

# **Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and Indian Freedom Movement**

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## **Abstract**

The renowned doctor Bidhan Chandra Roy's political life has fueled the curiosity of the readership. A person who is successful in his profession and moves smoothly in the political arena has been analyzed by researchers with different perspectives. The reason for his entering politics is explained by the fact that he wanted to apply his professional success and familiarity in his own field to a larger area like politics. Some have also put forth ideal theories of service. It cannot be said that he was completely successful in political life. It cannot as well be overemphasized that he played a brilliant role in the freedom movement. Although he had extremely strong patriotism, but blind love for his country never overshadowed his rational personality. Therefore, he supported many proposals of the British government in view of the situation. Although he considered Gandhiji to be an ideal, but Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy did not accept all his decisions without hesitation. Though he had been a lifelong Congressman but he never took the primary membership of the Congress. Another special feature of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy is that he always put his profession above politics as a doctor.

**Keyword :** Swarajya Party, Gandhiji, Congress Working Committee, Bengal Legislative Council, Medical Mission, National Consciousness.

One of the aspects of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's multifaceted and varied career is his political life. His political career is divided into two phases -

1. His political life of the pre - independence period and
2. His post - independence political life i.e. his role as the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

This researched based article will discuss the activities of Bidhan Chandra Roy's early political life. In other words, the objective of this essay is to discuss and analyze his political life in a colonial environment against the British imperial as well as colonial rule. But here the question may be raised that why a doctor like this renowned legend Bidhan Chandra Roy was attracted to a completely different field? The answer to this question can be found in Nilendu Sengupta's writings. He wrote that there were two reasons behind his attraction to Congress politics and gaining power in the political field -

1. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was one of the best doctors in India and he wanted to use his professional success and familiarity in the arena of politics.

2. He became a close, reliable friend of most of the major Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass, Vallabhbhai Patel and many others as their personal doctor.

This personal relationship paved the way for his rise in politics.<sup>1</sup> Many again say that he came into politics from the ideal of service of his countrymen. Although critics say that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's political activities do not show any evidence of his coming into politics out of patriotism or being attracted to the freedom movement.

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's active political life began in 1922, which was a turning point for India towards her independence. It was then the fifth year of the Gandhi era in the Congress (the Gandhi era began in 1917 in Indian politics), but before the Gandhian era entered the political arena in a wider sense, Bidhan Chandra Roy's political apprenticeship began under the leadership of Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay, who was then the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University. Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay requested Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy to become a Fellow of the University, but Bidhan Chandra did not agree to his proposal. It was customary at that time, for those contesting in the Senate Elections to register the names of one hundred graduates at their own expense. As a result, they could vote in the Senate elections as registered graduates. Most of the senators used to win the Senate elections in this way. But Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy did not go that way. He stood for the Senate election on his own merits and won the election in 1916 and became a member of the Senate.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy became very close to Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee as a member of the Senate. In 1922, when Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay's second term as the Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University had ended, the Governor Lord Lytton gave a letter to Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay. The letter stated that Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay could become the Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University for the third time subject to certain conditions. Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee showed the letter to Bidhan Chandra and asked for his opinion. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy found the terms of the letter quite humiliating. Sir Ashutosh immediately rejected the Governor General's Lord Litton's proposal and said, "Freedom first, Freedom Second and Freedom Always."<sup>3</sup> Previously, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy had raised his voice against the injustice of the English doctors and British administration several times. He developed himself as a person with national consciousness, independence and self-esteem under the influence of that era. Even then he did not join active politics.

At the beginning of the 20th century, nationalism flourished in India. The travelling of the Muslims to Bengal and India increased political awareness among the common people. In this context, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy actively entered the arena of politics. Two prominent political figures who deeply influenced Dr. Roy were Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass and Mahatma Gandhi. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass himself brought Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy into politics, and he was practically Dr. Roy's political maestro. After the demise of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1925, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy came closer to Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>4</sup> Gandhiji was able to bridge the gap and discrimination between the villages and the towns by involving the common people of both the places in the mass movements the Champaran Farmers' Struggle, the Ahmedabad Textile Workers' Strike and the Kheda Farmers' and Mass Movements. So far the Indian national movement was dominated by upper class and middle class intellectuals. But after these events the common mass of people in India started considering Mahatma Gandhi to be their own person rather than the intellectuals and theoretical leaders in the city. Slowly and gently, Mahatma Gandhi became the undisputed leader of India. From this time Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, inspired by Gandhiji's ideals, decided to devote himself to politics.

