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## Reform, Revolution and Resistance: The Freedom Legacy of Krishnanagar (1859 - 1911)

Amit Kumar Das, *Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Assam, India*

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### Abstract

The Indian Independence Movement is considered to be the biggest mass movement in the history of India. In this movement, just as great leaders and people played a role, so too did various cities, which accelerated the path of India's freedom struggle. Krishnanagar, the headquarter of Nadia District in West Bengal played a substantial yet underrepresented role in India's freedom movement. The Indian Independence Movement in Krishnanagar was merely a regional extension of the all-India Movement. India's first peasant movement, the Indigo Revolution of 1859 began here. It was led by Digambar Biswas, Bishnu Charan Biswas, Bishwanath Sardar, Meghai Sardar etc. After that, Krishnanagar and its residents did not have a direct role in the Swadeshi Movement that took place in Indian history, but they certainly had an indirect role. Everyone from Krishnanagar, regardless of gender spontaneously participated in the Indian freedom struggle. Some of the prominent leaders from Krishnanagar were Lalmohan Ghosh, Monmohan Ghosh, Tarapada Bandhyapadhyay etc. This article explores the political, educational, revolutionary, and cultural contributions of Krishnanagar and its people from the middle 18th century to 1911.

**Keywords:** Nadia, Krishnanagar, Indigo Revolt, The Three, Swadeshi Movement

### Research Objectives:

1. To explore the socio-political environment of Krishnanagar during British colonial rule.
2. To identify the key individuals and events involved in Krishnanagar's freedom struggle.
3. To analyze public participation in national movements within Krishnanagar.
4. To integrate Krishnanagar's local contributions into the broader narrative of India's independence.

### Research Findings:

1. Revolutionary Networks and Secret Activities: Local youth were involved in underground revolutionary groups. Krishnanagar provided a strategic base for planning, sheltering revolutionaries, and circulating banned materials under British surveillance.

2. Participation in Mass Movements: Krishnanagar responded robustly to national campaigns—burning foreign goods during the Swadeshi Movement, boycotting colonial institutions.
3. Cultural and Literary Resistance: Theatre, poetry, and local literature in Krishnanagar carried hidden nationalist messages. Cultural forums became tools to inspire collective identity and spread anti-colonial sentiment without overtly defying the British.

### **Introduction:**

Krishnanagar is located in the Nadia district of West Bengal, India. It lies on the eastern banks of the Jalangi River, a tributary of the Ganges. The city is situated at an average elevation of about 14 metres (46 feet) above sea level. Latitude: 23.40° N, Longitude: 88.50° E. The original name of Krishnanagar was Rewi. Rewi was a peaceful, cool, green forested, lively village surrounded by the Jalangi River on one side and the Anjana River on the other. Krishnanagar's Rajbari, Roy Dynasty, the heritage of this city, Bhavananda Majumdar is known as the founder of this dynasty, 'Roy' is their title, not their surname. It is said that Bhabananda Majumdar helped Mansingh in the conquest of Bengal by suppressing Pratapaditya, he fell in the favor of the Mughal emperor and the emperor was pleased and gave him the responsibility of the fourteen parganas. Rewi was one of the parganas that Bhabananda Majumdar received. He shifted his zamindari from Bagowan to Matiari. His son Gopal also lived in Matiari. But Gopal's son Raghav Roy moved his capital from Matiari to Rewi because of its geographical location. Raghav's son Rudra Roy changed the name of Rewi to Krishnanagar. The new name Krishnanagar is named after the goddess Krishna, the worshipped goddess of the Krishna worshippers of the village of Rewi. One of the most famous kings of this dynasty was Raja Krishnachandra Roy (1728- 1782). He started the 'Bardal Mela' in Krishnanagar. Krishna Chandra was a supporter of the British during the Battle of Plassey in 1757. At the end of the war, he received five cannons from Clive as a gift, the English began to travel to Krishnanagar, and they began to give importance to Krishnanagar. In June 1772, Warren Hastings came to Krishnanagar as the head of the Committee of Circuits to assess land revenue. In 1772, he created the post of Collector and established the first (Collector) district in Nadia under an English Collector. During the British era, this city was the district headquarters, and a civil and a criminal court were established to conduct judicial proceedings. The Collector was made a judge of the civil court and a court was established on Govinda Road (Gowari) in Krishnanagar. The responsibility of criminal trials was given to Muslim Qazis and Muftis. European Sahebs began to live near the Collector's Building in Krishnanagar, and the first circuit house for administrative officials was built in Bengal. With the arrival of foreigners and their permanent settlement, Christian missionaries also arrived here. Two Christian neighborhoods were established near Sahebpara. The English initially could not pronounce the names of people and places here correctly. They called the city of Nuddeah or Nuddea Raj Krishnaghur, later it was slightly modified to Krishnagar, but in the Hindoo Patriot newspaper of 1855 it was spelled Krishnanagar. Krishnanagar is a city steeped in tradition, not only in its geographical or political importance, but a

