

The Congress led Student Movement in West Bengal: (1947-77)

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Abstract: During the post independent period, the then Congress Government advised the students not to involve in party politics in their student life. The then central Government proposed to form a non-political student organization in different colleges and universities, so that the students could raise their education related problems. The Government proposed to form National Union of Students (NUS) which, according to them would act as a platform of all students of different views. NUS generated a crucial debate among different students' unions. During fifties and early sixties of the last century NUS issue intensified a great controversies among the students. Left students organizations did not wholeheartedly accept this proposal but the Congress minded students were bound to accept it. However, during fifties Communist led Students' organization BPSF occupied the crucial position in the student movement of the state. The rapid growth of the BPSF among the students of West Bengal caused the headache of the Congress leadership. Ultimately a separate student association for the Congress students was formed in 1954, named, Chhatra Parisad (C.P). this paper seeks to explore the relationship between the Congress and the C.P during 1960-72. these twelve years were full of major events in West Bengal politics. During this time the students' movement of the state had been passing through a critical juncture. This paper intends to narrate the role of the C.P in West Bengal politics during the period under review.

Keywords: AISF, AISC, Chhatra Congress, Chhatra Parisad, USO, BPSF, NUS, Congress, PDA, Emergency

The All India Student Federation (AISF) was formed in 1936 mainly under the initiative of Congress minded students but later it became a communist dominated organization. In 1941 Patna conference of the AISF when it adopted the line of Peoples' War, then the non communist members of the AISF left the organization and formed their parallel AISF. Another split took place within this organization in 1944, when the conflict cropped up between the Socialist and Congress students on organizational issues. Ultimately, the Congress minded students came out and formed their own All India student organization, All India Student Congress (AISC). In the same year Chhatra Congress was established in the then undivided Bengal as a Bengal wing of AISC. However, for whatever reason this organization did not last long.

Inspired by the role of the Indian National Congress in the anti-imperialist struggle, a good number of students coming from anti-communist families began to take part in student-politics since the early fifties. They also contested against BPSF in different institutions of West Bengal with different names. For example, in the University of Calcutta, Congress-minded students previously associated themselves with United Students' Organization (USO). USO was an anti-BPSF platform consisting of all anti-BPSF forces like PSU, Socialists, Congress-minded students and others. Even after the formation of *Chhatra Parishad* (CP), USO maintained its existence. However, Congress did not have an exclusive students' organization of its own till 1954. So, anti-communist, Congress-minded students used to fight against Communist-led BPSF in different colleges and universities in West Bengal with other allied forces. After independence, Prime-Minister Nehru said, in the changed circumstances, students should not involve themselves in active politics; rather, they should concentrate on their studies. Only if they perform their duties properly can they contribute with their talent to the making of a new India. With this in regard, the then Ministry of Education proposed to form the National Union of Students (NUS), which would act as a common, non-political, national platform for students. The ministry's standpoint was that students should primarily concentrate on studies; they should have nothing to do with active politics. So, irrespective of political party affiliation, there should be formed an apolitical students' organization under the guidance of the authorities of colleges and universities, which would serve the 'common' interests of the students. Further, students would not elect NUS representatives; college and university authorities, under the approval of the government, would nominate them. During the 1950s, this issue intensified into a crucial debate within the student-communities, particularly in West Bengal. A section of BPSF was opposed to it. However, as it was the order of the then Union Ministry of Education, the Congress-minded students had to accept it.