In the year 1920, a special session of the Congress was held under the chairmanship of Lala Lajpat Rai in the large eastern garden near Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's residence in Wellington Square, in Calcutta. In this session, a decision was taken to launch a non - violent non - cooperation movement against the British colonial government. In this session, decisions were taken to boycott all the legislatures, to boycott the titles given by the British government, to boycott government courts, official and semi-official functions, to boycott schools and colleges and to join the national educational institutions, to boycott the formation of arbitral tribunals, to boycott foreign goods and accept indigenous goods. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy attended this special session of the Congress. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was amazed to see the way how the great leader Mahatma Gandhiji had been getting felicitated by twenty thousand to twenty five thousand delegates and visitors from different provinces of India in the Great Assembly Hall. He knew that no hero in the thirty four years of the establishment of the Congress had received such sincere respect and compliments from the common people of India.<sup>5</sup> But Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy did not meet Mahatma Gandhiji during this time and he did not participate actively in the non - cooperation movement of 1920 - 22 led by Gandhiji. However, despite not actively participating in the non - cooperation movement, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy established himself

as one of the closest person of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass, the supreme leader of the non-cooperation movement in Bengal. In spite of Mahatma Gandhi's declaration, Swaraj had not been achieved within a year. To make the thing worse, Gandhiji's decision to call off the non-cooperation movement over the Chaurichaura incident shocked the people of the entire country. Chittaranjan Dass and his followers became extremely disappointed and annoyed with the decision taken by Mahatma. Their argument was that in a large country like India, if a small number of people isolate themselves in the face of temporary tension in a region and if the movement was stopped because of that, then it would never be possible to carry out a movement. Later however, Gandhi also realized that he had made a big mistake. He openly admitted his fault and named it to be 'the Himlayan Blunder'.<sup>6</sup> Gandhiji's frank confession towards his own created blunder surprised Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy even more. However, centering the Chaurichaura incident, the Bengal Congress split into two factions. These two paths are No-Triers, who were the followers of Mahatma Gandhi) and Pro-Changers, which was an anti-Gandhi group. The leaders like Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass, Motilal Nehru, Subhash Chandra and others and their followers are known as Pro-Changers. They proposed to enter the Legislature to amend or reform the Montagu Chelmsford regime which was opposed by Chakrabarty Raja Gopalachari and other who were the Pro-Changers. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass' proposal was rejected by majority votes and he resigned from the post of the President. Then he formed a powerful party on an all-India basis called 'Swarajya Party' with Pandit Motilal Nehru, N. C. Kolkar and other leaders in 1922. In March of the same year (1922), Mahatma Gandhiji was arrested on the charges of sedition by the British colonial government.

In 1923, a special session of the Congress was held in Delhi under the chairmanship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. The policy of entering the legislature proposed by Deshbandu Chittaranjan Dass, Pandit Motilal Nehru, N. C. Kolkar and others was discussed once more in this session. The advocates of this policy made it clear in the meeting that they would not go to the Legislature to help the British Government, but that they would reform the newly introduced Diarchy, and if they could not do so, they would create a stalemate and disable the whole system. The Swarajya Dal was given permission enter the Legislature.<sup>7</sup> The cabinet formed as a result of the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms gave a seat to Surendranath Banerjee with a salary of Rs. 64,000. A vigorous campaign by the Swarajya Dal continued against Surendranath and other moderate leaders for cooperating with reactionary foreign governments to introduce