iso in its artistic, literary and cultural aspects. This city is the birthplace of poet Dwijendralal Roy, Kazi Nazrul lived here with his family for many years, playwright Dinabandhu Mitra lived here, Baghajatin grew up in this city, and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's footsteps were in this city, this city is rich in pottery, this city is also famous for Jagaddhatri Puja.

**Indigo Revolt (1859 -1860):**

It is known that indigo cultivation started in India in 1777 by Louis Bonnaud, a French merchant. In 1778, an English employee named Carolblum introduced indigo cultivation in Bengal. In the early 19th century, the demand for indigo increased in England to paint the textiles produced; to meet that demand, they began to cultivate a large amount of indigo in Bengal. And as it was profitable, the retired employees of the company also started cultivating indigo. In 1776 John Reeves and C. W. Sheriff jointly set up a Nilkuti at Sinduria in Chuadanga. And later, at the initiative of James Hill, Nilkuthi was established at Nischintapur in the early 18th century. The districts of Bengal were rich in silt and situated on river banks. There were also river routes for transportation. In the mid-eighteenth century, nothing but indigo could be cultivated here. In Bengal, especially Nadia district became the main center of indigo cultivation. By 1757, 9 of the 143 large indigo factories were established in Nadia district.

Indigo cultivation methods were two types. One was Abadi Cultivation and the other was Raiti Abadi Cultivation. In the first method, a Neelkar had to cultivate indigo on his own responsibility. Which was not profitable for them. So, they used to cultivate in the second way, here they assigned a farmer from Bengal to do the cultivation. In this method, the farmer used to borrow some money from the British owner to cultivate indigo on his own land in exchange for certain conditions, known as Dadan. Farmers were forced to sell the crop in the British hut at the measure and price they had. Farmers could not earn profit in this cultivation. At the time of taking the money, the farmers had to sign the contract made by Saheb. In this contract, it was written that I promise to pay a certain amount of money from you to cultivate indigo on a certain amount of good land till a certain year and deliver it to you, failing which I and my heirs will be responsible for the loss that you will suffer. At the time of the sale of indigo, the farmers had no freedom in terms of weight and bargains, but they were obliged to sell the Indigo at the amount and price fixed by the brokers. Farmers were obliged to give 4/6 or 8 bundles of indigo for one rupee. A bundle was caught with as many as could be caught on a 6-foot chain. Again, while giving the price to the farmer, the payment amount (Dadon), the stamp price of the contract, the price of the seeds was deducted from the total price. Therefore, it can be easily estimated how much the farmers used to make profit by cultivating indigo through this. Sometimes it was also seen that according to the contract he was asked to cultivate seven bighas of land but actually it was eleven bighas.

When the oppression on the indigo farmers reached its limit, the farmers were forced to revolt. As a result, the first peasant revolt in Indian history, the Indigo Rebellion, took place in 1859, led by Krishnanagar, also known as Nadia district. At that time, one of those who took up the pen as a weapon against the injustice done to the farmers was the famous barrister Manmohan Ghosh of Krishnanagar. Dinabandhu Mitra highlighted the condition of the farmers through his play 'Neeldarpan'. At that time, he came to Krishnanagar as an inspector of the Postal Department and witnessed the oppression done to them. The hero of this revolution was Bishwanath Sardar, a brave revolutionary from Chapra police station in Nadia district. The British nicknamed him 'Bishe Dakat'. He, along with his associates Meghai Sardar, Krishnaram Sardar and others, looted the Neelkuthi of the notorious Neelkar saheb Fed of Krishnanagar and took Fedi prisoner and took him to his hideout. After that, he plundered places like Shantipur, Chitrashali etc., and became a source of fear

for Nilkar Sahib and the British administration. The British, with the help of Vishwanath's adopted son and Fedi, captured him and his gang and, in a mock trial, hanged them on the banks of the Ganges. Thus, the spark of rebellion was suppressed at its very beginning. The place where they were hanged is still known as the 'Fansitolar Math'. Then in 1860, the fire of rebellion flared up again in Poragacha, not far from Krishnanagar, under the leadership of Vishnucharan Biswas and Digambara Biswas. Inspired by the ideals of self-sacrifice of Biswanath Sardar and the play 'Neeldarpan', they left the jobs of the indigo farmers and devoted themselves to organizing the indigo farmers under the Bansheria factory.

