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**Partha Chatterjee: A Princely Impostor?**

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## Chapter One

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### THE FACTS OF THE MATTER

#### DEATH

**B**HAWAL was an estate—a zamindari—in the eastern district of Dacca in British Bengal. The zamindar's house, a large mansion, was in Jaidebpur, a small town located a little to the north of the present capital city of Bangladesh. Zamindaris in Dacca were notoriously small, the region having been a classic example of what agrarian historians of Bengal call subinfeudation—that endless multiplication of rent-collecting interests that brought about a massive fragmentation of landed estates in the nineteenth century. By Dacca standards, however, Bhawal was a very large estate, with an annual rent income of about Rs.650,000 in the early twentieth century. The family was regarded as the premier Hindu zamindar family of the district; the zamindar was locally called the raja, and the estate as the Bhawal raj.

In 1909, when our story begins, the estate was owned by three brothers with equal shares. They were known as kumars, princes. The eldest was twenty-seven years old, the second twenty-five, and the third twenty-two. All three brothers were married and lived in the family mansion—the Jaidebpur Rajbari. Three married sisters also lived in the house at this time, together with their respective husbands and children.

On April 18, 1909, Ramendra Narayan Roy, the second kumar, left Bhawal for Darjeeling by train, arriving at the hill station on the twentieth. He was accompanied by his wife Bibhabati, Bibhabati's elder brother Satyendra, and a retinue of twenty-one servants. Ashutosh Dasgupta, the family doctor, was also in the party. The reason for the visit was Ramendra's health. The second kumar had contracted syphilis about three years before, and now ulcers had broken out on his legs and arms. The hills, it was thought, would be a good change for him, and his brother-in-law Satyendra had already made a scouting visit to Darjeeling and arranged a house for him to rent. It was somewhat surprising that Bibhabati was not accompanied by any other woman of the family, for it was not customary in families of the standing of the Bhawal Raj for young wives to travel alone with their husbands. But later, when this question was raised, it was explained that Satyendra had thought the house in Darjeeling too small to accommodate a large party.