governance reforms that the Congress had rejected as unacceptable. In 1923, Surendranath Bandyopadhyay, a minister, who used to get sixty-four-thousand rupees as his salary minister, became a candidate for the second time in the Bengal Legislative Assembly elections. On the advice of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, inspired by the visionary leader Chittaranjan Dass, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was agreed to stand for the election from the North Kolkata Municipal constituency. This center was known as Barrackpore centre. On the advice of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, Bidhan Chandra filed his nomination as an independent candidate in that centre. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was the candidate against Surendranath, the hero of hundreds of wars. Surendranath was famous as 'Rashtraguru'. He was called the "Uncrowned King of Bengal". He was known to the British as "Surrender Not".<sup>8</sup> Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass requested Bidhan Chandra to contest the election as a Congress candidate but Bidhan Chandra did not agree. He said that he had no conflict with the Congress but he said that since he had submitted his nomination as an independent candidate, now if he had become the Congress candidate, then, it would not save his face to the voters. Bidhan Chandra also added that if Rastraguru Surendranath Banerjee resigned from the ministerial post given to him by the British government, Bidhan Chandra Roy would withdraw his candidature. On the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1923, everyone was surprised to see the headline on the front page of the newspaper. It was published in Amrita Bazar Patrika: "Sir, Surendra Nath Banerjee Defeated." "On object lesson to Supporters of Bureaucracy Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy Elected. People's Victory at Barrackpur." The full picture of the vote is noticeable in this newspaper.

Out of a total of 11660 voters, 8029 cast their votes, out of which 58 votes were canceled due to various reasons. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy got 5688 votes and his opponent Surendranath Bandyopadhyay got 2283 votes. In other words, Bidhan Chandra Roy defeated Surendranath Banerjee by a margin of 3405 votes and stirred up the politics of Bengal.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Roy was a member of the Legislative Council of Bengal as a representative of this constituency for eight years. In the meantime, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy had joined the Swarajya Dal. After the death of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass, on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1925, Deshopriyo Jatindra Mohan Sengupta had been elected as the leader of the legislative assembly. Bidhan Chandra Roy was the assistant leader of Swarajya Parishadiya Dal. Bidhan Chandra Roy took several proactive roles in the Bengal Legislative Council. Bidhan Chandra Roy was the first person in this Legislative Council to call for nursing as a profession for both Indian and Bengali girls. He took several positive

steps including improvement of medical facilities, prevention of water pollution in Hooghly River, provision of footpaths for pedestrians on Bali Rail Bridge and many more.

In 1930, Bidhan Chandra Roy was nominated a member of the Congress Working Committee in recognition of his achievements in the Bengal Legislature. He was a member of this committee till his death. In 1930, the whole country became agitated with the call of Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement. Congress members resigned from the provincial legislatures as per the decision of the Congress Working Committee. Before the historic Jati campaign, Subhash Chandra Bose became imprisoned. Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, the mayor of Calcutta was taken behind the bars within a few days. The British government banned the Congress Party. Congress councilors in the corporation office were left without leadership after the arrest of Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy became the Mayor of Calcutta Corporation. As he was not a councilor, the Congress councilors first elected him as Alder Man and later elected him as the mayor of Calcutta in 1932. He held this post till 1932 - 33. After Kumud Ranjan Roy resigned from the post of Alder Man, Bidhan Chandra was re-elected as Mayor in 1938 - 39 and held the position till 1940. After Subhash Chandra Bose resigned, Dr. Roy was re-elected as Mayor for the third time. He did many welfare works based on the western philosophical theory "The Greatest Good of the Greatest Number". Dr. Bidhan Chandra, as mayor, told a reporter in the newspaper 'Englishman' that the biggest problem in Calcutta was three fold. These are-

1. Water supply problems,
2. Colon problems and
3. Housing and food supply problems for poor people.

All three of these problems lead to the possibility of epidemic disease. He commented that if he can solve all these problems, he will become complacent. He laid great importance on solving the housing problems of the poor. He commented that, "We shall have to devise some plan for housing of these poor people". Apart from that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy arranged food supply and inspection.<sup>10</sup>

How did Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy emerge as a Congress leader is an important point of discussion. In that sense, he never accepted primary membership of the Congress Party but he had been a Congressman all his life. In his early life, he became known as an associate of

Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Dass, who was an anti -Gandhiji figure. Later on, Bidhan Chandra came in close proximity to Mahama Gandhi and became Gandhiji's disciple. Bidhan Chandra Roy wrote in his memoir in later period - "an instantaneous feeling of kinship between Gandhi and myself which nothing could lessen during the ensuing 23 years".<sup>11</sup> But it must be kept in mind that Bidhan Chandra never blindly followed Gandhiji's views and his path. More than once Dr. Roy strongly opposed Gandhiji's decisions. Congress at that time was always divided into factional conflicts at the national and provincial levels. Sometimes these conflicts turned violent too. In Bengal Congress this was very evident between Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta. Subhash Chandra had been leading the reformists of the Congress Party and Jatindra Mohan Sengupta led the traditionalists, who were the supporters of Gandhiji. Bidhan Chandra Roy always distanced himself from this groups of Bengal Congress, who were always busy to fight amongst themselves, rather, he acted as a bridge between these two groups. He had intimate personal relations with the leaders of both the groups. The Simon Commission was formed in the year 1927 under the leadership of Sir John Simon, the commissioner who framed the Constitution of India. All the parties like Congress, Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha rejected the Simon Commission as Indian members had no place in it. The slogan "Go back Simon" started to be murmured everywhere. At that period of time, all the top Congress leaders and the common people of India jumped into the movement. But there is no information that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy participated in the movement directly at this time.<sup>12</sup> At this time, all-party conferences were called in Delhi and Poona to give a befitting reply to the British arrogance and it was decided that a sub - committee would be formed to prepare a constitution for India. Motilal Nehru became its president. Other members of this sub - committee were Subhash Chandra Bose, Ali Imam, Tej Bahadur and others. Unfortunately, the Nehru Report could not be accepted at the All Party Conference held in Calcutta due to the opposition of communal minded leaders.<sup>13</sup> Both groups worked together in the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Congress held in Calcutta in December, 1928 under the presidency of Pandit Motilal Nehru. Jatindra Mohan Sengupta and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy were appointed as the President and General Secretary of the Congress Reception Committee respectively. Nirmal Chandra was appointed the Treasurer and Subhash Chandra Bose was appointed Commander - in - Chief of the Volunteer Force. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy wrote in a letter to one of his friends - "... that my appointment as General Secretary of the

Reception Committee was more in recognition by congressmen of my organizing ability than as a reward for my performances in congress politics.<sup>14</sup> At this time there were two conflicting groups in the Bengal Province Committee. However, both the groups made this session a success through collective efforts. Jatindra Mohan Sengupta did not feel hesitant to tell that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy should be commended for this achievement because he was free from all factionalism and worked liberally, gaining support from all the groups. He acquired a highly held position on the public stage of the Congress as one of the five leaders of the Bengal Congress. These five leaders were Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Sarat Chandra Bose, Nirmal Chandra Bose, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Shri Tulsi Charan Goswami. The main role of Panch Pradhan or the five leaders was to keep the supremacy of the Swarajya group intact in the Bengal Congress. However, Bidhan Chandra Roy became a member of the Congress Working Committee in 1930 as a reward.

On 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1930, the Congress Executive Committee empowered Gandhiji to launch civil disobedience at his own will. Gandhiji announced that the civil disobedience movement would be started by defying the Salt Act. The Mayor Irwin mockingly wrote in a letter, "My midnight sleep is not disturbed pondering over the defiance of the salt law."<sup>15</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi and his followers started the Dandi march from the Sabarmati Ashram. The agitation spread throughout India. But at last the Mayor Irwin's blissful sleep got disturbed. Mass arrests, police torture, and unspeakable oppression upon the revolutionaries were ensued. Several leaders including Jatindra Mohan Sengupta and Subhash Chandra were sent behind the bars. Bidhan Chandra Roy was given charge of the Bengal Congress. Bidhan Chandra took an important role in conducting the civil disobedience movement in Bengal for about six months. At this time Gandhiji seemed to be a completely new man. This time he did not repeat his action in this case as he called off the non - cooperation movement after the Chaurichaura incident. The fact that Gandhiji changed himself with the passage of time gave Bidhan Chandra Roy a distinct satisfaction. He became closer to Gandhiji from this time. On Gandhiji's instructions, Bidhan Chandra Roy visited Pandit Motilal Nehru who was ill in Naini jail. Motilal wanted Bidhan Chandra Roy to treat him. Bidhan Chandra Roy went to Delhi for attending the meeting of the Congress Working Committee after seeing Motilal Nehru in Naini jail. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was arrested along with other members during the session on the afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> August in 1930. It was written in Amritbazar Patrika - "On



that afternoon on 27<sup>th</sup> August, during the session of the committee, the police arrested the following members except Mrs. Kamala Nehru and Mrs. Hans Meta -