### **The Three- Rebel:**

It is worth mentioning that among the great personalities who played a pioneering role in the progressive social reform movement of 19th century India, the spread of public education, and the liberation of India's socio-political-economic structure from the shackles of the British, Krishnanagar's Ramtanu Lahiri, Lalmohan Ghosh, Manmohan Ghosh, Tarapada Bandyopadhyay and others are notable. The first three individuals played an important role in the background of the establishment of the Bharat Sabha in Calcutta. Lalmohan Ghosh of Krishnanagar and his grandfather Manmohan Ghosh were among the 27 active members of the organization when the Bharat Sabha was established in 1876. In 1885, a meeting of the Bharat Sabha was also held at Krishnanagar and was attended by a large number of farmers. These two men played an important role in the backdrop of all-India politics and particularly influenced the entire course of action of nationalist central political organizations like the Bharat Sabha. It was due to the influence of Manmohan Ghosh that the principle of separation of powers was emphasized in the conferences of 1883 and 1885. Led by Lalmohan Ghosh, the Bharat Sabha sent a delegation to the Parliament of London in 1879 to present the demands of Indians and to shape public opinion in England. His speech in the House of Commons in London had a special impact on the British government. For six months, he held meetings in different places in England and informed the common people and administrative officials about the various demands of Indians. Gladstone, John Bright, Earl of Beaconsfield, etc. of England were impressed by his eloquence. Even before the formation of the National Congress in 1885, Tarapada Banerjee, a resident of Krishnanagar, had thought of forming an all-India political organization like the Congress. Therefore, on July 4, 1883, in an article in the 'Indian Mirror' newspaper, he presented a significant statement about the need and value of the people of India to organize themselves politically. As a result, a stir was created among the intellectuals of the whole country. In that article, he also talked about establishing a national treasury. Surendranath Banerjee had several correspondences with Tarapada Banerjee with the aim of establishing a national organization. He established a national treasury as proposed by Tarapada Babu, in which twenty thousand taka was collected. Tarapada Banerjee represented Nadia district in the historic session at the birth of the National Congress in 1885. After returning from the session, he took the initiative to organize a branch of the National Congress in Nadia district in 1886. For this purpose, he organized a public meeting in the grounds of Krishnanagar College Library that year, which he himself presided over. In this meeting, the 'Nadia Congress Karmi Samaj' was formed with the young playwright Dwijendralal Roy of Krishnanagar, his elder brother Gyanendranath Roy and others, and Tarapada Babu was nominated as the secretary of this organization. After Tarapada Banerjee formed the

Congress organization in Nadia district in 1886, he developed the structure and rules of the Nadia District Congress organization.