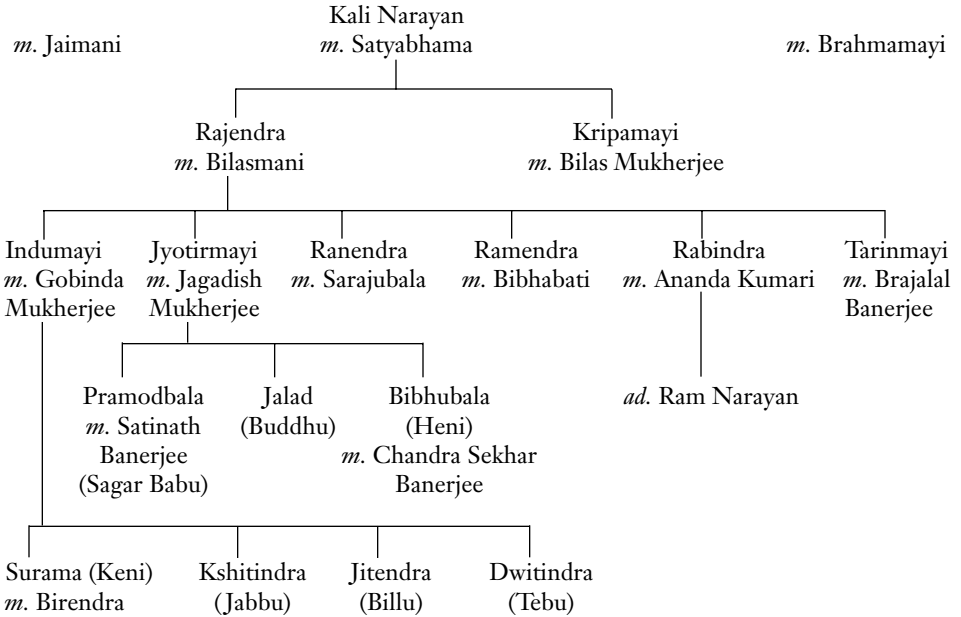


FIGURE 1. The Bhawal Raj family tree

The first few days of the second kumar's visit passed without incident. On May 6, however, he fell ill: a telegram arrived at Jaidebpur the next morning from one of the clerks in the Darjeeling party saying that the kumar had a fever. The following morning, a telegram arrived with the news that he was much better. But another, which arrived late in the evening, brought alarming news. "Kumar seriously ill," it said. "Frequent watery motion with blood. Come sharp." Early next morning, the youngest kumar set out from the Rajbari to catch the mail train to Darjeeling. As he was approaching the station at Jaidebpur, a man stopped his carriage and handed him a telegram which said that the second kumar had died. Three days later, the second kumar's party returned from Darjeeling to Jaidebpur, bringing back the young widow Bibhabati.

The prescribed religious rites were performed for the dead kumar on May 18, the customary eleven days after death. It was said later that there was a proposal to burn a *kuṣaputtalikā* before performing the *śrāddha* ceremonies (homage to the deceased performed as a supplement to the funer-

ary rites), since there were disturbing rumors about the way the kumar's body had been cremated in Darjeeling. The *kuśaputtalikā*, in Brahminical funerary rites, is a grass effigy that is symbolically burned when the body of a dead person, for whatever reasons, has not been or is supposed not to have been cremated. It was established later that no such symbolic cremation was performed at the second kumar's *śrāddha* in Jaidebpur, and many people maintained that no such thing had even been suggested.

Nevertheless, some rumors were afloat about the circumstances of the second kumar's death in Darjeeling and the manner in which his body had been cremated. Sharif Khan, an orderly who went to Darjeeling with the kumar's party, brought back the dramatic story of how, when he had been asked to help shift the kumar's bed, the ailing kumar had suddenly vomited, and so corrosive was the ejected fluid that some drops that fell on Sharif Khan's clothes actually made holes in them. More persistent was a rumor that although the kumar's body had been taken to the cremation ground in Darjeeling, it had not been cremated.

It is hard to know whether any members of the family took these rumors seriously at the time. The evidence suggests that people in Jaidebpur were stunned by the sudden death of the second kumar. His *śrāddha* was a lack-luster affair without any of the pomp that might be expected of a *śrāddha* at the Rajbari.

Soon afterward, Bibhabati's elder brother Satyendra Banerjee began to intercede on behalf of his sister in order to protect her interests in the property. There seems to have been a proposal to take out a deed to exclude her from the management of the estate in return for a monthly allowance, and Satyendra rushed to Calcutta to seek legal advice to stall the move. Later, it was suggested that the idea was not so much to exclude the second rani as to prevent her brother from meddling in the affairs of the raj. In any case, nothing came of this proposal. Satyendra now moved from Calcutta to Dhaka, rented a house, and began to live there with his wife and mother; he tried to persuade Bibhabati to move out of the Jaidebpur Rajbari. For several months, Bibhabati resisted. In November 1909, however, she formally appointed Satyendra her agent and claimed Rs.30,000, which was the value of a life insurance policy taken out by the estate in the name of the second kumar.

Dark days seemed to descend upon the Bhawal Raj. The eldest kumar, Ranendra Narayan, died in September 1910. Soon after, Bibhabati went to live with Satyendra's family in Calcutta, not to return to Jaidebpur for the next twenty years. She received a monthly allowance of Rs.1,100 and took out more than Rs.35,000 from her share in the estate, besides the insurance money, with the help of which her brother bought a house on Lansdowne Road in Calcutta. In April 1911, F. W. Needham, the British manager of

the estate, informed the second rani in Calcutta that the management of her share was being taken over by the Court of Wards, the government department responsible for looking after zamindari estates that did not have owners who could manage them properly. In May that year, the share of the third kumar was also taken over because he was deemed unfit to manage it. In May 1912, when the share of the eldest rani was taken over, the entire estate came under the jurisdiction of the Court of Wards. In September 1913, after a brief illness, the third kumar died. Suddenly, the premier Hindu zamindar family of Dacca was reduced to three childless widows, none of whom was in charge of her property. Soon after her husband's death, the third rani also left Jaidebpur. Six years later, she adopted a son.