Names of the arrested members were - Dr. M. A. Ansari, Pandit Madan Mohan Malvya, Bitthal Bhai Patel, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Deep Narayan Singh, Dukhi Chand, Sardar Mangal Singh, Chowdhury Afzal Haque and Raja Rao (Editors). These ten members were taken to the local jail. Each was sentenced to six months' imprisonment without labour on the charges of being present in the unlawful assembly.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Bidhan Chandra was brought to Alipore Central Jail. Subhash Chandra Bose, Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, Kiran Shankar Roy, Dr. Kanailal Ganguly and others were imprisoned in Alipore Jail. Dr. Roy came to the jail and told the jailer Major Patni that even though he was a prisoner of the jail, who had been sentenced without imprisonment with no labour but it was being impossible for him to waste his time in jail without any work. So he said that he would be delighted if Major Patni gave him any work. Major Patni requested Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy to take charge of the 120 - bed jail hospital. Dr. Roy gladly accepted the responsibility and many patients were cured by his good treatment. The Jailer Major Patni recommended that Bidhan Chandra Roy's jail term be reduced by six weeks. With the instruction of the Jail Superintendent, Bidhan Chandra's sentence was commuted for 6 weeks and at that time, Major Patni gave a note in which he wrote that Dr. Roy had saved the life of not one but many of his inmates. Finally, in the middle of the year 1931, Bidhan Chandra was released from the Alipore Central Jail. After leaving the jail, Bidhan Chandra Roy heard that Pandit Motilal Nehru had not yet recovered. The next day he left for Allahabad. Towards the end of January Motilal was taken to Lucknow for an examination, accompanied by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. But Motilal could not be revived. On 29<sup>th</sup> January, the day after reaching Lucknow, Motilal breathed his last. Under the management of Dr. Bidhan Chandra, Motilal's body was brought to Allahabad and his mortal remains were cremated on the banks of the Yamuna.

When the Civil Disobedience Movement was suspended by the Gandhi - Irwin Pact on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1931, many including Subhash Chandra Bose strongly protested. Subhash Chandra and Billy Bhai Patel criticized it in a joint statement from Europe - "Gandhiji failed as a political leader. Congress has to be radically restructured on the basis of new principles and new methods, and it urgently needs a new leader. Mahatma Gandhi's latest act of suspending, the Civil Disobedience movement was nothing but the recognition of the defeat."<sup>17</sup> This

agreement also appeared as a big question mark for Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. He clearly asked Mahatma Gandhi in Allahabad - "Why did he agree to this agreement?" Gandhiji candidly told Bidhan Chandra "succumbed not to lord Irwin, but to the honesty in him, I went against the directive of the working committee."<sup>18</sup> In the meanwhile, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced a separate electoral system (Communal award) for scheduled communities. In effect of this, protests erupted across the country. Gandhiji started hunger strike till the last breath again in Pune. On the third day of the fast, Bidhan Chandra appeared next to Gandhiji in Pune because saving Gandhiji's life was the greatest need of the nation. Therefore, during the hunger strike, Gandhiji signed the Poona Pact with B. R. Ambedkar on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1932. The perception of the Poona Pact was deeply rooted in the Congress mind that Gandhiji had given him more through the Poona Pact than what Ramsay Macdonald had given to B. R. Ambedkar in his communal divide. There was great excitement around this agreement across the country. However, till the end of Mahatma Gandhiji's twenty one days hunger strike in Poona in 1933, Bidhan Chandra was always by the side of Mahatma Gandhi but he got back to Calcutta with utter dismay. However, Bidhan Chandra got a lesson from Gandhiji in Pune - "That in some persons mind controls all physical functions."<sup>19</sup>