### **Swadeshi Movement:**

To quell the anti-British movement in India, Lord Curzon, the British, decided to partition Bengal, the heart of the movement, in 1905. In protest of Curzon's decision, the Swadeshi and Boycott movement started. Responding to the call of Congress leaders, the Boycott and Swadeshi movement started in Nadia district as well, led by - Manmohan Ghosh, Lalmohan Ghosh, Tarapada Banerjee, etc. Since the first two people were mostly busy in all-India politics, the main leader of this movement in 1905 was Tarapada Babu, accompanied by Becharam Lahiri, Bakreswar Banerjee, Amulya Kumar Gupta, Jyotiprasad Chatterjee, etc. This movement was generally limited to various public meetings and speeches. It is worth mentioning that the heart of this movement was Krishnanagar. A public meeting was organized in Krishnanagar on 26 July 1905 to protest the partition of Bengal. Gradually, the wave of the movement spread not only to Krishnanagar but also to various places in Nadia district like Shikarpur, Shantipur, Nabadwip, Meherpur, Majdia, Kushtia, Kumarkhali and even to remote areas. People of all classes, irrespective of Hindus or Muslims, joined the movement inspired by nationalism. The widespread impact of the Swadeshi movement in Nadia district was observed in 1906. On 22 February 1906, a huge public meeting was organized in Krishnanagar in the presence of 500 Nationalist Congress supporters in protest against the partition of Bengal. The people present, led by Pandit Ajitnath Nyayaratne, took initiation into the Swadeshi mantra in front of the 'Porama' temple in Nabadwip in protest against the partition of Bengal. On 12 March that year, another protest meeting was called at the Krishnanagar Public Library ground, where a resolution against the partition of Bengal was adopted under the chairmanship of Tarapada Banerjee. At the same time, leaders like Jyoti Prasad Chatterjee, Tarani Charan Sen, Yogendranath Roy, Tarapada Banerjee, Amulya Kumar Gupta were elected as representatives from Nadia district for the provincial conference in Calcutta. On February 22, 1906, at a protest meeting against the partition of Bengal in the premises of the 'Mahesh Mardini' temple in Krishnanagar, presided over by the then mayor, the crowd present there raised their voices in protest. During the Swadeshi movement, various organizations from other places were in regular contact with the leaders of Nadia district. To instill Swadeshi ideals among the common people of Nadia district, they would bring Swadeshi singing groups from outside districts and organize Swadeshi singing events at various places. For this reason, on June 9, 1906, at the invitation of the nationalist leaders of Nadia district, a Swadeshi party led by Barisal student leaders Surendranath Chatterjee and Nibaran Chakraborty came to Krishnanagar. Their Swadeshi songs spread patriotism among the Hindu and Muslim people of Krishnanagar. Inspired by them, many people of Krishnanagar joined the Swadeshi party. On February 3, 1907, at Gowari Bazar in Krishnanagar, famous leader Jyotirmoy Sanyal and other leaders including Becharam Lahiri, Sardaprisad Sanyal appealed to the youth to form a Swadeshi party to spread the Swadeshi movement and stop selling rice to the British. Krishnanagar lawyers, associated with Congress politics, followed the program of the Provincial Congress and actively participated in the Congress movement. That is why 29 delegates were elected from Krishnanagar and Nadia district for the Provincial Congress Conference held in Berhampore in 1907. In 1907, when the Swadeshi movement intensified in East Bengal, the British administration in East Bengal became alarmed. The Statesman newspaper published from

Calcutta blamed Mudhalkar and Lala Lajpat Roy for this. In protest against this statement of the Statesman newspaper, the secretaries of the Krishnanagar Public Library and the Bar Library also took up the pen as a weapon of protest. Protesting the allegations made about Mudhalkar and Lala Lajpat Roy and all the disrespectful words used in the newspaper, they called for a boycott of the newspaper in an open letter written to the editor of the newspaper on 23 March 1907. August 7, 1907, was the second anniversary of the boycott. To celebrate that day, a meeting was held at the Krishnanagar Public Library grounds. The Swadeshis present at this meeting took an oath to use Swadeshi products as much as possible, despite their economic hardship. Tarapada Banerjee, the leader of Swadeshi movement in Nadia district, died in 1907, resulting in mourning in the entire district. Through various meetings, Tarapadababu's patriotism and nationalism was taken to spread the ideals of nationalism and continue the movement. On 18 September, 1907 'Raksha Bandhan Festival' and 'Arandhaan' were celebrated in Krishnanagar. Everyone went around their area in processions in the morning and evening, singing patriotic songs. Regardless of Hindus and Muslims, men and women, everyone went around the city in groups and took an oath to boycott foreign goods. The nationalist leaders were conscious and enthusiastic about the spread of education in the district. And so, they took care of the smooth running of the only college in Nadia district located in Krishnanagar. In 1908, on 7 August, the fourth Boycott Day was celebrated in Krishnanagar under the leadership of Nanigopal Banerjee. The leaders of Krishnanagar understood the importance of newspapers, so they wrote and published newspapers. Through their writings, they raised their voices against injustice and also instilled a sense of nationalism among the people of the district and the country. When the partition of Bengal was annulled by George V on 12 December 1911, the six-year-long Swadeshi movement in Bengal was considered successful, and a flood of happiness swept through the entire Bengal, including Nadia district. Along with Bengal, the movement in Nadia district also stagnated, and Nadia district remained quiet until the next spark of rebellion touched it.

### **Conclusion:**

Krishnanagar's contribution to India's freedom struggle is a testament to the strength of grassroots nationalism. The town nurtured reformers, revolutionaries, educators, and cultural icons who collectively resisted colonial oppression through both violent and non-violent means. Though often overshadowed by larger urban centers like Kolkata, the spirit of patriotism in Krishnanagar played an equally vital role in mobilizing the masses and challenging British authority. From fostering intellectual debates in classrooms to harboring underground revolutionaries in its lanes, Krishnanagar stands as a symbol of Bengal's undying quest for freedom. Its legacy lives on not only in history books but in the spirit of its institutions, monuments, and the undeterred pride of its people.

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