

**MINOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE LANGUAGE
OF POLITICS IN LATE COLONIAL BENGAL(1921- 1947);
ATTITUDE, ADJUSTMENT AND REACTION**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL**

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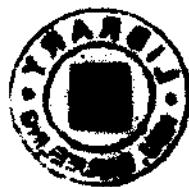
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Certified that the Ph.D. thesis prepared by Koushiki Dasgupta on **Minor Political Parties and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial Bengal (1921-1947); Attitude, Adjustment and Reaction** embodies the result of her original study and investigation under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this study is the first of its kind and is in no way a reproduction of any other research work.

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DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the thesis entitled **MINOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICS IN LATE COLONIAL BENGAL (1921- 1947); ATTITUDE, ADJUSTMENT AND REACTION** being submitted to the University of North Bengal in partial fulfillment for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in History is an original piece of research work done by me and has not been published or submitted elsewhere for any other degree in full or part of it.

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Contents

Page No.

Abbreviations

1. Acknowledgement.....	1-2
2. Introduction.....	3 - 18
3. Chapter I –The Test of Gandhism and Factionalism In Bengal Politics: The Swarajist Phase.....	19 - 67
4. Chapter II-Sectarian Politics and the Minor Political Parties-Early 1920s-1932.....	68-144
5. Chapter III—Popular Politics and the Minor Political Parties : 1920s to 1939.....	145-255
6. Chapter IV---Minor political Parties and Bengal Politics : 1939-1947.....	256-352
7. Conclusion.....	353-361
8. Appendices	362-394
9. Select Bibliography.....	395-423

Abbreviations

ABP	Amrita Bazar Patrika
AICC	All India Congress Committee
BPCC	Bengal Provincial Congress Committee
BPML	Bengal Provincial Muslim League
CPI	Communist Party of India
GB	Government of Bengal
GI	Government of India
Home Poll	Home Political
I B	Intelligence Branch
KPP	Krisak Praja Party
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
WPP	Workers' and Peasants' Party

Acknowledgement

I deem it my honour and profound duty to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to all those who rendered their valuable services and cooperation during the course of my research and preparation of the present thesis. First of all I express my sincere gratitude to my Supervisor, Dr. I.Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal, under whose able guidance this work has got the shape in the present form. I am benefitted from his continuous encouragement, scholarly guidance and timely suggestions all the way through my research work.

I can not forget the services I have received from the staff members of National Archives, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi, West Bengal State Archives, National Library, Calcutta, Uttarpara Jai Krishna Public Library, Institute of Social Science Library, Calcutta, North Bengal University Library and Ajay Bhaban Library, New Delhi. My special sense of gratitude is due to all those party workers who have provided books, reports and important party document which enriched my understanding of the theme of this dissertation.

I extent my heartiest thanks to all the teachers who were associated with my P.G Studies in the Department of History, University of North Bengal. I specially recall the contributions of Prof J Kar, Prof T. K Roychoudhury, Prof Mrs. M. Bhattacharya, Prof. Mrs. C. Chakraborty, Prof. A.G Ghosh, Dr. K. Bandhyopadhyay, Dr.A. Bagchi and Prof R. Roy Sanyal who have helped me some way or other to develop this Ph.D dissertation. I express my sincere gratitude to Prof A. G Ghosh and Dr. K. Bandhyopadhyay who had focused on some new areas of the history of modern Bengal during the time of my P.G Studies. I also wish to thank Sri Binoy Garg and Jatin Upadhyay of the All India Hindu Mahasabha office, New Delhi, for their kind help and assistance. My sincere thanks are also due to Mr Gokul Roy, Karandighi (MLA, All India Forward Block),Dr Srikumar Mukherjee,Itahar, MLA,CPI and a Minister, Government of West Bengal, and Sri Satya Ranjan Das,((Raiganj) a dedicated scholar of regional history of North Bengal for their support and assistance in course of my study. For infusing necessary inspiration and encouragement I deem it my sincere duty to record my thanks to Prof Ranjan Chakraborty, Department of History,

