

CONCLUSION

The society of Malda was composed of numerous and diverse social groups. The population belonged to different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, to various creeds and religious communities. The district in fact, as our study has shown, represented a prototype of a colonized economy and society. The changes introduced by the Permanent Settlement affected the position of the *raiya*s, the cultivators of land. The *raiya*s of Malda were differentiated more or less. Differentiation among the peasantry with the predominance of the small peasants is thus focused in the agrarian structure of the district in the nineteenth century and the same picture can also be found in the twentieth century. During our period of study progressive enhancement of rent as well as illegal enhancement of rent were fairly common in Malda. The tribal people was the most susceptible to pressure by the landlords. It propelled the sharecroppers towards indebtedness. Its volume was steadily increased during the first three decades of the twentieth century. It ultimately led to alienation of land from agriculturists to non-agriculturists. A process of depeasantization was thus set in the scenario in Malda, particularly in the tribal belt of Barind region.

The *santals* lost their lands to the *mahajans* not only in consequences of their debt to them. They were dispossessed of their land, as our study indicates, also by means of deliberate fraud committed on them, which was possible because of their complete ignorance of laws relating to occupancy rights. The loss of land meant to them loss of identity. Their search for identity led the *santals* to initiate movement to lift the members up towards the custom of the dominant society by emulating them. Attempts were thus made by the Barind *santals* to revise tribal custom through waves of conversion to Hinduism. Yet they did not entirely identified with the Hindus. The Satyam Shibam movement was a striking case of self-reform among *santals*, in interaction with ideas and images from outside, but according to terms decided by the *adivasi* leader. With the passage of time, this religious movement swivels into a political nature, confronting the British government. It has been shown that the element of religion, though used sometimes as

ideology or an ingredient of organization build-up, was never a determining force in the revolt. The revolt of Jitu Santal was against an entire system of oppression.

It has been shown that the town-based nationalist leadership lacked adequate integration with this movement of the *santal* sharecroppers, aiming to establish Santal Raj. The Congress leadership at the district level failed to evolve any programme oriented towards the subordinate groups and classes at the base. Between 1920 and 1944, the Congress played decisive roles in articulating anti-British sentiments because the Congress's political basis had been consolidated with the incorporation of a large section of tenure holders who articulated their anti-British role through participation in the institutions of colonial governance in the localities. By articulating the class interests of the broad range of tenure holders, the Malda Congress postulated its own version of political struggle which, though militant vis-à-vis imperialism, opposed movements potentially harmful to the existing socio-economic order. As a result, the local Congress based on rural property successfully conducted anti-British movements that displayed considerable militancy without correspondingly upsetting the existent pattern of class relationships in rural society.

It was against such a dichotomy in the Congress politics, radical views within the district Congress began to develop which led to the emergence of a "Left" trend and ultimately to the formation of the district unit of the Communist Party. The Krishak Sabha organized successful Hat Tola movement at different areas like Nababganj, Ratua, Mathurapur and Old Malda. The successful agitation against the arbitrary toll collection provided great impetus to the peasant movement. The broad peasant unity shown during the movement assumed a new dimension a few years later when the district of Malda witnessed a more militant type of peasant movement that came to be known as the Tebhaga Movement. But the story of Malda suggests that the Communists too had their own weaknesses and confusion. So the radical potential created by the Left and the popular forces could not develop into reality.

However, the most significant development that decisively shaped Malda politics in the decades before the 1947 partition was undoubtedly the emergence of Muslims as a district socio-cultural group, and their importance in the political arena with the introduction of the 1932 Communal Award. The emergence of a new sense of identity among the Malda Muslims may be traced back to a series of religious reform movements. The prominent among these were the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah (erroneously called Indian Wahabism). The Wahabi State Trials in the Malda Court created a sensation among the urban educated Muslim community. It was reflected in the argument of the Maldah Mohammedans Association in favour of *Islami Bangla*. The percentage of Muslim participation in the Swadeshi Movement in Malda was quite negligible. It has been shown in our study that the relationship between the two major communities in Malda was at least, until the end of the second decade of the present century, free from any tension and conflict. However, in the thirties, signs of tension were clearly discernible in the local scenario. The caste consolidation programme in Malda, initiated chiefly under Hindu Sabha and Hindu Mahasabha auspices, created tension in the local political scenario. The Muslim League activists were not sitting on the fence. Often they rose to the occasion and gave provocation to intensify communalism to serve their vested interest. Thus, in the 1940s Hindu-Muslim communal and political rivalry became acute in Malda. Mutual suspicion and distrust loomed large on the horizon. The process culminated in the construction of a Muslim block and consequently the 'othering' of the Hindus.