On 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1934, Bidhan Chandra Roy went to Patna and met Gandhiji. He conveyed his disappointment and dissatisfaction to Mahatma. In fact, unlike Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose, Bidhan Chandra Roy posed various questions to Gandhiji, but never publicly criticized him or made any negative comment against him. This was where he differs from other leaders. However, Bidhan Chandra Roy told Gandhiji that, "A surgeon needs a very sharp knife to remove the source of cancer from the patient's body. But if the surgeon finds that the knife in his hand is not sharp and rather blunt while operating, then the knife helps spreading the patient's cancer instead of eradicating it. The same has happened to the Civil Disobedience Movement in India."<sup>20</sup> On Bidhan Chandra's advice, Gandhiji approved the proposal to call the conference and directed Bidhan Chandra Roy to inform him of its results. A four day meeting of All India Pro - Swarajya Congress leaders was held from 30<sup>th</sup> March to 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1934 at Dr. Ansari's residence. On 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1934, Dr. Roy announced that the Congress would leave the matter of Satyagraha in his hands for the time being. He wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel, "Those who are anxious to enter the Council and working day and night for it should be allowed to get in. Nehru was shocked by this move of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy."<sup>21</sup> Mahatma Gandhi opined

that some people were trying to enter the hall of power of the Council. Dr. Roy used his influence on Gandhiji to lead this right wing group and got his consent. Bidhan Chandra Roy stayed in the nationalist movement directly for a few days, but he showed enthusiasm for achieving governance through public representative institutions such as councils and assemblies. He got imprisoned as well for the same reason. Dr. Roy felt that the Congress no longer had the strength to mount a mass movement. This frustration can be overcome by entering the legislature as a new battleground. Dr. Roy's opinion was supported by Dr. M. A. Ansari, Asaf Ali, Satyamurthy, Bhulabhai Desai and the Swarajists led by Dr. B. C. Roy.

In July 1934, it was decided to call off the Civil Disobedience Movement in the meeting of A. I. C. C. Dr. Ansari and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy submitted a report to A. I. C. C. for the participation in the Legislative Assembly elections and it was approved. In this meeting Gandhiji surprisingly endorsed the report of Dr. Ansari and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and said,

“I admit that Dr. Ansari and Dr. Bidhan are people with honest convictions and they desire a charge in our programmes. I will therefore withdraw the civil Disobedience Movement so that the Council Entry Programme be given a chance.<sup>22</sup> Taking the advantage of this strategy, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Dr. Ansari, Satyamurthy and others thought that the best way to get as much benefits as possible from the government is to enter the legislature. At this time Bidhan Chandra Roy decided to distance himself from the center of Congress politics between the years 1934 and 1935. He wrote a letter to his personal friend Dr. M. A. Ansari on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 1935 in Delhi -

“I do not desire to have anything to do with the congress for some time. I would rather remain away from politics for a while and for the same reason. I have no inclination to be on the Parliamentary Board.”<sup>23</sup> The reason for such a decision is probably the rift and factionalism between the Big Five of the Bengal Congress. After the death of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das the factional conflict that had been going on became more acute in the Bengal Congress. An influential section of this clan conflict was led by Deshopriyo Jatindra Mohan Sengupta and his follower Birendranath Shasmal. The leaders of the other group were Sarat Chandra Bose and Subhash Chandra Bose. Hence, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy removed himself from politics for the time being. Bidhan Chandra Roy never took up politics as a means for earning money. He became the president of Congress and the member A. I. C. C. working committee

because of his own merit. He stated in his memoirs - "I can truthfully say that while I was all along taking my share in the deliberations of these committees, I have never had any ambition to occupy any position in the political party nor to boss it."<sup>24</sup> During this time he used to spend more time in medical work.

In the meantime, Deshopriyo Jatindra Mohan Sengupta tragically died of snakebite in Giridi, Bihar. Therefore it can be perceived that the changeists become victorious at the end. The Congress decided to enter the Legislature and participate in the elections at Lakhhi in early 1936 and at the Faizpur Congress session later that year. In February 1937 elections to the Provincial Legislature, the Congress jumped with all its organizational strength. In the election manifesto of the Congress, the demand for complete repeal of the Act of 1935 was again strongly raised. Moreover, various public promises were made, such as restoration of civil rights, unconditional release of political prisoners, abolition of untouchability, radical reforms in agrarian system and reduction of revenue, right to form unions etc. The Congress election campaign evoked massive response among the people.