Jadavpur University and for proving valuable suggestions I wish to pay my heartiest gratitude to Prof Amalendu De, a retired Professor of History, Jadavpur University. Last but not the least I extent my special thanks to all my colleagues of the University of Gour Banga, Malda. I bear a sincere obligation and feel indebted to Prof Gopa Dutta, the honourable Vice Chancellor, University of Gour Banga for her kind support and assistance to me in various circumstances

I might not have completed this work without the support of my parents in every possible manner. Here I want to recall the continuous encouragement and mental support of my beloved mother Smt. Snigdha Dasgupta who passed away early in 2010. This work would not have been completed unless the help of my father Mr. Pallab Dasgupta, once a teacher of Economics, Raiganj College, who has stood by me all the time since my childhood. I must record my thanks to the supreme Lord who always guides me to reach to my destination.

Dated..... 3.1.11

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Introduction

In spite of a considerable number of works on the organized and unorganized forms of politics of pre partition Bengal, there has been a dearth of discussion on the political parties in general. None of the existing literatures reflect Bengal politics in terms of a political process providing scopes for highlighting the language of party politics both in and outside the arena of legislative politics in pre partition Bengal. Most of the writings has dealt either with the growth of nationalist politics under the fold of the Congress or discussed the general political developments in Bengal with a special reference to the course of Muslim politics under the Muslim League. In late colonial Bengal the shift from nationalism to communalism is one of the popular issues for the historians working on it. However, almost all these works are based on the background of all India politics dominated mainly by two major political parties the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. It may be noted that the political language of the minor political parties were not less expressive than the major political parties because at every crucial stage of late colonial Bengal politics these parties appeared with greater potentials of articulating the existing political realities. After the enactment of the Act of 1919 the entire structure of party politics entered into a more responsible phase of decision making. The political parties now became more involved into the task of carrying the weightage of expectations from people to state and took the responsibility of influencing the content of public policy in favour of some set of principles. It was seen that from 1920s some important political personalities took the opportunity of mobilizing popular support in

favour of their respective ideas and political objectives. Until the partition of the province these personalities stayed as the originating spirit of different political developments and to some extent set the pulse of late colonial Bengal politics. Leaders like Chittaranjan Das, A K Fazlul Huq, Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, and Subhas Chandra Bose were the few among others who had contributed in their own way to make their political philosophy more special than their contemporaries. All of these leaders tried to ensure that that any cost the interest of Bengal and Bengalis must be kept unabated in every circumstance. Definitely the shadow of communal preferences sometimes put them under pressure, however, a strong sense of belonging always made them attached with their people and soil. The late colonial politics in Bengal while reflecting the dynamisms of mainstream Indian politics, maintained its essential characters in identical terms. In this process the minor political parties had some definite roles to play.

Ever since the Indian national movement started, Bengal remained the most politically advanced province. It was here that the very necessities of a separate Muslim organization were felt in early 20th century and within the first three decades of the century the Congress continued to grow as the most enterprising political party of the nationalist Indians. The constituency of nationalist politics went beyond the confines of elite politics after the Non cooperation movement (1920-22) and the involbment of a large section of the masses into the nationalist movement put forward the importance of leadership in transforming the ambitions of the masses into an anti colonial national movement. In Bengal the task of articulating the aspirations of the masses was carried on by a numbers of

for Indian National Congress and the Muslim League and the term 'minor' has been used to describe those parties which had tried to function independently out of the influence of the major political parties. Some of these parties were called minor in the sense that they had either originated or worked under the fold of the all India parties and some of them had failed to overlap the politics of the major ones in spite of their independent approach. Side by side a few political parties with national importance had played a secondary role in Bengal politics and they were proved to be minor in comparison to the political action of the major political parties. On virtue of their programmes and party mechanism some of these minor parties were seemed to take a regional character, however, it would be wrong to describe them as a mere regional party because both in regard to the ideology and objectives of these parties successfully attained a national appeal not less than the major all India parties. Numerous studies have been devoted till now on the very politics of the major political parties but no detailed study has been made on the political language of minor political parties on the background of the late colonial Bengal politics. The present subject undertaken for the dissertation work is the study of the minor political parties in Bengal in the late colonial period when the cross currents of different socio political developments widened the spheres of party politics both in the levels of ideology and practice.