During this time, particularly in West Bengal, BPSF had a strong foothold, in almost ninety percent of the institutions; the students' unions were dominated by the BPSF. In this situation a few of the Congress leaders, like, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy (B.C Roy) and Atulya Ghose realized the need to form a students' organization under the guidance of the Congress to check the influence and rapid expansion of the BPSF. In order to form a students' organization, a convention was convened on August 27 and 28, 1954 at Bharat Sabha Hall in Calcutta under the initiative of Congress activists. Some of the State leaders of the then Congress, like,

B.C Roy, Atulya Ghose, and the like, a good number of students and Congress activists were invited in this convention. The decision of the formation of the *Chhatra Parishad* was formalised in the convention and on the second day, an executive committee of the newly formed organization was constituted. All executive members, including president and secretary of the CP were nominated by the West Bengal State Congress leadership. Bidhubhusan Ghose was nominated as the president of the CP and the name of Subrata Chowdhury was proposed as the general secretary of the organization. However, within a few days Subrata Chowdhury stepped down and Munnya Badaliya shouldered the responsibility of the general secretary. Bidhubhusan was not a student at that time; he was one of the members of the Syndicate of the University of Calcutta. The other executive committee members of the CP did not want to have a president who did not belong to the student-community. Naturally, problems began to crop-up within the organization. The State leadership of the Congress might have had a perception that if the president of the CP would be a nominated someone outside the student-community, then he could restrain the militant activities of the students better. However, students were not satisfied with him. The problems within the organization were increasing day by day. During this time, in 1956, Dr B.C Roy and Atulya Ghose directed the CP activists to go to the masses and popularised the Bengal-Bihar merger issue. In the meantime, a bi-election of Calcutta North-West Parliamentary Constituency took place because of the sudden demise of Meghnath Saha, the then M.P. of that constituency. Ashok Sen contested as Congress candidate against Mohit Moitra, who contested as independent candidate, supported by all left parties. CP workers played a vital role in the election campaign in favour of Ashok Sen. However; Ashok Sen was defeated by Mohit Moitra in that election. Just after the declaration of the election results, Dr Roy withdrew the Bengal-Bihar merger issue. Before the election, CP played an important role in organising mass-campaign in favour of Bengal-Bihar merger and also in favour of Ashok Sen. According to Shyamal Bhattacharya, former president of this organization, the CP practically became extinct after 1956 .1

The attempts to revive C.P. began since the beginning of 1957. The main initiative was taken by Atulya Ghose. In the late 1957, he entrusted upon Shyamal Bhattacharya and Ramen Mukherjee the responsibilities to rejuvenate the C.P. According to Shyamal Bhattacharya, in 1958 a sudden incident took place which helped the C.P. regain its prestige in the students' movement. During this time, there occurred resentment amongst students because of the implementation of the new fee-structure in the colleges and universities. From the beginning BPSF and other students' organizations were opposed to this revised fee-structure and organised campaigns against it. C.P. also decided to join this movement. Within a few days this movement gathered tremendous momentum. A large number of student-activists of different organizations were arrested. Along with others, a good number of C.P. activists were also imprisoned. Ultimately mainly under the initiative of Dr B.C. Roy, the revised fee-structure had to be withdrawn. According to Shyamal Bhattacharya, C.P. played a vital role in this movement, especially in the negotiation with the then State Government. According to him it enhanced the prestige and the position of the C.P. among the general students (Bhattacharya, 2004, 46). Given this background, the Third State Conference of the C.P. was held in Calcutta in 1959. This conference was significant for a number of reasons -- it was the first conference after the reconstitution of the C.P. Secondly, in this conference the flag of the C.P. was approved and thirdly, the decision to formulate the constitution of the C.P. was taken in this very conference, where Shyamal Bhattacharya was elected as the president and Ramen Mukherjee was elected as the general secretary of the C.P.

However, Shyamal Bhattacharya says that the period 1958-62 was very eventful in the history of the C.P., because during this time it began to gain some organisational strength in different parts of the state. He points out some reasons behind it: 1) a large chunk of students became frustrated with the stereotypical activities of the BPSF and other students' organizations, particularly, their blind and sterile Congress opposition. On the other hand, according to Bhattacharya, the general students had seen some prospects in the activities of the C.P. Bhattacharya says that, C.P. provided an alternative direction to the students' movement. 2) Over ten years after independence, the period 1959-62 witnessed the rise of a new middle class in the villages of West Bengal. The students came from those rural middle class families with an ambition to have a good academic career became gradually demoralised with the negative activities of the BPSF, like frequent strikes. According to Bhattacharya this group of students gradually became the supporters of C.P. 3) in the initial stage, many of the Congress leaders of different districts had some reservation about the C.P. However, within a few years they came out of those reservations and began to promote C.P. so that they could get a strong foothold in different district colleges and universities. According to Shyamal Bhattacharya, it gave a positive impetus to the C.P. rank and file.2

