

## The Struggle of East Bengal Camp Refugees, Before and After the Formation of United Central Refugee Council : Midnapur District , A Case Study

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### Abstract

*This article tries to focus on the struggle of the camp refugees in the Midnapur district before and after the establishment of United Central Refugee Council. The main thrust of this article is in the changing role of the refugee struggle and the growth and establishment of refugee camps in the latter half of the 1950s. After 1950, gradually the UCRC began to play a dominant role. The focus of the refugees changed. In the later period, the demands of the refugees were not local in nature. Gradually the refugees struggled against the government policy of dispersal in particular and Dandakaranya scheme in general.*

**Keywords:** East Bengal Refugees, Midnapur, Refugee Samiti, UCRC, Local Demands, Dandakaranya Scheme.

### Introduction

In the Midnapur district, there were some refugee activities who had come from East Pakistan in the pre-1950s days. At that juncture in time, the refugees fought without any political organization. In the year 1950, the United Central Refugee Council was established. It changed the nature of refugee struggles in West Bengal. Gradually branches of UCRC spread to the district level. In the refugee camps unit of UCRC was also established. From 1955-57, some new camps were established in Midnapur. In this article the present author would like to show how in the post 1955 days, East Bengal Refugees fought in Midnapur district and how the nature of their struggle changed under UCRC.

### Existing Historiography

In case of West Bengal, there is a limited amount of work on the camp refugees. The pioneering work was Marginal Men by Prafulla Chakrabarti.<sup>i</sup> He allotted two chapters on camp refugees in his book. Any future scholar can start from that point. But this book lacks full-fledged description of refugee movements of 1957-1958 and 1961.

Joya Chatterji in her books and articles<sup>ii</sup> dealt with the question of refugees. She did not cover the camp refugees. In only the articles, issues of camp refugees came up. In the second article, she made a comparison between conditions of government sponsored camps of Jeerat and refugees own settlement at Azadgarh.

In early 1990s, Nilanjana Chatterjee dealt with the question of rehabilitation of refugees in her doctoral thesis.<sup>iii</sup> Her work contained some technical discussion regarding migration from East Pakistan. She discussed the life of camp refugees but mainly focused on self-made, self-sufficient refugees. Chatterjee in another article<sup>iv</sup> described the process of influx, how the government categorized the refugees into old and new, how caste and time played an important role. In this article, there is no reference to refugee agitation. Gyanesh Kudaiysa's article<sup>v</sup> focused on the idea of lower caste refugees, who migrated to West Bengal after 1950s. These people took shelter at government camps. The government followed a policy of dispersal, toward these refugees. Dandakaranya scheme and Marichjhapi massacres had been discussed in this article. The author ended with the refugees' deep sense of longing for their motherland. Abhijit Dasgupta in his article<sup>vi</sup> showed the connection between caste factor and refugee agitation. He discussed the agitation at Cooper's camp. Two articles by Calcutta

Research Group, were penned by Anushua Basu Roychoudhury Roychowdhury and Ishita De <sup>vii</sup>. Basu Roychowdhury in her article "Life After Partition" <sup>viii</sup> devoted a section on lives and times in the refugee camps. She wrote about the life and condition of Coopers' camp. Her arguments are based on the interviews with the residents. She wrote about United Central Refugee Council and Praja Socialist Party. She traced the history of Marichjhapi but no detailed discussion of the refugee movement is found in her writing. Ishita De wrote an article <sup>ix</sup> which was mostly related to Coopers' camp. She depended on interviews with camp refugees for her article. In the third section of her article, she dealt with transit camp to ex-camp site. She referred to the refugee movement but did not touch the main issues of refugee movements. Dwaipayana Sen's thesis on Jogendranath Mandal <sup>x</sup> is important from the aspect of camp refugee's movement.

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in his book <sup>xi</sup> dealt with problems of East Bengal refugees. In the chapter 'Arrival of Freedom', he depicted refugees as 'bitter taste of freedom'. He gave a short description of refugee migration, nature of migration, establishment of colonies and camps. He emphasized the idea of rehabilitation policy as well as policy of repatriation. 1952 was a landmark year. The general election was held in that year. In the electoral process, refugees acted as a social group which according to Bandyopadhyay stood at the margin but could not represent any party as a candidate. He mentioned the activities of various politicians. He spoke about UCRC, firing at Dhubulia camp. There were some references of struggle of camp refugees.