The role of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was significant in the run - up to the elections. A committee chaired by Bidhan Chandra was formed to finalize the names of the Congress candidates for this province. Two representatives each from the two rival factions of the Bengali Congress became members of this committee. The names of 200 candidates of the committee had been finalized. But the committee had a disagreement with Sarat Bose over the names of candidates for the four constituencies. At Sarat Bose's request, the Congress Working Committee intervened and finalized the names of two candidates each from the two rival groups. But Bidhan Chandra stated that this decision is against the constitution of the party. He proposed that the matter be brought up in the General Meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee and that both groups should accept the decision of the General Meeting. Sarat Bose did not agree to this proposal. Bidhan Chandra Roy resigned from the post of President of the Election Committee. In this atmosphere of conflict, the elections to the Bengal Provincial Legislature were faced in 1937. In the election, the Bengali Legislative Assembly won a single majority by getting 59 seats. Fazlul Haque Sahib's Krishak Praja Party won 40 seats by compromising with the Congress on several seats. Muslim League got 39 seats. A. K. Fazlul Haque proposed to the Congress to form a coalition government. Sarat Bose did not agree to this proposal. He argued that the election manifesto did not promise to form a coalition government. Haque

Sahib sought the help of the Muslim League this time. The Muslim League immediately agreed and a coalition government was formed. Bidhan Chandra Roy proposed that the Congress form the government together with Fazlul Haque but that did not happen in reality. The result is fatal. It was because of this mistake of the Congress that Bengal was engulfed in communal politics and it was because of this mistake that the All India Muslim League of Lahore got the chance to pass its historic 'Pakistan proposal in 1940. Bidhan Chandra became heart broken with the consequences.<sup>25</sup>

The year 1939 was extremely important in all India politics. The Gandhiji and Subhash Chandra controversy culminated in the Tripuri Congress session this year over the election of Subhash Chandra Bose for a second term as Congress president. Subhash Chandra Bose defeated Gandhiji's nominated candidate Pattabi Seetaramaiah in the Tripuri Congress session election. As Subhash Chandra won the election, twelve out of the fifteen members of the Congress Working Committee resigned from their post. Gandhiji's statement at this situation was - "The defeat is more mine, not his (Sitaramaiah's). I am nothing but a representative of certain policies and activities. So it seems that my policies and activities are not liked by the Congress representatives."<sup>26</sup> At this time, the Gandhi - Subhas Bose conflict stirred up the national politics. At the peak of this factionalism, that Dr. Bidhan Chandra who had been keeping an equal distance from Gandhiji and Subhas Chandra till now, changed his position and suddenly accepted Gandhiji's leadership. The consequences of this decision are dire. Bidhan Chandra Roy's Wellington Street home was attacked and broken massively. Nilendu Sengupta said - "It is mysterious that he (Bidhan Chandra Roy) repeatedly got involved in factionalism and clan politics. His career as a physician was so impressive and grand that it is surprising that he should be involved in dirty political parties like this."<sup>27</sup>

After the expulsion of Subhash Chandra Bose from the Congress, the existence of Congress in Bengal was endangered. Gandhiji instructed Bidhan Chandra to reorganize the Provincial Congress. World War II had already begun by that time. The Viceroy ignored Indian opinion and declared India as a war partner in their battle. The Congress boycotted seven cabinets to protest of this implication of the British government. Bidhan Chandra Roy, as the provisional president of the Congress, opposed the proposal in the working committee, saying that boycotting the cabinet would be an act of imprudence. He also added that as a result of this, the political dominance and power of the Muslim League will increase in the country. We are aware of its

authenticity. Bidhan Chandra wanted to resign from the Congress Working Committee. At first his resignation letter was not accepted. After much insistence, the newly appointed president Maulana Abul Kalam Azad accepted his resignation. Bidhan Chandra again moved away from national politics. In 1939, Dr. Roy was elected the first non-executive President of the Medical Council of India and remained in this position for six consecutive years. In 1942, the British Government requested Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy to help and cooperate in forming a medical corps for the military department. Dr. Roy again went to Gandhiji and sought for his help although he was ready to take on this responsibility as serving patients as a doctor was his first love. However, Gandhiji allowed the establishment of the Congress Medical Mission. A huge list of medicines and other items sent by the Congress Medical Mission is still preserved in Dr. B. C. Roy's private papers.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, when the Quit India movement started, Gandhiji's two-pronged policy, i.e. the Quit India movement against the British on the one hand, and indirectly helping the British war effort by sending medical teams on the other, began to be successful in various quarters.