For several years after Ramendra Narayan's death, rumors surfaced periodically—not just that the second kumar's body had not been cremated, but that he was still alive, living as a sannyasi. Apparently, only a few months after Ramendra's death, a wandering sannyasi, on being told in Jaidebpur about the second kumar's death, remarked that he had seen a Bengali—a rich man's son—traveling with a group of sadhus who had found him in Darjeeling. Some relatives were sent out to northern India to make inquiries. Jyotirmayi, a sister of the kumars, who often went to Benaras, made it a habit to ask at that great meeting place of religious people if anyone could give her any news. She later said that from what she heard from various sources, she became convinced that her brother was alive. In 1917, a sadhu who had taken a vow of silence arrived in Jaidebpur and wrote on a piece of paper that the second kumar was alive.

After this, the rumors became particularly strong, because Rani Satyabhama, the aged grandmother of the three kumars, who was then living alone in the Jaidebpur Rajbari, wrote to the maharaja of Burdwan asking if he could confirm that the second kumar's body had indeed been cremated eight years previously, since she knew that the maharaja had been in Darjeeling at the time. She was hearing rumors, she said, from places all over eastern and northern Bengal, that her grandson had been seen wandering about in the company of mendicants. In reply, the maharaja wrote that he did remember having been told one day in Darjeeling that the second kumar of Bhawal had died and he had asked his staff to send the holy Ganga water and tulsi leaves that would be needed at the funeral. More than this he could not say.<sup>1</sup>

The rumors and speculation persisted. Many years later, Ronald Francis Lodge, judge of the High Court in Calcutta, would remark that the strength of the rumors showed “how the people of the locality were ready to believe that Ramendra Narayan Roy was alive. They were in a mood to accept a claimant, and if any one was inclined to put forward a claim, he must have realised from the experience of that year that an impostor bearing any re-

semblance to the late Ramendra Narayan Roy would have a reasonable chance of success.”<sup>2</sup>

### THE SANNYASI

The Buckland Bund was in the early part of this century an embankment on the Buriganga River, a popular promenade for the inhabitants of the city of Dhaka. Today, it is the approach to the Sadarghat launch terminal and one of the most congested streets of the city. As one trudges through the slush and garbage, negotiating the fruit and vegetable vendors and an endless stream of rickshaws, one’s view of the river blocked off by an ugly wall and with no trees in sight, it is hard to imagine that the road had been built as an attractive riverfront boulevard. But older residents of the city still remember a time when they could take a leisurely evening walk on the bund.<sup>3</sup> Sometime in December 1920 or January 1921, a sannyasi appeared on the Buckland Bund. He had matted hair and a long beard, wore only a loin-cloth, and his body was covered with ashes. For about four months, he sat on the bund in front of Rupal Das’s mansion (which still stands in a state of crumbling magnificence as an ineffectually protected heritage site). He sat there night and day, rain or shine, impervious to the weather. He attracted a lot of attention, because he was, as one of the witnesses said later in court, “a beautiful fair man with a fine and noble stature. . . . I do not remember having seen such a handsome, fair *jaṭādhārī* sannyasi [with matted hair] at Dacca.”<sup>4</sup> Often a small crowd would collect around him, and people would ask him where he was from or if he would give them medicines. He spoke in Hindi. Some later said that he told people that he was from Punjab and had left home when he was a child. Others said that he spoke of having left his parents and wife. He apparently complained of the climate and the water in Bengal. To those who asked for medicines, he sometimes offered a pinch of the ash with which his body was always smeared, but refused to give amulets.

It seems that fairly soon after his arrival on the Buckland Bund, word began to spread that the second kumar of Bhawal had come back as a sannyasi. People now came to the riverside in Dhaka to see for themselves if this was true. They would stand around him and ask him questions. Most of the time, the sannyasi would remain silent; when he did respond, he would say in his rustic Hindi that he was a renouncer and had no home or family. Many went back convinced that the rumors were baseless. Some even said that the man was an impostor, although no one had heard the sadhu make any claims at all about who he was. Yet, as the crowds jostled around him under the pale winter sun on the Buckland Bund, the whispers

were clearly audible: “This is the mejo (second) kumar! The second kumar of Bhawal!”