Although C.P. never acknowledged the fact that, during the period under review, compared to BPSF, it had very limited influence on the students, it was well aware about the enormous influence that BPSF exercised therein. So, there was always a note of caution as it was understood that there was no scope to ignore BPSF; blind opposition to BPSF might cause certain problems. So, the C.P. rightly took a strategy of unity and struggle with the BPSF. With regard to international or student-related issues they decided to join with the BPSF and other students' organizations. One such joint programme was the students' strike, on February 15, 1961, against

the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Independent Democratic Republic of the Congo. Along with other students' organizations C.P also participated in the demonstrations against the imperialist attack in Congo. A joint statement was issued by all students' organizations on it. Ramen Mukherjee on behalf of C.P. signed on it.

In 1961, C.P raised a demand to the then State Government for making a good stadium in Calcutta. For this purpose, the C.P activists organized a street-signature campaign and they got tremendous popular support.

The year 1962 was very significant in the history of West Bengal as well as India, because in this year the Sino- Indian border conflict culminated into a war between the two countries. It brought about a drastic change in the student-movement of West Bengal. C.P for the first time, got the opportunity to marginalise the BPSF in the student-movement by way of slandering them as "Chinese agent". After the declaration of Sino-Indian war, the CPI and BPSF became the main targets of the government. A large chunk of communist leaders were arrested during this tie under DIR. On the question of border dispute, the then CPI was ideologically sharply divided. A group of CPI leaders and workers did not accept even the fact that China had attacked India. However, Soviet Union extended its support to India on this issue. The National Council of the then CPI adopted a resolution on 'Armed Conflict between India and China on Border dispute'. In that resolution, the CPI appealed to all sections of the Indian people to unite in defence of the motherland against Chinese aggression. However, the pro-Chinese group within the party did not accept it. As a result the party was vertically divided into two groups; pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese. The BPSF was also divided on this issue. A section of the BPSF led by Nanda Gopal Bhattacharya, accepted the resolution of the National Council (which condemned Chinese aggression) and appealed to all sections of students to unite in defence of the motherland. They also condemned the aggressive ultra-nationalist campaign against the communists. Another section of the then BPSF, under the leadership of Dinesh Majumdar, opposed the resolution of the National Council and condemned the aggressive nationalism patronised by the anti-communist blocs. As with the CPI, the Indo-China border dispute marked a sharp division in the organisation. Ultimately, BPSF informally split into two rival groups – BPSF (Pro-Soviet) and BPSF (Pro-Chinese). Inner fighting within the BPSF definitely helped the C.P. to occupy an important position in the student-movement of the state. It was a time, when the communists were on the back foot. In this situation, the existence of the BPSF was under great strain. Nanda Gopal Bhattacharya, the then BPSF General Secretary, had already been arrested. Taking full advantage of the situation, along with C.P., other left students' organisations like PSU. Student Bloc joined in the tedious anti- BPSF and anti - communist chorus.³ During this period almost in every college and university of Calcutta and most of the districts, the students' unions were run by the BPSF. During the Indo-China border conflict, the college and university authorities had dismissed all those BPSF led students' unions in different colleges and universities. During this time, communists were very rudely condemned by a large section of the society; starting from military personnel to a section of intellectuals, people began to call them traitors.