In 1942, Gandhiji suddenly called for the Quit India movement. Although all the top Congress leaders were arrested on the eve of this movement, it became the largest and most powerful movement in India under regional leadership with spontaneous participation of the people. There were four main flashpoints of the movement - Eastern United Provinces, Midnapore in Bengal, Odisha and Maharashtra-Karnataka. Communists did not participate in the Quit India Movement as the Congress helped the Allies in World War II. They called for people's war and engaged themselves in the work of social service. Some of the Nationalist Congress leaders like Dr. Bidhan Chandra neither took part in the 'Quit India Movement' nor supported it in principle. Sir J. Herbert in a secret report from Bengal gave sensational information to Linlithgow. He wrote that "Kiran Shankar Roy, Bidhan Chandra Roy and other influential sections of the Congress held discussions among themselves that they would not support the Quit India movement of 1942. Rather, they would help the British in the war process in various ways."<sup>29</sup> The British government appreciated this role of Bidhan Chandra. However, his personal relationship with Gandhiji was never severed. In 1943, when Gandhi started a hunger strike while imprisoned in the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, the jail superintendent of the palace requested Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy to lend his hand in Gandhiji's treatment. Bidhan Chandra immediately agreed to go to Poona and he agreed to publish a daily medical

bulletin on Gandhiji's health on the condition given by the British Government. After 13 days of Gandhiji's fast, Gandhiji became morbid and almost dead. As a last resort, other doctors decided to forcefully inject Gandhiji with glucose. Bidhan Chandra objected to it and said that if Gandhiji died, he would write the same thing in the death certificate that in spite of Dr. B. C. Roy's objections and warnings, Gandhiji died of severe trauma for forcefully injecting glucose. After hearing all these words, the other doctors did not dare to make any advancement toward injecting glucose to Gandhiji. Bidhan Chandra began to slowly pour four ounces of lemon juice into Gandhiji's mouth and gradually he recovered from all his ailments. Bidhan Chandra later noted - "Gandhiji had fooled the Government and death himself."<sup>30</sup> In 1945 - 46, Bidhan Chandra Roy was completely disgusted and extremely dismayed with the Congress' policy towards the Muslim League. He did not keep any relationship other than his relationship with the Congress leaders as only being their physician. However, when Jawaharlal Nehru asked for his help in sending Indian medical missions to China and Malaya on behalf of the Congress, he jumped at the mission because he considered serving the war - torn people as a primary need.

One episode of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's eventful and colorful career is his political career. His role in the history of Indian nationalism may not be as direct as that of politicians like Gandhiji or Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, but his patriotism was not lacking either. Although some critics called him an opportunist. Shri Subodh Chandra Sengupta writes, "In politics, Bidhan Chandra Roy showed a great ability - that of betting on the horse that will win. The fact that he took shelter under the umbrella of Chittaranjan Dass against Rashtraguru Surendranath had nothing to do with revolutionary doctrine. He calculated that as the left - wing sentiment had then been prevailing in the Congress, so opposition to the moderate Surendranath would be profitable. This is also the reason why he left Jatindra Mohan and joined Subhash Chandra."<sup>31</sup> However, this kind of criticism does not get much acceptance, because if we discuss the entire history of Bidhan Chandra Roy, it can be seen that he was a member of the Congress class all his life. He never had the lust for power. When he left the medical profession and entered politics, his financial loss was huge. No one usually accepts such a loss if there is no passion for service to country and people. Although he was inspired by Gandhiji's ideals, but he did not accept all the decisions made by Gandhiji by sacrificing his own self - reverence. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy had all the qualities of a real politician - such as practical intelligence,

restraint of speech, responsibility towards the people. Even when he became Chief Minister after independence on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1948, he did not deviate from his duties. He showed devotion to his duties throughout his life. He had always fulfilled his lifelong duty for the country and people. When the highest honour, the Bharat Ratna, was handed over to him, on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1961, he said with a smile - "Let India be mine, you take the *Ratna* or the jewels."<sup>32</sup>

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