The first person from the Bhawal Raj family who went to see the sannyasi on the bund was Buddhu, the son of Jyotirmayi, an elder sister of the kumars. He went from Jaidebpur accompanied by some gentlemen from Kasimpur, a neighboring village, and returned not knowing what to make of his visit. The sadhu certainly had, he thought, a strong resemblance to the second kumar, but whether he was in fact his uncle, returned from the dead after twelve years, he could not say. It was then that the gentlemen from Kasimpur decided that an attempt should be made to bring the sannyasi to Jaidebpur.

On April 5, 1921, Atul Prasad Raychaudhuri, a younger member of the zamindar family of Kasimpur, brought the sannyasi to his house. Atul Babu had known the second kumar well, and the two families were on close terms. It was later suggested that the sannyasi was taken to Kasimpur not because anyone suspected that he might be the kumar of Bhawal but because it was hoped that he might be persuaded to do a *putreṣṭi yajña*, a sacrificial rite performed in order to get a son, since Sarada Prasad, the head of the Kasimpur family, had none. The sannyasi, it seems, said flatly that he knew nothing of such rites. In any case, he stayed in Kasimpur for about a week, living under a tree. On April 12, he was sent on an elephant to Jaidebpur, arriving there at about six in the evening.

The elephant stopped at the Rajbari. The sannyasi got off and went to sit under a kamini tree near Madhabbari, a building within the Rajbari complex that served as a resthouse for travelers and mendicants. None of the family now lived in the Rajbari, as the three sisters had moved a few years before to their own houses in a neighborhood about a quarter of a mile from the Rajbari. Rani Satyabhama, now nearly eighty years old, usually lived with one of her granddaughters. Some distant relatives and employees of the estate, however, came to see the sannyasi that evening. One of them, Radhika Goswami, a nephew of Satyabhama, recalled later that he looked at this man, naked except for his loincloth, and tried especially to observe his hands and feet. He could not be sure that he was the mejo kumar.

The next morning, Rai Saheb Jogendra Nath Banerjee, secretary to the Bhawal estate, along with his younger brother Sagar, who was married to Jyotirmayi's daughter, came to see the sannyasi. They found him sitting on the southern verandah of the building known as the Rajbilas. Sagar Babu observed him very closely. “He looked at us as we stood facing him. I could see the colour of his eyes. It was brownish. I observed his build, his style of sitting, and the way he looked—his way of looking. I suspected he was the Second Kumar. I told Jogen Babu what I thought. He said the matter looks serious. I asked him what he thought. He said: Don't make a row. Let's wait and see him further.”<sup>5</sup>

A little later, Buddhu arrived to say that his mother would like the sannyasi to be taken to her house. When asked, the sannyasi said that he would go in the afternoon.

Jyotirmayi saw the sannyasi for the first time in her house that evening. He had been brought in a dogcart (known all over India as a *tumtum*) a few minutes before, and when she came out on to the verandah, she found him seated on a mat, surrounded by members of her family. The sannyasi sat with his head bowed, looking through the corner of his eyes. “That reminded me of Mejo’s way of looking at people. It excited my suspicion. I started looking at him, scrutinizing his features, eyes, ears, lips, figure, hands and feet, the contour of his face.”

She asked him how long he would stay. He replied in Hindi that he would go the next day to Nangalbund for the Brahmaputra bath. She gave him some fruits and cream to eat. He ate the cream. Soon after, he left. “I noticed his gait—it was that of the second kumar. I noticed his height, but he seemed slightly stouter, a shade stouter.”<sup>6</sup> After he had left, they all talked about the sannyasi. It was decided that they would ask him to come for a meal the next day when they could observe him in the daylight.