There are some vernacular literature on camp refugees. Manaranjan Byapari <sup>xii</sup> wrote on Namasudra aspect of camp refugees' struggle. Hironmoy Bandyopadhyay being a government official began his Udbastu <sup>xiii</sup> with an incident which showed a mental separation between himself and the Muslim orderlies. He gave official view of the rehabilitation policies of the early days. He also spoke about categorization of refugees and establishment of camps, transshipment of refugees to camps. One can get an idea of government sponsored colonies. Ultimately the idea of Dandakaranya is found in this book.

Tussar Singha's book <sup>xiv</sup> and Jagadish Mandal's books <sup>xv</sup> throw light on the camp refugee's struggle. From the abovementioned survey it is clear that no clear and vast work had been done on the camp refugees in pre and post 1950 period. Moreover the relation between camp refugees and scheduled castes and any such struggle was only depicted by Abhijit Dasgupta. Thus the current article try to show the spontaneity of refugee struggle in the pre-1949 years and the gradual entry of political parties and unions in refugee politics in post 1950 years. Salboni, Salua, Kashipur, represented the first group and Cooper's camp represented the second group. Shibaji Pratim Basu <sup>xvi</sup> also focused on the role of UCRC in camps and colonies of West Bengal.

## Methodology

For this article, the author has sifted through unpublished archival sources, intelligence branch papers from 1948-1961 as well as published secondary sources. The present author has also used newspapers for writing this article.

The present articles has been divided in two broad sections-a) struggles of the camp refugees in 1948-49 and b) struggle of camp refugees in Midnapur after 1950. In the first phase the demands were localized.

### *Struggles of camp refugees of Mindapur in 1948-49:*

In the present article, the researcher would like to focus on how the struggle of the camp refugees and Salboni camp Midnapur, developed during 1948-49. Salboni camp of Midnapur, became a source of apprehension for the authorities. <sup>xvii</sup> Regarding the 'disturbance' at this camp, Bengal Refugee Minority Samiti's president gave a statement. According to him, on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1949, 6 refugees including 2 women started a hunger strike as a protest against mismanagement, injustice, oppression, corruption, in the camp. Shri Chattayapadhyay the president informed the news to CM B C Roy, relief commissioner B K Guha, and PM Jawaharlal Nehru. Consequently Sarat Chandra Ghosh-Dastidar, a member of Bengal

Refugee Minority Samiti, was sent to Salboni camp. His negotiations and DM's cooperation, helped to call off the hunger strike(24 March 1949) but under certain conditions. But unfortunately the main terms of the conditions were not fulfilled. So again, the agitation commenced.<sup>xviii</sup> Local authority in apprehension of 'breach of peace' declared section 144.

After the withdrawal of hunger strike, situation took a new turn at Salboni camp. Under the guidance of Ramini Mohan Sharma and others, Salboni Refugee Kalyan Samiti had already come into being. It now became more active. It tried to recruit all the local refugees. The prominent workers of the samiti, propagated that government would have fulfilled their demands had it not been for the local authorities who stood in their way. These leaders created a kind of dissatisfaction in the minds of the inmates toward the camp authorities.<sup>xix</sup>

On 11<sup>th</sup> May 1949 a prominent leader of the said samiti organized an open meeting. There it was decided to raise fund for the samiti, with a view to face a worst situation in the long run and also to incur expenses for keeping contact with their Calcutta link. Thus it was decided to collect 2 anna from each member of the samiti, and Mushtibhikya from each refugee from outside the camp. The samiti also started a volunteer organization called Shanti Bahini. It had about 40 members. They were trained to parade daily in the early morning in front of the camp no 3. The volunteers had no uniform. They carried no lathi during the time of parade. One Jogyeshwar Deb of Noakhali of the camp, acted as the instructor. The only object of starting this volunteer organization was to procure some wholetimers for the samiti. They would remain prepared for an occasion of an emergent situation.<sup>xx</sup>

It appeared that some of the members of the Kalyan Samiti threatened to assault the refugees, who had planned to go against the samiti, and give information about the activities of the samities to the office of the camp.