On December 3, 1962 mainly through the initiative of the Chhatra Parisad, a meeting was organised in the College Street campus of the University of Calcutta, where a good number of students assembled to take oath in defence of their motherland. In spite of its organizational crisis, BPSF also participated in this programme. Shyamal Bhattacharya, the then President of the Chhatra Parishad, presided over the meeting. Representatives of all students' organisations got the opportunity to express their views, except the BPSF. In almost all the speeches there was a strong anti-communist tone. Some speakers did not even hesitate in accusing communists as traitors.⁴

After this meeting, a students' rally was organised in protest against the unabashed attack of China on India. The C.P. students raised some nationalist slogans in the rally, like, "*Bande Mataram*", "*China Fouj Bharat Chharo*". ("Chinese Forces leave India").

On the occasion of the Sino-Indian border conflict, the authorities of the colleges and universities dismissed all the BPSF-led students' unions. It paved the way for the C.P. to capture those unions. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi (former President of the C.P.), says that, by this time, C.P. had already gained much popularity because of its positive role in the students' movement. According to Das Munshi, during the early sixties of the last century, the C.P. activists raised four popular demands which were: **1)** the formation of a stadium in Calcutta, **2)** students' concession in trams and buses, **3)** students' concession in the monthly of local trains, and **4)** to introduce Honours courses and science in the district colleges. However, except stadium, all other demands had already been placed to the then State Government by the BPSF prior to the C.P.⁵

After the 1962 Indo-China border conflict, the ideological battle within the BPSF reached its peak. As a result, the existence of the BPSF was temporarily under great strain. Taking advantage of the situation, C.P. tried to exhibit its strength. One such event occurred on July 26, 1963, when the hooligans, under the instruction of the C.P. attacked the procession, organized by the BPSF in protest against the Voice of America (VOA) pact. The Voice of America Agreement between India and U.S.A, as Michael Brecher says, signalled an (abortive) shift in India's policy of non-alignment (Brecher 1974:637). The then opposition parties, mainly the CPI,

opposed it from the beginning, because according to them it was out of tune with the principle of non-alignment. The BPSF also raised its voice against the VOA Pact. On July 26, 1963 mainly under the initiative of BPSF, Calcutta district, a protest meeting was organised in Subodh Mallick Square. The BPSF supporters were on the way to Subodh Mallick square, where they intended to take out a procession; suddenly some anti-social hooligans under the leadership of Chhatra Parisad attacked them. Some of the activists of the BPSF were severely injured.⁶

One of the tragic events of the sixties of the last century was the bloody Hindu-Muslim riot of 1964. The riot began in the then East-Pakistan in the wake of an alleged theft of what was believed to be the prophet's hair from Hazratbal Shrine in Jammu and Kashmir in India. A huge number of Hindus in the then East-Pakistan were the victims of this riot. Very soon the riot spread to different areas of West Bengal. The students, cutting across their political lines came together to stop the riot and to save people from it. The students of Dinabandhu Andrews College came down the street and organised a peace-procession where the police started firing. Bhudeb Sen, a student of Andrews College was shot dead. All students' associations condemned it. The then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, Dr Bidhubhusan Malik constituted a coordination committee consisting of students of different associations with a mission to aid the riot-affected people. The following committee was constituted by Dr Malik on January 11, 1964: Dr Bidhubhusan Malik (President), Nanda Gopal Bhattacharya (BPSF), Pranab Mukherjee (PSU), Shyamal Bhattacharya (C.P.), Asit Bhattacharya, Mrinal Biswas.⁷

After the formal split in the BPSF it was assumed by some leaders of the C.P. that C.P. would capture the position of the BPSF in West Bengal. However, it was not to be, at least for the time being. After the split in the BPSF, the two rival groups BPSF (CPI-led) and BPSF (CPI-M led) became the main competitors. In most of the colleges and universities, the students' unions were dominated either by the CPI-led BPSF or CPI (M)-led BPSF. CP could never become a significant force till 1970.