The next morning, the sadhu was seen walking along the verandah of the Rajbilas, which used to be the main living quarters of the family, looking through the shutters of the second kumar’s room, going into the adjacent bathroom and washing under a tap. At noon, he went to Jyotirmayi’s house in a carriage belonging to the estate. This time, he went into the front room and sat on a chair. Gobinda Mukherjee, Indumayi’s husband, sat on a *chauki*, a flat wooden divan, while Satyabhama and Jyotirmayi sat on chairs. Everyone else stood. “The sannyasi,” Jyotirmayi said later, “asked my grandmother in Hindi to sit on the *chauki*.” She moved and sat on the edge of the divan. The sannyasi asked her to sit up and helped her move to a more comfortable position. He said, “*Buḍikā baḍā dukh hai*” (the old woman is very unhappy). Then he pointed to Jyotirmayi’s daughters and asked who they were, and then in turn he asked about her son and her sister Indumayi’s sons. “Pointing to Keni, my sister’s daughter, he said: ‘*Yeh kaun hai?*’ (who is this?). I said, ‘She is the daughter of my elder sister.’ As I said that, the sannyasi burst into tears. Tears trickled down his cheeks. Keni was then a widow.”<sup>7</sup>

Tebu, Indumayi’s son, showed the sannyasi photographs of the kumar. Seeing them, he began to weep uncontrollably. Jyotirmayi asked him why he was crying when he had taken the vows of a renouncer. The sannyasi said, “*Ham māyāse rotā hai*” (I cry because of *māyā*, my sense of attachment). Jyotirmayi asked, “*Māyā* for whom?” She then told him about her brother who was said to have died in Darjeeling, and how some said that his body had been cremated, while others said it had not. Even before she had finished, the sannyasi said, “No, no, that is not true. His body was not



burned. He is alive.” Jyotirmayi looked directly into the sannyasi’s eyes and said, “Every bit of your face looks like my brother’s. Are you he?” “No,” the sannyasi said, “I am nothing to you.”<sup>8</sup>

However, he agreed to have a meal that day in Jyotirmayi’s house.

I noticed his index finger sticking out as he was taking his food, and he was putting out his tongue a bit. I noticed his features. I noticed his adam’s apple. I noticed his hair was red; *kaṭā* eyes, brownish. I noticed his teeth: they were those of the Second Kumar, even, smooth and beautiful. I noticed his hands and fingernails—every one of the fingernails. I noticed the palm and back of the hand. I noticed his leg, feet and toes. How could I forget? We had lived together from infancy. His whole body—arms, legs and face, and even the eyelids were smeared with ashes. His hair was long. He had a beard now. The Second Kumar did not wear a beard when he went to Darjeeling. His utterance on this day was indistinct. His voice was that of the Second Kumar.<sup>9</sup>

Jyotirmayi now had a very strong suspicion that this was indeed her brother. She wanted him to stay a few more days so that she could check whether he had the old marks on his body. But the sannyasi was anxious to go back to Dhaka and would not stay any longer.

For the next week or so, he was not in Dhaka—when Buddha, on Jyotirmayi’s instructions, went to look for him, he was not to be found. He had apparently gone to visit Chandranath, a shrine in Chittagong district. On about April 25, however, he was back at his usual spot on the Buckland Bund. On that day, Buddha took the sannyasi to the house of a relative in Dhaka, where Jyotirmayi had arranged for her younger sister Tarinmayi to meet him.

On April 30, the sannyasi was once again taken to Jyotirmayi’s house in Jaidebpur. This time, several relatives and people from the town collected to see him. Jyotirmayi tried to persuade him not to cover his body with ashes when he came back from his bath. For two days, the sannyasi refused. On the third day, however, he came back from the river without the ashes on his body. Jyotirmayi later said, “Then I saw his complexion. It was the Second Kumar’s complexion as of old, and seemed brighter still on account of *brahmacarya* [celibacy]. Then, looking at his face, cleaned of ashes, he looked like Ramendra himself. I noticed his eyelids darker than his complexion. I saw the mark left by the carriage wheel, and I saw the rough and scored skins at the wrists and at the instep. The relatives I already named, my grandmother and the rest also saw him, and recognized him, just as I did.”<sup>10</sup>

The next day, May 4, early in the morning, the sannyasi allowed Buddha, acting once again on instructions from his mother, to inspect him closely for various marks on his body. Jyotirmayi explained later that she did this because “the matter was very serious and we wanted to be dead certain, so

that no question could ever arise in our minds." By late morning that day, large crowds were collecting outside the house. Jyotirmayi decided to confront the sannyasi: "Your marks and appearance are like those of my second brother. You must be he. Declare your identity." "No, no," the sannyasi said, "I am not. Why do you annoy me?" "You must say who you are," Jyotirmayi insisted.