In the meantime, majority of the inmates of the camp started working according to contract system, based on circular issued by the authority. But the members of the Kalyan Samiti did not accept the new system of the work. They tried to dissuade others from doing work under the system. Just after the dusk, some outsider-agitators also visited the camp and held secret meetings and discussions with the samiti members. The following were the main agitators of the salboni refugee kalyan Samiti. They were behind the entire scenario: Camp no.1- Ranimohan Sensharma of Noakhali(president, Kalyan samiti), Nirmal Sensharma, Mahendra Roy of Barishal, Narayan Sarkar of Barishal, Nikhunja Chakraborty of Barishal, Madhusudhan Sarkhel of Barishal, Dinesh Chandra Dey of Tripura, Jogweshwar De of Noakhali, Manaranjan Pal of Dhaka, Kanailal Chakraborty of Tripura. Camp no.2- Rajendra Bhowmick of Tripura(asst secy Kalyan samiti), Nityagopal Das, Bonpolimohan Pal, Nakuleshwar Nandi of Tripura, Balaram Kaviraj of Noakhali. Camp no.3. Umesh Chandra Sarkar of Noakhali, Mritunjoy Chakraborty of Noakhali, Suresh Chatterjee of Barishal.<sup>xxi</sup>

On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1949, local authorities of the camp, announced section 144 in the camp. Moreover 7 members of Kalyan Samiti, including the president, were ordered to be transferred to Dudhkundi camp. In the meantime, another samiti, named Salboni Bastutyagi Shanti Sanmeloni grew up in the camp.<sup>xxii</sup> Camp authorities decided to pay dole to the refugees in proportion to the output of their work. Refugees who were not working under the contract system, would not be paid any dole. The date of payment of dole for the last fortnight was fixed on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1949. Thus the authority became apprehensive of 'trouble' in the camp on that day.<sup>xxiii</sup> Superintendent of the camp informed that attitude of the members of the Kalyan Samiti, was not at all congenial to the authorities of the camp. They often 'abused' the camp authority.

In the camp something else transpired. In course of time rivalry and bitterness developed between two existing samities. Consequently there was a possibility of 'breach of peace' in the camp. This prompted the camp authorities to impose section 144. It should be mentioned here. Kalyan Samiti had already fought against oppression, corruption, maladministration, through hunger-strikes. It was numerically stronger. Because of this Samiti, the leaders were ordered to be transferred to Dudhkundi camp. A new situation was created as a result.<sup>xxiv</sup>

On 16<sup>th</sup> May, a special police officer (Midnapur), went to the camp to execute the order of transfer effectively. In practice, the leaders on whom the order was served were not found in their houses. Then the police went to the house of the president. It was surrounded by many women. They sat on the road. When the police party and camp authorities, approached they stood up. Some other refugees including women came to join them.<sup>xxv</sup>

On the second day, 55 refugees were arrested. They complained about physical torture. Each refugee was allowed to be released on the payment of Rs.200. But everybody preferred to stay in jail. On 26<sup>th</sup> May 1949, Amritalal Chattapadhyay met them. 5 were found to be hospitalized. 7 were still in jail.<sup>xxvi</sup> The news of hunger strikes at Salua camp reached him through the department of post and telegraph. He sent a member of the Brahmo Samaj and member of refugee minority samiti, Sarat Chandra Ghosh-Dastidar for necessary enquiry and to make a compromise. They requested the refugees to withdraw the hunger strike.

On 21<sup>st</sup> May 1949, Jogananda Babu and Sarat Babu sent the news through some other people that condition of the camp was critical. He (Amritalal Chattapadhyay) should come immediately. Thus on 22<sup>nd</sup> May Chattapadhyay informed Dr B C Roy about the situation in the camp in writing. Chattapadhyay went to Salboni camp on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1949 and then to Salua camp. He then went to DM and successfully solved the problems of the camp. But Salboni still had very critical problems.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The inmates of the Salboni camp had three grievances. 1. The terms and conditions on which inmates broke the hunger strike in the last March were not fulfilled. 2. The camp authorities were utilizing money in the name of people who were absent in the camp. They did the same thing in the name of people living in Pakistan. 3. Kerosene, cloths, blankets, allotted to the inmates were sold off in the black market.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The Kalyan Samiti protested against these issues. According to the samiti, the authorities decided to transfer some of the leaders in order to hide such nefarious activities. So the inmates decided to oppose the authorities till an enquiry was made. Amritalal Chattapadhyay even after repeated attempts could not move the refugees from their stand. He asked them to accept the order of transfer. He insinuated that their demands would be fulfilled then. The refugees wanted Enquiry of their grievances (revoke of section 144 and release of arrested people) first and only then they would consider transfer of their leaders. Chattapadhyay wanted them to accept the transfer first, then he would enquire into the matter.<sup>xxix</sup> The government accepted the proposal of Chattapadhyay but 4 refugees scheduled to be transferred, did not agree to it. Therefore the problem remained unsolved.<sup>xxx</sup>