In this present discussion a special attention has been given on the relationship of the minor political parties with the major parties because any discussion on the minor parties is likely to be incomplete unless the role of the major political parties is evaluated in that particular occasion. The parties which are taken into consideration are the All India Hindu Mahasabha (1915), Swaraj Party (1922), Workers and Peasants Party (1925), Bengal Muslim Party(1926), Independent Muslim Party (1926), Nationalist Party(1932), Krisak Praja Party(1936), United Muslim Party (1936), Forward Block (1939), and Revolutionary Socialist Party (1941). The emergence of some of these political parties was situational as well as of political necessity. But they did not exist for long and disappeared within a short time. The minor Muslim parties fell in this category. Some other parties even took part in the ministerial process but lacked the spirit and endeavor to sustain itself at the office for a long period of time. Within half a decade or so these parties only remained in paper having no organization or office in the actual sense of the term. The Swaraj Party and the Krisak Praja Party even after some years of extensive political programmes and activities lost their charisma to compete other political forces and in the midst of various vicissitudes they became almost out of the political scene. A parallel trend could be seen in respect of the communist movement in Bengal. Although socialist group avowing socialism appeared in India on the eve of the October revolution, systematic communist mobilization started after a considerable period of time. Following the establishment of the Communist Party of India in 1920, communists groups emerged in different parts of India. It can be pointed out that no important theoretical and strategical innovations were made on the part of the Indian communists rather it anticipated several

important tendencies manifested in the international communist movement. Changing ideological position and practical contestations of the Indian communists resulted in the emergence of many communist parties. Official restrictions on the communist movement also forced the communists to form minor communist groups or to make use of the platform of the Congress for practical necessities. All of the mushroom communist parties claimed to be the real communist party although factional differences and ideological battle over some tactical issues arrested the growth of a consolidated communist party until a considerable period of time. Some of the minor communist parties had either worked as a 'transitional party' or as a legal cover of the out-lowed communist party. The Workers and Peasants Party fell in the first category while the Bengal Labour Party was proved to be the ideal legal platform for carrying on communist activity into its due course of action. Apart from this two, the Young Comrade League, Communist League (later renamed as the Revolutionary Communist Party of India), Samyraj Party, Indian Proletarian Revolutionary Party, Chattra Yuba Samsad, Bolshevik Party and a few other communist groups emerged time to time in Bengal. Most of these parties either merged with the Communist Party later or continued its independent existence for some years. Unlike the minor communist parties, the Forward Block and the Revolutionary Socialist Party appeared as a challenge to the existing state of Gandhian Congress politics and the shifting tendencies of the community movement respectively. But these parties failed to reach to the point of expectation for a numbers of tactical mistakes and situational compulsions. It was the situational compulsion what necessitated the slow but steady development of another political party with an aim to socio

cultural movement to protect the community interests of the Hindus. In its silent bid to be the alternative of the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha faced numbers of constraints in Bengal at first but ultimately it stood as the sole minor party to capture a significant place for itself at the time of taking the final decision on the fate of Bengal in 1947.

One question becomes very much pertinent here that whether in a colonial situation a political party evolved automatically as a natural reaction of the existing socio political system or these parties had emerged in a created phenomenon or in a given political situation. How far a party would be able to represent the popular will or to what extent a party would be successful in transforming the existing socio economic imbalance depends largely on the response of the party to many voices of the nation be it a class, caste, an ideology or even a region. In this light it may be noted that the working of party system within the colonial framework was directed towards a one party domination on the basis of its superior potentials to influence and accommodate all shades of opinion and different interest groups. Simultaneously the factional and intra party group competition might be at work as a normal tendency of single party domination. In a colonial situation the domination of one nationalist party could easily be exposed before the challenges of some outer nationalist forces seeking for legitimacy into the political mainstream and the minor political parties might be taken here as an example of this type of trend subject to experiments from the nationalist and counter nationalist forces.