#### DECLARATION

She asked Buddha to go out and tell everyone that all the marks on the second kumar's body had been found on the sannyasi's. By this time, there were already several hundred people, mostly tenants from the estate, who had collected outside Jyotirmayi's house, wanting to know more about the sannyasi. Jyotirmayi said to the man she was now convinced was her brother that she would not eat until he had made a public declaration of his identity. It was twelve years, almost to the day, since her brother was supposed to have died in Darjeeling.

That afternoon, the sannyasi appeared before the assembled crowd of some two thousand people. Someone asked him, "What is your name?"

The sannyasi said, "Ramendra Narayan Roychaudhuri."

"What is your father's name?"

"Raja Rajendra Narayan Roychaudhuri."

"Your mother's name?"

"Rani Bilasmani Debi."

Somebody then shouted, "But everyone knows the names of the raja and the rani. Tell us the name of your wet nurse?"

The sannyasi answered, "Aloka."

Hearing this, the crowd broke out into cheers: "*Jay!*" they said. "Victory! Victory to the second kumar!" The women started ululating. The sannyasi seemed to go into a faint. Jyotirmayi and a few other women came out from behind the screens and started to fan him and sprinkle rosewater on his head. A few minutes later, he was taken into the house of Tarinmayi, the youngest sister. The crowds tried to follow, but after much persuasion, they were made to desist.

The next day, May 5, Needham, the manager of the Bhawal estate, sent a confidential report from Jaidebpur to Lindsay, collector and district magistrate of Dacca.

My dear Lindsay,

A very curious and extraordinary thing is happening here which has created a tremendous sensation throughout the Estate and outside.

About 5 months ago a fair complexioned mendicant came to Dacca, it is

reported, from Hardwar and stayed on the river side just opposite to Rup Babu's house, whence he was taken to Kasimpur by Babu Saroda Prosad Roy Choudhury, Zemindar of Kasimpur. He halted there for a few days. On his way back to Dacca he halted at Madhabbari at Jaidebpur, as other mendicants used to do. During his stay at Madhabbari he was taken to the house of Srj. Jyotirmoyee Devi. Srj. Jyotirmoyee Devi began to shed tears finding in the sadhu some likeness of her late 2nd brother (Kumar Ramendra Narayan Roy of Bhowal), and the sadhu too burst into tears. This raised some suspicion in the minds of the inmates of the house. After a photo of the 2nd Kumar was presented to him, he began to shed tears profusely; this strengthened the suspicion already created. He was then questioned by the inmates of the house as to who he really was, but without giving any answer he abruptly left for Dacca. For a few days nothing was heard of the sadhu.

A week ago the sadhu was again brought to the house of Srj. Jyotirmoyee Devi by Babu Atul Prosad Roy Choudhury, zemindar of Kasimpur, and since then he has been staying here. On seeing the sadhu who is here now an impression has been made upon the minds of the people who are visiting him daily in hundreds that he is the late 2nd Kumar. Tenants from different parts of the estate, and also outsiders, are daily coming in large numbers, visiting the Sadhu and giving out that he is the 2nd Kumar. His presence has created a very great sensation in the locality.

Late evening the sadhu, being questioned and hard-pressed by several hundreds of tenants, at last gave out that his name is Ramendra N. Roy and his father's name was Rajendra N. Roy and his nurse was Aloka Dhai. After this the Sadhu fainted, and the numerous people present began to utter "Hullu-dhani" and "Jay-dhani". All the people who were present at the time were convinced that he was no other than the 2nd Kumar, and the tenants present gave out that even if the estate could not accept him, they would stand by him and maintain his position. Finding the gravity of the situation, the inmates of the houses of late Srj. Indumoyee Devi and Jyotirmoyee Devi informed Mohini Babu and Mr. Banerjee that the sadhu had given out such and such things. They forthwith proceeded to the house of Srj. Jyotirmoyee Devi and enquired about the matter. The sadhu did not meet them. They went there this morning again, but the sadhu sent intimation that he would see them this afternoon. The inmates of the house threatened the sadhu that he was incurring great responsibility by expressing in words and by conduct that he is the 2nd Kumar, and that he cannot leave the place without giving the full particulars about his identity and past history. Under the circumstances a sifting enquiry about the sadhu is urgently needed. From morning crowds of people have been flocking to see the sadhu, and the excitement and sensation is so great that the matter may take a serious turn unless necessary steps are taken promptly.

