

Maharaja Bijay Chand Mahtab

August 20, 2022

In news— Bardhaman municipality in West Bengal has decided to erect a statue of Bardhaman's Maharaja Bijay Chand Mahatab and his wife Radharani in front of the 119-year-old Curzon Gate in Bardhaman.

History of Maharaja Bijay Chand Mahtab-

- He was the **ruler of Burdwan Estate, Bengal in British India** (present-day West Bengal, India) from 1887 till his death in 1941.
- **Mahtab's predecessor, Maharaja Aftab Chand Mahtab (1879–85) died without heirs, and his widow adopted Bijoy Chand Mahtab**, son of Khatri Ban Bihari Kapur, a relative of Mahtab Chand Bahadur, a past ruler of Burdwan Estate from 1832 to 1879.
- At the time of adoption, in 1887, he was only six years old, therefore, the Court of Wards along with the Diwani-i-Raj, Ban Bihari Kapoor, (the natural father of Bijaychand), ruled the estate up to 1902.
- In 1893, the title of 'Raja' was bestowed on Ban Bihari Kapoor. The government permitted the Raj in 1897 to maintain an armed force of 600 people and 41 cannons.
- In 1899, Bijay Chand Mahtab **passed the entrance examination of Calcutta University, and was the first in the Raj family** to obtain a formal educational qualification.
- In 1903 the **title of 'Rajadhiraj' was bestowed on him at the Delhi Durbar.**
- In 1903, he **invited the Governor General Lord Curzon to the Bardhaman palace** and to commemorate the event constructed a **gate now known as Curzon Gate in Gothic style**, which is a major landmark of Burdwan today and stands at the junction of Bijaychand Road and Grand Trunk Road.

- He **risked his life to save that of Sir Andrew Fraser, lieutenant-governor of Bengal**, when an attempt to assassinate him was made by Indian nationalists on 7 November 1908.
- In return for his loyalty to the British, **he was honoured with the title of K.C.I.E. and Indian Order of Merit (Class III)**.
- In 1908, as per a proclamation of Lord Minto, elevated to the **title of 'Maharajadhiraja'**, which was bestowed on a hereditary basis.
- He also **served as representative of Bengal zamindars in the Legislative and Provincial council**, continuously for many years.
- In 1908, he toured England and Europe and later **wrote a book named Diary of an European Tour**.
- He was also noted for his philanthropy, especially in the field of education and health welfare. For example, in 1908, he donated money for **construction of a hostel and other facilities for Ranchi Arts College, Ranchi**, where Burdwan Raj also held large estates.
- **Bijoy Chand Hospital** was also founded by him during his reign in the decade of 1910.
- He was a **member of the Bengal Legislative Council from 1907 to 1918, and of the Imperial Legislative Council from 1909 to 1912**.
- He was associated with the state administration in subsequent years and Member of the Executive Council of Bengal for the years 1919–1924.
- He was also the **President of British Indian Association from 1911 to 1918 and again in 1925**.
- In 1914, he was **appointed as one of the members of the committee that investigated riots of Budge Budge and Komagata Maru incidents**.
- In 1924, he was **one of the members of a committee headed by Sir Charles Todhunter, which looked into taxation reforms in British India**, which submitted its report in 1925. and was also a **member of Indian Reforms Enquiry**

Commission of 1924.

- In spite of his loyalty towards the British, he provided **warm hospitality to Mahatma Gandhi**, when he visited Bardhaman in 1925 and cordially welcomed Subhas Chandra Bose when he visited Bardhaman in 1928 to campaign in the municipal elections.
- The British administrator took over the complete management of Burdwan Raj and Bijoy Chand was deprived of management from the years 1929–1936. In 1936, he was handed over the reign of his Estate back by British.
- In 1938, he was a **member of the Francis Floud Commission to suggest changes in the Permanent Settlement** of 1793.
- The **commission recommended the replacement of the zamindari system by a ryotwari (tenancy) system** in which the ownership of land would vest with the ryot (tenant) and the land revenue payable by him could be revised periodically.
- However, with India's independence gaining momentum it was evident that the days of zamindars and princely states were coming to an end. It was this realisation that led Bijaychand Mahtab to extend **indirect support to the Congress**.