The most important event of the 1960s, in which students played an important role, was the Food Movement of 1966 against ration and kerosene shortages and rising grain prices. The C.P. did not take part in this movement; rather they began to defend the government on this issue. As a result, the C.P. had to face the later consequences. Since early 1965, the opposition, mainly both communist parties and other left parties, warned the Government to immediately look after the situation and control food grain and kerosene prices. But the Government seemed reluctant. Without taking any positive measures to solve the problem, the then Chief Minister P.C. Sen advised the people of West Bengal to change their food habits and overcome the situation thereby. Such a ridiculous statement produced resentment among the people. Bhowani Sen, then CPI State Secretary, protested against the rapid increase in the price of rice. He demanded an immediate withdrawal of the anti-people policy.⁸ CPI (M) leader EMS Namboodiripad also gave a call to people to fight against the wrongful food policy of the state government.⁹ Students played a vital role in this movement. The first demonstration was organised by school students of Basirhat Sub-Division, under the leadership of the Basirhat Sangram Samiti (BSS) and the Basirhat Chhatra Sangram Committee (BCSC). The Food Movement began on February 16, 1966 at Basirhat, when six protesting people were injured in police firing. The next day, another demonstration was organised in Swarup Nagar, near the BDO office. School students took part. The police attacked the protesters and opened fire. Nurul Islam, a boy of class six studying in Tetulia Multipurpose School and who participated in the protest, was shot dead. Then all the left students' organizations jointly formed 'All Bengal Student Struggle Committee' to carry on this movement. Very soon, the movement spread all over West Bengal, it definitely increased the strength and prestige of all left-students' organizations. At the same time, it was a setback for the Congress and C.P. During this time, C.P. failed to play an independent and positive role.

The Food Movement of 1966 shook the foundation of Congress rule in West Bengal. At the same time, it was the period of left radicalism. Immediately after the Food Movement, the student-movement in Presidency College began to emerge, the detail account of which has already been discussed in the first chapter. C.P. never had a significant presence in the Presidency College during the turbulent days of 1966 when the student-movement of Presidency College reached its peak and it forced the college authority to close the college for an indefinite period. The movement of Presidency College spread to University of Calcutta in just a few days. At that time, C.P. in the name of *Shiksha Bachao Committee* (Save Education Committee) raised the demand to open the University and restore its academic environment as early as possible but its activists failed to carry out this movement in the long run.¹⁰

However, a new leadership of C.P. came out from this movement. Priyo Ranjan Das Munshi, Subrata Mukherjee and a number of new faces came forward to the leadership of the C.P.

The fourth general elections took place in February 1967, in which, in nine states including West Bengal, the ruling Congress failed to gain majority. In West Bengal, the first non-congress United Front Government (UF) was established. Immediately after the UF Government came to power, it announced that the state administration would not implement any black law to restrict the democratic movement of different political

parties and individuals. It definitely encouraged the political parties and interest groups like trade unions, students' organizations to launch radical demonstrations. The left students' movement gathered tremendous momentum after the first UF Government came to power. Both the BPSF (CPI and CPI-M led) became very much enthusiastic during this period. At the same time C.P. had to change their way of functioning. Till 1967, Congress was in power of the state and C.P. as a students' organ of the party used to support and justify the policies of the state government. On the other hand, BPSF (both CPI and CPI-M led) used to play a militant role against the Congress Government. However, the political scenario of West Bengal had been changed after the UF Government captured state power. The left student organizations had to change their political strategies after United Front ministry came to power. The left-student organizations, particularly, CPI-led BPSF and CPI-(M) led BPSF changed their militant activities and began to justify the policies of the Government. On the other side, it was a question of survival for the C.P. During this time, C.P.'s main concern was to maintain their existence; therefore, it had to change its techniques and began to come down to the streets in protest against the policies of the United Front Government. On October 12, 1967, C.P. observed protest day throughout the West Bengal against the atrocities on C.P. It organized protest programmes in different college gates. The Chhatra Parishad organised an exhibition in the College Street Campus of the University of Calcutta on January 17, 1968. The title of the exhibition was 'Andhakarer Din Guli' (The days of darkness). The theme of the exhibition was the menace of U.F rule shown through episodes. During this time a slogan was raised by some C.P activists, 'Desh Chhey Boudi Baro'. It was a symbolic title through which they tried to ridicule Ajay Mukherjee. Actually, after Ajoy Mukherjee left Congress and built-up Bangla Congress, he initially decided to contest election independently without entering its any pact with the Communists, because he himself was very much anti-communist. However, within a very short time he changed his decision and joined as partner in the Progressive United Left Front (PULF), led by CPI and contested the election. After he won the election, again, he had some reservations to form a government with the CPI(M) but later he changed his stand. It was then propagated by a section of anti-communists that Ajoy babu changed his stand after the intervention of one of his sister in laws (Boudi) whom he respected like his mother. This was nothing but a rumor, spread within a couple of days. However, this story was baseless and concocted through which they bantered Ajoy Babu.