The socio economic structure of Bengal was one of the determinants of political developments in Bengal. Right from the introduction of representative government the predominance of the Muslim peasantry under Hindu landlords remained a crucial factor of East Bengal politics. This combination was very much useful to transform economic grievances of the peasantry to communalizing the class relation of the peasantry. This sort of manipulations was not autonomous in nature. The interplay of party politics and the existing realities of economic differences between a Muslim peasant and a Hindu zamindar or moneylender often employed some extra territorial mechanisms to keep the situation under control. The minor political parties specially those worked mainly on the popular realm of politics fell within the quandary of deviating religion from economic grievances because in most of the cases they failed to identify those issues from the institutional level of politics or faced a serious setback when corresponding to the ideology of religion with that of an ideology of class struggle or class confrontation. In case of the minor communist parties it happened to be very common.

After the First World War, Mahatma Gandhi and a new group of leaders took command of the Indian National Congress. The acceptance of Gandhi as the new mass leader was not same in all the provinces. In Bengal Gandhi was challenged mainly on ideological grounds. The confrontation was with groups or parties like the revolutionaries and the communists and some times with personalities like Chittaranjan Das or Subhas Chandra Bose. Chhittaranjan Das led the first opposition against Gandhi. The establishment of the Swaraj Party with the programmes of council entry in defiance of the no changers indeed set an attack on the

Gandhian dogma for the first time in Bengal. In the first chapter it has been discussed how the Swaraj Party had started its journey in Bengal as the first important minor political party and why Chittaranjan Das's ambitious project on Hindu Muslim unity went in vein within a few years after his death. All the more in spite of the Swaraj Party being an integral part of the Congress, Chittaranjan Das did not enjoy the party strength behind him during his enthusiastic ventures in activating the Bengal Pact (1923). This chapter has sought to answer the pertinent questions like why did the Swaraj Party fail to check the alienation of the Muslim Swarajists particularly after the death of Chittaranjan Das and what kind of relation did the party share with the Congress and the other existing minor political parties of Bengal! On the whole this chapter intends to make an evaluation of Swarajists politics when the actual possibilities of Gandhian politics were put at a test on the ground of intense factionalism and communal animosities. It was expected that the party would be able to politicize the masses by supporting some real demand of the people. The validity of such politics lasted as long as it could sustain the spirit of anti British agitation but the narrow vested interests emerged within the rank and file of the party and thereby spoiled the actual relevance of this party before the electorate. The real test of Gandhism depended on to what extent the party could utilize an autonomous subjectivity of unanticipated mass action while exercising a different power relation conducted through an institutional language of political culture. This chapter is an attempt to make some practical conclusion on the utility of the Swaraj Party and to make an evaluation on the legacy it had left for the critical time ahead.

During the entire period of the operation of the Diarchy (1921-1937), the Muslim League failed to participate in the council on its own and the leadership of Muslim politics remained in the hands of some Muslim leaders who had shown immense enthusiasm on their part to protect Muslim interests within the legislature at any cost. With the sudden withdrawal of the Non Cooperation movement the sectarian forces who had been forced to lie down because of the mass involvement in the Non Cooperation movement, now came out from their pockets and raised some new issues of communal discontent like Music before mosque or cow sacrifice including that of the Suddhi or Tabligh and Sanghathan or Tanzeem. But no positive steps were taken by the Swarajist Muslims and the Hindu leaders to educate the masses on the very nature of the colonial rule and divert their grievances into a struggle against imperialism. In absence of such programmes sectarian forces easily mobilized the masses on behalf of their political propaganda. An unwarranted fear of Muslim domination motivated a section of the Hindu Bengalis for protecting their interests. Subsequent efforts were made by these Hindus with the establishment of Hindu Sabha in 1924. The activities of the Hindu Sabha under the agencies of the Hindu Mahasabha stimulated further sectarian tensions all over the province and gradually mutual suspicion and hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims got shaped into violent communal riots. The constitutional developments starting from the Act of 1919 created genuine hopes among the Bengali Muslims as if they were coming to power. These hopes and aspirations opened another dimension of Bengal politics in which a few Muslim political parties had an opportunity to get crystallized. The interplay of the Hindu- Muslim politics in the 20s of the 20th century presents a

