Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar was in



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overall management. Details of various books suitable for Swadeshi schools were published in this magazine. Acharya Benoy Kumar Sarkar's initiative was to publish another notable magazine *Grihastha*. Srikumudnath Lahiri, the son-in-law of Malda, was in charge of editing this magazine. The real purpose of publishing these magazines was to unite the people in the Swadeshi movement and build an anti-British movement.

### **Conclusion**

This humble educated man could have lived a luxurious life by taking any high position, but he still devoted himself to the service of the country, his revolutionary life began with the Partition of Bengal movement of 1905. Further Benoy Kumar Sarkar was very highly esteemed by his countrymen for his patriotic zeal and his involvement in nation building activities. He enthused a glorious future of India, rather the East that was emerging from centuries-old bondage of new genre was pointed in most brilliant colors by Sarkar and he called upon everyone including the youth to realize the portrait in reality. Little wonder then, that Sarkar would win hearts of scores of young men in India of his time.

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