Amritalal Chattapadhyay placed his demands, before the government and public. He wanted eradication of corruption and injustice prevailing in the Salboni camp. The inmates of the camp had already gone to jail, as a way of protest. No state or civilized society, could ignore the responsibility toward these demands. The grievances could be dealt with only through impartial enquiry. In this way state and nation can fulfill its responsibilities. And the states' prestige could be maintained. Otherwise animal force would dominate humanitarian demands for a long time. It would be a thorough injustice.

Next year i.e. in 1950, the stopping of monthly doles to the East Bengal refugees created an 'unrest' in the camp. On 18<sup>th</sup> April 1950, some refugees of the camp placed their grievances before the DM. They were assured of 7 days' supply of dry doles. As a result of this assurance, they came back to the camp. But the authorities remained apprehensive of 'troubles' until they could make further arrangements for the refugees.<sup>xxxi</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> May 1950, a month later, sub-divisional officer (north), accompanied by Mrs Renuka Roy and Dr Mrs Fulrenu Guha, visited Salboni camp. They discussed the grievances of the refugees. Further, they assured the refugees of full cooperation.

However in June 1950, doles of able-bodied men of Salua camp, were stopped. Consequently dissatisfaction grew up in the camp. Some refugees resorted to hunger strike. Thus it is evident even in 1950, the inmates used the instrument of hunger strike as a mark of protest.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Toward the fag end of 1950, refugees of Salua camp of Midnapur agitated against their settlement in Murshidabad. It was a demonstration of their will to choose their area of settlement. The refugees had been ordered to be transferred to Mahananda camp in Murshidabad. The refugees believed that living

condition of the said camp, for ex. dwelling houses, was worse than the Salua camp. But here it is pertinent to mention that proposal for transfer had earlier come from the inmates themselves. They earlier complained that local climate and other conditions of Salua did not suit them. So the camp authorities were unyielding. Eventually they were sent to Mahananda camp on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1950.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

#### *Establishment of camps in Midnapur districts 1955-57:*

In Midnapur, some camps were established by the government after 1955. Out of these, Jhargram was a worksite camp. It was established in 1955. Some transit camps were established in the same year. Mahasol (rural) and Salboni, were established in 1955. Kalabani camp was established in 1956. And Sarshanka (rural) was established in 1957.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

#### *Establishment of United Central Refugee Council*

In the meantime, certain developments took place, in the field of refugee organizations. By the end of 1948, the regular influx of refugees, from East Bengal, increased by 2000 per week. Between 15<sup>th</sup> April and 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1948, 10000 people migrated to West Bengal. Those who arrived after June 1948, were middle class, professional people. Earlier, the West Bengal government had opened some camps in Calcutta and suburbs. After June 1948, there was acute shortage of accommodation in Calcutta. A group which was very desperate, took over vacant lands in Dhakuria lake area. After a few days, 80 families took possession of Ballyganj military camp. This establishment of squatter's colonies from early 1949, was actively supported by newly formed Nikhil Vanga Bastuhara Karmi Parishad.<sup>xxxv</sup> It had an executive committee headed by Amritalal Chatterjee. The other members were mostly from congress and few affiliated to CPI.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

To create a joint platform, for the cause of the refugees, the NVBKP decided to incorporate other primary units, into this organization. It was decided to include the seven other leftist parties, representatives from camps and colonies, refugee relief organizations, to decide unanimously on the refugee front.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