More or less, by this time there appeared a shift in the Congress-backed students' union, the Chhatra Parishad, as its president Shyamal Bhattacharya left because of the fractional politics within the C.P. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi became elected as the new president of the C.P. after its 6th state conference, held in May, 1968 at Mahajati Sadan. When Priya Ranjan Das Munshi took charge as the president of the organization, the C.P. had been passing through a transitional phase. No doubt, organisationally C.P. became rejuvenated after Priya Ranjan shouldered the responsibility as its president and C.P. played a vital role in the revival of Congress in West Bengal in the late sixties and early seventies.

1967-70 happened to be a phase full of major events in the politics of West Bengal and it of course influenced the then student-movements of the state. The conflict and split within the Congress, the emergence of Bangla Congress, the rise and fall of the first United Front Government, the inner party ideological conflict within the CPI(M), people's upsurge in Naxalbari, the formation of CPI(M-L), rise of left-adventurism, the formation of the Second United Front Government, conflict within the front partners and ultimately the collapse of the Second United Front Government all these events definitely influenced the student-movements of West Bengal during the late sixties and early seventies of the last century.

During this time, Congress was in the opposition in the West Bengal legislature. Taking advantage of the situation, in order to increase its mass base in the state, the C.P. began to organize a series of demonstrations against the United Front Government, like, "March to Writers' Building", "Punish the Marxist leaders in a pseudo-court of justice", etc. In this way the C.P. tried to gain popularity among the students. **11** As far as the documents of the C.P. are concerned, they had to face attacks both physically and politically from the communists, particularly, in the two United Front regimes. According to them, a good number of their activists were murdered during this time. One such victim was Nitya Gopal Datta, a C.P. leader of Birati College, who was assassinated on April 22, 1969. On the next day, after this incident, the C.P. supporters organised a procession to Writers' Building with the dead body of their dear comrade Nitya Gopal.

One of the mentionable events of 1970 was Sainbari. There are two opposite versions on the Sainbari incident. According to Congress, it was a barbaric mass killing organised by the CPI(M). On the other hand, according to CPI (M) Sainbari was a spontaneous peoples' upsurge against feudal exploitation.

1970-72 witnessed a number of bloody conflicts in West Bengal. During this time, practically utter anarchy prevailed in the state. Under this backdrop, the Seventh State Congress of the C.P. was held at Kumar Singh hall at Calcutta on September 25-27, 1970 where Subrata Mukherjee was elected as the President of the Chhatra Parishad. Under the leadership of Subrata Mukherjee the C.P. began to undertake a number of militant movements against the then United Front Government. On September 28, 1970 the C.P. observed students'

strike throughout the state in protest against the inability of the United Front Government to provide proper security to the students. However, the strike was hardly successful.

The State Convention of the C.P. was held on June 8-9, 1971 at Digha. On the basis of the decision taken in the convention, the C.P. began to organize a movement for students' concession in public transport. It gathered a huge number of students' support within a few days.