I am awaiting your instructions in the matter.<sup>11</sup>

Copies of the letter were forwarded to Bibhabati Debi, the second rani, in Calcutta as well as to the other two ranis for their information.

Four days later, on May 9, there appeared in *The Englishman* of Calcutta the following letter to the editor:

Sir, you published on Saturday morning a report sent by the Associated Press from Dacca under the heading "Dacca Sensation" to the effect that a person has suddenly appeared who claims to be the Second Kumar of Bhowal, who died twelve years ago.

The late Kumar was attended in his last illness by Lieutenant-Colonel Calvert, the then Civil Surgeon of Darjeeling, and the death certificate was given by Mr. Crawford, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling.

I was personally present at the time of the death of the late lamented Kumar and attended the funeral service along with numerous friends and relatives of the deceased who were then present in Darjeeling. The Rani of Bhowal, the widow of the Second Kumar, who is my sister, is still alive. Yours etc., S. N. Banerjee.

Meanwhile, in Jaidebpur, streams of people converged every day upon the grounds in front of Jyotirmayi Debi's house to get a glimpse of the sadhu who had now declared himself as Ramendra Narayan, the second kumar of Bhowal. He had dispensed with the appurtenances of a mendicant, and wore ordinary clothes, although his hair and beard were still long. Each day he would sit on a chair in front of the house, talking to people who came up to him, answering questions, sharing old memories and often weeping. The daily register kept at the Jaidebpur police station has the following entries for these days:

10-5-21. 3 P.M. No rain during the past 24 hours. The Sadhu who declared at Jaidebpur Rajbari that he was the Second Kumar of Bhowal is still staying there. Large numbers of men are coming to see him from far and near. Most of the general public believe that he is the Rajkumar.

11-5-21. . . . A Sannyasi has come to Jaidebpur. Large numbers of men are coming and going from various parts to see him, and 15 annas of the people [that is, fifteen out of sixteen; 16 annas = 1 rupee] are expressing the opinion that he is the Second Kumar, Ramendra Narayan Chaudhury.

13-5-21. 2-30 P.M. Information has been received that a big meeting will be held on Sunday next of the general body of the tenantry to accept as the Kumar the Sannyasi who declared his identity as the Second Kumar.<sup>12</sup>

The police information was correct. An open meeting was called for Sunday May 15, to be held in front of the Jaidebpur Rajbari. That day, people started coming in from early morning from distant parts of Dacca and

Mymensingh districts. The railway company even ran special trains to Jaidebpur, and still people were hanging from the footboards and windows. By the afternoon, well over ten thousand people had collected; some said later that there were as many as fifty thousand. The meeting began with Adinath Chakrabarti of Barishaba, a prominent talukdar (tenureholder under a zamindar) of Bhawal, in the chair. He explained in detail the background of the present sensation, recounting the story of the second kumar's death, the rumors concerning his cremation, the recent appearance of the sadhu in Dhaka, his visit to Jaidebpur, the questions that were put to him by his sisters and other relatives, the marks on his body, and his admission a few days ago that he was indeed the second kumar. Everyone who had seen and spoken to the sannyasi, Adinath asserted, was convinced that he was Kumar Ramendra Narayan Roy. Only a few of his relatives, for their own selfish reasons, were still resisting this idea. But the talukdars and tenants of the Bhawal estate were united in their conviction that their beloved second kumar had returned. They must now come forward and declare their belief in public. Adinath asked everyone who believed that the sannyasi was the second kumar to raise their hands. Thousands of hands went up in assent. He then asked if there was anyone who doubted the identity of the sannyasi. Not a single hand was raised. Purna Chandra Chatterjee then moved a resolution in the name of the assembled talukdars and tenants of the Bhawal Raj that they had recognized the sannyasi and were convinced that he was Kumar Ramendra Narayan Roy, the second son of the late Raja Rajendra Narayan Roy. The resolution was passed without any dissent. It was decided that copies would be sent to the governor, the Board of Revenue, the divisional commissioner, and the district magistrate. As the summer sun began to descend toward the horizon, the man everyone had come to see was brought to the meeting seated on an elephant. Slowly, the elephant circled the dais, to the accompaniment of cheers from the crowd. "Jay, Madhyam Kumar ki jay!" they said. "Victory to the second kumar!" Suddenly, a huge storm started to blow, as it was liable to do at this time of the year, followed by torrential rains. The meeting broke up, but by then everyone had had their fill of the excitement.