It confirmed assimilation of all leftist parties, amalgamation with the auxiliary bodies. The delegates of the organization, involved CPI, FBM, FB, SUC, RCPI(Rebel), DW, BP, SRP. NVBKP could not maintain their popularity due to lack of proper relevant policies. Keeping consistency in communication, was the biggest challenge. It failed to achieve its goal because of ideological and internal rift. But the background was set for emergence of central body that would look after the all-round needs of the refugees and take under it, the newly growing up, squatter's colonies.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

On June 4<sup>th</sup> 1950, Ambica Chakrabarty, organized a meeting at commercial museum hall , Calcutta, to form a prastuti committee for the West Bengal Refugee Conference. He became the president of the conference. It provided the emergence of UCRC on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1950. Ambica Chakrabarty became its secretary.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Ambica Chakrabarty attended several meetings of UCRC in 1950s. In September 1955, under his direction the thana committee was formed at Habra. In October 1955, Hooghly district refugee council was formed.<sup>xl</sup> Gradually other district councils were formed. And at camp level, branches of UCRC were formed.<sup>xli</sup>

#### *Struggles in the camps of Mindapur 1957-1961 :*

After the formation of district councils, certain developments took place in the districts. Midnapur was no exception. Under the auspices of Jhargram branch of Midnapur refugee council, a mass meeting was held(300), outside Dudhkundi refugee camp on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1958. Binod Samaddar of the said camp, was in the chair. The meeting was organised, at the instance of Mira Dhal, and Chapala Mukherjee. Pran Krishna Chakraborti of UCRC and Sukumar Ghosh(CPI), General Secretary district refugee council addressed the gathering. The matters discussed in the meeting were – problems of food, unemployment, refugees. They criticised the government for failing to solve the problems. The speakers also urged the refugees to ask explanation from the government about the whereabouts of the camp resident Dijendranth Chakraborty, who had resorted to hunger strike in the camp. The government's

explanation was that he was unknown to the government. He had presumably died. In the meeting, a resolution demanding information about return of Dijendranath Chakraborty to the camp, was adopted. If the demands of the camp refugees were not fulfilled by the camp super, within 4 days, then there would be a direct action. <sup>xlii</sup>

After 1950, UCRC became active amongst the refugees. UCRC took a dominant position in the second phase of the struggle in the camps of Midnapur. CPI leaders actively participated in the meetings. Simultaneously refugees of different camps came to join the meeting. After 1957, the demand of the camp refugees of Midnapur was direct withdrawal of Dandakaranya scheme. They also protested against the government dispersal policy. UCRC established its branches in different camps of Midnapur. In those camps, there were some complications. But toward the end of 1950s and early 1960 the camp refugees of Midnapur fought against the dispersal policy. They received the support of UCRC.

Under the auspices of Midnapur district unit of UCRC, a mass convention of refugees(600), was held at Subhashpally gate , Kharagpur town on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1958, between 17.15 and 19.30 hours, with Saroj Roy, MLA/CPI, in the chair. The meeting was organised in observance of protest day in response to the call of UCRC Calcutta. Vice –President of UCRC, Mohit Moitra was the chief guest. Besides Sukumar Ghosh (CPI), Ananta Deb Majhi, Narayan Choubey( both MLA), Mohit Moitra addressed the gathering. They criticised different plans of the Congress government. They voiced protests against the idea of implementation of Dandakaranya scheme. They also asked the people to make the refugee movement, to be started at Calcutta from November 14<sup>th</sup> 1958. Refugees of different colonies and camps attended the meeting. For example – 1. Dr Ajit Dhar of Chandrakana road, 2. Anil Bhanja of Midnapur, 3. Ranjani Maity of Midnapur, attended the meeting.