In the Bangladesh liberation struggle the C.P played a vital role in providing assistances to the people of the then East-Pakistan. It was Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India provided all kinds of supports to the people of East-Pakistan in their liberation struggle. The left parties, mainly CPI also played an important role in this liberation movement. In the Bangladesh war of independence C.P played a significant role. The C.P had a link with the students' organization of Bangladesh, The Students' League. During this time, a large number of Bengalese in erstwhile East-Pakistan were forced to leave their motherland. At that time some refugee camps were built-up in West Bengal and Tripura. In west Bengal the C.P activists were asked by the Congress leaders to look after those people, took shelter in those camps. The people of East-Pakistan won the war, Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign, independent state in the world Map. It was former Soviet Union and the Government of India first recognised Bangladesh as sovereign, independent Republic. The C.P celebrated the victory of Bangladesh and in this occasion they felicitated Bagha Siddiqui, the student leader of Bangladesh.

On February 16, 1972 C.P placed education related eight-point charter of demands to the Government of West Bengal, where they urged for some reforms in the contemporary education system. Some of their demands were as follows: **a).** To elect student's representatives in various governing bodies of the institutions, including, Senate and Syndicate. **b).** To introduce Vocational and Technical education, **c).** To introduce compulsory secondary education by curtailing the unrestricted access to higher education. **d).** To introduce syllabi comprising compulsory study of national history, And the like.¹²

1971-77 saw West Bengal politics passing through a critical phase. After the 1971 general elections, Siddhartha Shankar Ray became the central minister of education and in addition to it, Ray shouldered additional charge of West Bengal. It gave the C.P. a golden opportunity to capture an important position in the student-politics of West Bengal. A number of young Congress leaders like, Kumad Bhattacharya, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, and others came to the surface. Directly under the patronage of Siddhartha Sankar Ray, the young brigade of the Congress, (popularly known as 'Naba Congresses') started vandalism. In the name of restoration of peace the C.P. activists started atrocities on the opposition. During 1972-77 a huge number of activists of the left parties were forced to leave their localities.

Siddhartha Sankar Ray was the key person who made the blueprint to crack down the Naxalite movement in the state. During this time, the suppression of the opposition by the state machinery reached the optimum level. In the name of controlling Naxalite activities, a huge number of students and youth were killed by the police. In March 1972 the Assembly election of West Bengal took place on the backdrop of acute violence. Prior to this election, CPI decided to go with the Congress by making Progressive Democratic Alliance (PDA) with the Congress. On the other hand, other left parties under the leadership of CPI (M) formed another front against the PDA. It was, out and out, a rigged election through which Congress(R) came to power. The hooligans of Congress(R) were fully prepared to vandalize the election and they did it successfully. On March 18, 1972 the opposing left parties decided to boycott the assembly together. A joint statement went out which was signed by the representatives of all the left parties. The C.P. played a vital role in the 1972 election. In this election, student-leaders, like, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, were elected to the Lok Sabha and Subrata Mukherjee was elected to the State Legislature. Subrata became the Home Minister in Ray's Cabinet. After the formation of Congress Government in the State in 1972, the C.P. celebrated their victory with pomp. During this time C.P took some popular programmes which were not directly connected with the education. Like, the chair occupancy programme in protest against Government servants coming late to office.

Another important programme, *Garibi Hatao* (eradication of poverty) was taken by the then Indira Gandhi Government. The youth and the students' wings of the Congress played a vital role to champion this programme. In West Bengal, C.P observed "*Garibi Hatao Dibas*" (the day of eradication of poverty) on December 19, 1972. The seventies of the last century, the Congress was dominated by the youth Congress leader Sanjay Gandhi. He became the icon of the Congress minded students. In the late sixties of the last century Indira Gandhi took some socialist stands like Bank Nationalisation, Coal nationalisation, etc. which were even appreciated by the left parties also. As part of it, during this time the C.P also took some socialist programmes, like, along with the left student organizations the C.P also condemned the attack of the U.S.A on Vietnam. The C.P also observed Vietnam Day along with the left student organizations.

It is fact that in west Bengal the C.P paved the way for the congress to revive its powers and position. However, the period 1972-77 witnessed a number of bloody conflicts amongst different political parties. The fundamental rights of the people were violated by the state during this time. In 1977, the Left Front government came to power. By this time the C.P had already been divided.

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