A few days later, an association was formed under the name of the Bhawal Talukdar and Praja Samiti to raise funds "to establish the Kumar in his legal position by legal means." The association was presided over by Digendra Narayan Ghosh of Harbaid, a prominent talukdar of Bhawal.

On May 29, 1921, some three weeks after his declaration of identity, the former sannyasi now claiming to be the second kumar of Bhawal came to Dhaka and, accompanied by two lawyers and a local zamindar, appeared before Lindsay, the collector, in his house. After he left, Lindsay made the following record of the interview.

The sadhu came to-day about 11 A.M. with Babu Sarat Ch. Chakrabarti, Babu Peari Lal Ghosh and, I think, the Kasimpur Manager. He said he wants some arrangement made about his estate so that the tenants could be benefitted. I explained that the Board of Revenue must hold him not to be the Second Kumar as they have carried on the work of the estate on that assumption for many years. I said he could prove his identity in court in a suit, or if he preferred to produce his evidence before me I was willing to record it. He agreed to the latter procedure, and the pleaders said they would file a petition tomorrow for such an enquiry. They asked that the Board might pay the expenses and I replied that if they put in a petition to that effect I would get orders on it.

In reply to my questions the sadhu (Second Kumar) told me that he had been ill for 2–4 days of pneumonia before he lost consciousness in Darjeeling. He could not remember the name of the house in Darjeeling where he lived, he went from Jaidebpur to Darjeeling, that he was not ill at Jaidebpur except from a boil just above his right knee which occurred within 10 days of his going, there was no special cause of this boil, he did not remember when he was in Calcutta before that, that he recovered his senses in the jungle in the hills in the presence of one sadhu who has since been his Guru, that the sadhu said he had been senseless for 3–4 days, that the sadhu told him that he had found him lying on the ground as if he had been thrown there and that his body was wet with rain as it had been raining before he found him, that the sadhu did not say whether he found him in the day or at night.

The sadhu agreed that the rents should be collected as usual by the estate officers and the pleaders urged that the tenants would have less objection to paying if the receipts were given in Bibhabati's name leaving out that of her dead husband.<sup>13</sup>

On the margin of this report, Lindsay also made the following observation: "The sadhu appeared to be an up-country [man] with a beautifully clear skin with no sign of syphilis."<sup>14</sup>

Five days later, on June 3, the following public notice was issued in Bengali in the Bhawal estate.

All the tenants of the Bhawal estate are hereby informed that the Board of Revenue has got conclusive proof that the dead body of the second kumar of Bhawal was burnt to ashes in the town of Darjeeling twelve years ago. It follows therefore that the sadhu who is calling himself the second kumar is an impostor. Anyone who will pay him rent or subscriptions will do so at his own risk.

With the permission of the Board of Revenue, J. H. Lindsay, Collector, Dacca.<sup>15</sup>

Officials and employees of the Bhawal estate were instructed to publicize this notice as widely as possible and not to do or say anything that might add to the belief that the second kumar had returned. On June 10, a week after it was issued, when the notice was sought to be announced in public at a place called Mirzapur, the assembled crowd protested in a somewhat less than orderly fashion, forcing the police to open fire; a man called Jhumar Ali was shot to death.

The battle lines had been drawn. People were making up their minds on whether or not they believed that the sannyasi was really Ramendra Narayan, the second kumar of Bhawal. For the next twenty-five years, as events would unfold around this sensational case, there would be few in the whole of Bengal, regardless of region, class, gender, or social status, who would not come to hear of the Bhawal sannyasi and his claim. Most would also have an opinion on whether the sannyasi was really the second kumar of Bhawal.