Sukumar Ghosh in his speech, gave an account of refugees, who came from different camps of the district. He stated that most of the refugees came from Sarsanka transit camp (ps Dantan) and the next high figure from the Jhargram sub-division. He diussed the plans of the government and urged the refugees and other people to boycott the Dandakaranya scheme. He wanted the refugee movement to be a success by raising volunteers and subscription. He wanted to send the volunteers in demand of rehabilitation of East Bengal refugees in West Bengal. At the outset, Saroj Roy, president of Midnapur district UCRC, asked the refugees to attend the convention at Kharagpur despite difficulties. He was supported by Ananta Deb Manjhi and Sukumar Ghosh. <sup>xliii</sup>

Ananta Deb Manjhi supported the statement of Sukumar Ghosh and stated that refugees would be backed by progressive minded people, as well as Kishan and Majdur. Narayan Choubey also spoke in the same line. Mohit Maitra discussed other problems of East Bengal refugees. Dandakaranya was within the jurisdiction of 3 states- Orissa, MP, AP. Malaria was rampant there. There would be health problems for the East Bengal refugees. Moreover they would be treated as perpetual minority without education, employment and possibility of social protest. Government had already refused to accept the proposal of UCRC. Saroj Roy also supported the views of Mohit Maitra. <sup>xliv</sup>

In the meantime(1959), some organizational developments took place in the Mahasol camp, p.o. Salbani, district Midnapur. Shakticharan Mondol of the said camp, wrote a letter to Prankrishna Chakraborti , dated April 26<sup>th</sup> 1958. The former informed that Laxmikanta Roy, secretary of the Kendriya Bastuhara Samity of the camp, had been controlling three or four members of the camp. This had created damage to the samity. Laxmikanta Roy was trying to mislead some members of the camp. On April 18<sup>th</sup> 1958, a conference was held at Kalabani camp. Roy submitted an application there. So Sukumar Babu gave a letter to Shakticharan Mondol. It appeared to Mondol that Sukumar Babu could not take Roy under his control. Sukumar Babu also failed to realise, the intention of Laxmikanta Roy and did not consider Roy to be dangerous, regarding local matters. Mondol requested Pran Krishna Chakraborti to visit Mahasol camp. Otherwise due to the activities of one person, the Mahasol Bastuhara Samity formed by Chakraborti, would be destroyed. From this letter it is apparent that camp samities, were grown up in Midnapur district. At the same time, there were internal conflicts. <sup>xlv</sup>

In 1959, Saroj Roy and Deben Mudli, addressed a procession of 300 refugees, which was led to Midnapur court compound by Sukumar Ghosh (CPI) on January 12<sup>th</sup> 1959. The government was as usual

condemned. Saroj Roy read out names of volunteers, who will offer civil disobedience by entering into the court compound.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Saroj Roy and others addressed a meeting, with settlement employees and protested against the order of discharge of duties. Roy described how East Bengal refugee women were put into trouble by the central refugee rehabilitation department authorities in Rajasthan and other areas. He also stated that government did not accept the plan of UCRC, in connection with the rehabilitation of East Bengal refugees.<sup>xlvii</sup> Earlier Roy addressed a gathering of 275 Kissans and refugees, from Mahasol Turiapara refugee camp at Midnapur court compound, on January 21<sup>st</sup> 1959. They assembled there in a procession for offering civil disobedience under the leadership of Deben Das alias Mudli. Saroj Roy explained the significance of the movement and wanted assistance from public in general. A deputation of seven CPI leaders including Saroj Roy, met the DM Midnapur as representatives of the meeting.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Saroj Roy, MLA, had asked Mira Dhal of Dudhkundi camp to send at least ten refugees from the said camp for participation in the satyagraha movement at Midnapur. Roy asked the refugee leaders to make extensive 'propaganda' amongst the peasants residing in villages near the camp and thereby making the movement a success. Mira Dhal paid Rs.10 to Saroj Roy as donation towards the movement.<sup>xlix</sup>

On March 25<sup>th</sup> 1960, Saroj Roy led a procession of 600 refugees of different camps of this district. And waited on a deputation with 16 representatives(refugees) before the zonal rehabilitation officer, Midnapur Town and submitted various grievances of the refugees.<sup>l</sup>

On June 17<sup>th</sup> 1960, Saroj Roy addressed a meeting of the refugees at Ballichak, receiving centre, PS Habra and urged them not to go outside West Bengal for their rehabilitation.<sup>li</sup>

In the satyagraha movement of early 1959, some refugees were arrested. In December 5<sup>th</sup> 1960, Pran Krishna Chakraborti(UCRC) paid a visit to Dudhkundi camp with a view to give further encouragement to the members of action committee. The leaders addressed the refugees, to continue their struggle. The leaders also assured that the matter would be taken to the assembly very soon for redress of their grievances.<sup>lii</sup>

The proceedings of the annual conference of Midnapur district UCRC was held in Kalabani refugee camp p.s Kashiari on December 17<sup>th</sup> 1960 and December 18<sup>th</sup> 1960.<sup>liii</sup> The open session (800) was held on the evening of December 18<sup>th</sup> 1960. Saroj Roy chaired the meeting. Besides the president, Ratanti Prasad Dhar , Bhibhuti Tripathy , Subhendhu Mondol (all MLA), Samar Mukherje MLA and Pran Krishna Chakraborti addressed the gathering. They all criticised and condemned plan and politics of the government with particular reference to land reforms act and Dandakaranya scheme. They asked the refugees to be united and start a strong movement against sending of refugees to Dandakaranya. The leaders also urged the refugees to demand rehabilitation within West Bengal. Ratanti Prasad Dhar congratulated the audience and asked them to render all possible help to the refugees in their movement against the government. The government notification had asked them to go to Dandakaranya or vacate the camps. Saroj Roy (MLA of CPI) in course of his speech criticised the government policies, regarding land reform act and the system of relief given to the refugees. The congress government did not pay any attention to the interests of the poor middle class and kissans. He asked to start a stronger movement against the transfer of Berubari , a portion of Indian soil, to Pakistan.<sup>liv</sup>

Shurhid Mallick Chowdhuri in course of his speech discussed the plight of the refugees, who were sent to different states of India. It appears that the government officials of those states were had set the local people against the refugees. Chowdhuri cited the example of Bettiah (Bihar), Mikir Hills (Assam), colonies of Orissa and Rajasthan. The culture and the language, of the East Bengal refugees became contaminated. In case of Dandakaranya, the refugees, would become victims of such condition. Moreover in Dandakaranya there was no arrangement of drinking water or education. It may be said that the refugees were given bullets instead of bread. He asked the refugees to be united against

rehabilitation in Dandakaranya. Samar Mukherjee shared this view. Sukumar Ghosh read out the following resolutions-

Release of all persons arrested from Dudhkundi camp in connection with hunger strike resorted to by some refugees.

Release of Mr P Lamba , ex-PM of Congo.

Continuation of byananama scheme.

Rehabilitation of Assam evacuees, with full compensation.

There should not be transfer of Berubari to Pakistan.

Restoration of cash dole, stopped to the refugees of Dudhkundi and other camps.

Rehabilitation of refugees within West Bengal.<sup>iv</sup>

At a meeting held at party office Midnapur, on August 11<sup>th</sup> 1961, Saroj Roy and other leaders decided that henceforth different camp committees, would organize civil disobedience movement in any of the government offices in their respective areas.<sup>lvi</sup>

### Conclusion

In the Midnapur district, we notice resistance by the camp refugees throughout the period 1948/1949 to 1961. In the first phase (1948-49) camp refugees, fought independently. There was no involvement of political parties and party leaders. In 1950, establishment of UCRC brought CPI into prominence in the struggle of the camp refugees. In the latter half of 1950s, simultaneously district councils were established. A branch of UCRC was established in these camps. Thus CPI became very important. During the period 1957-61, CPI leaders led the processions and demanded rehabilitation of camp refugees within West Bengal. Thus from now on, UCRC and CPI became very important. The target of the camp refugees became the Dandakaranya scheme.

<sup>i</sup> Prafulla Chakrabarti,, *Marginal Men, Refugees and Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, Kalyani: Lumier, 1990.

<sup>ii</sup> Joya. Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition, Bengal and India, 1947-67*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Joya. Chatterji, “Right or Charity? The Debate over relief and rehabilitation in West Bengal 1947-50”, in S Kaul ed. *The Afterlife of Division of India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007. Joya Chatterji, “Dispersal and Failure of Rehabilitation : Refugee Camp Dwellers and squatterers in West Bengal”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 41., No.5, 2007.

<sup>iii</sup> Nilanjana Chatterjee, ‘Midnight’s Unwanted Children, East Bengal Refugees, Politics of Rehabilitation’, unpublished thesis, Brown University, 1992.

<sup>iv</sup>Nilanjana Chatterjee, “The East Bengal Refugees, A Lesson of Survival”, in S. Chaudhuri ed. *Calcutta the living City*, Vol.2, Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1990.

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