picture of growing politicization of the respective electorates along sectarian line although the mechanisms adopted by these two types of politics were different in character and outlook. The Second chapter of the present discussion highlights the mode of sectarian politics in the 20s and early 30s with a special reference to the Hindu and Muslim political parties. This chapter seeks to deal with how in the 20s of the last century the radical spirit of the Hindu Bengalis was transformed into sectarianism and how this sectarian mode of politics took a grip over the peasant politics with the turn of the decade. Even the politics of the so called nationalists and the Swarajists also came to be spotted as one of conflicting class interests between the zamindars and the peasant masses in general at the time of the Tenancy Act Amendment Debate in 1928. From the third decade of the 20th century both the Hindus and the Muslims redefined their identities through a continuous process of making and remaking. What was really exceptional in this period was the development of the communities as mutually conflicting unites which was further consolidated after the introduction of the communal Award in 1932. From late 20s some new political trends appeared in Bengal when the political parties found new constituencies of support with a new narrative of popular politics. During and aftermath of the Non Cooperation movement the Congress leadership successfully promoted the causes of popular misery with a new language of political strategies and from this point the hitherto undefined factors figured the subsequent courses of national movement in India. The Swaraj Party first took the opportunity of radicalizing the horizon of politics by incorporating new actors into the political terrain ,however, caste and religious loyalties of the political participants often led the party into another type of political

mobilization less identified with the notions of popular politics at large. In spite of a general awareness of linking the peasant and working class movement with the wider anti British agitation, the Swaraj Party failed to adopt a concrete agrarian programme and the majority of the Muslim peasantry of East Bengal did not find anything appealing in the programmes and policies of the Swaraj Party. Its general line of maintaining an understanding with the zamindars and the propertied elites prevented any further consolidation of its position among the peasant masses. With the death of Citteranjan Das, the harmful effects of city politics could be visible along with a total disruption of Hindu Muslim joint political ventures. Within a year of his death the Bengal Pact was rejected in 1926, the parting of the Muslims from Swarajist rank and file became almost a possibility. The slow inroad of the terrorists the Swaraj Party with a certain Hindu ideology and the gradual submission of the Swarajist leaders to the terrorist groups not only spoiled its secular image but also gave the communal Muslims a chance to make their presence more visible against the Swarajists in Bengal. The pattern of Congress-Swarajist voting in the Tenancy Amendment Act of 1928 completely shattered the hopes for Hindu Muslim cooperation in Bengal and the necessity of a new Muslim organization was felt to protect the interest of the Muslim peasants. Accordingly the *Praja* (tenant) movement was launched in 1929 with the establishment of the Nkhil Banga Praja Samity. In 1936 the Samity changed its name into Krisak Praja Party (KPP) under the dynamic leadership of A.K. Fazlul Huq. Right from its inception this party had sustained its ideological fight against non Bengali Muslim political domination in Bengal specially in the Bengal Muslim League securing the support of the Muslim landlords

and business interests. It was due to the personal popularity and the popular political programmes of the KPP that it completely swept the polls in the election of 1937 under the new constitutional system of 1935. The attention of the third chapter is on how the understanding between Muslim Jotedar and non Bengali Muslim elites led to the absorption of the KPP by the Muslim League after 1937. Initially the KPP had emerged as the sole political organization to capture the imagination of the peasants in an uniform manner so that a sense 'commonness' could have been achieved against the zamindars and moneylenders. The gradual pre-eminence of the KPP over the political arena itself signaled some major shifts in the level of popular politics in agrarian Bengal. The most important one was the ascendancy of one Praja identity over other corresponding identities so that the lower strata of the peasantry could at best be identified with the higher echelon of the peasantry within same bracket. However, it did not work for long. This chapter seeks to highlight that why the KPP failed to handle the political language of a peasant class properly at a time when the possibilities of articulating the dual identities of 'Muslim' and 'peasant' in a same discourse was very much present in Bengal and how the immediate class enemy of a poor peasant took the position of his liberator by virtue of being a minor political party which had the possibility to become a dominant political party not less important than the position of the Congress and the Muslim League of the subsequent period. Side by side the communist failure to address the class issues has been discussed in this chapter with a special emphasis on the Communist -KPP relation in the realm of agrarian politics. It may be mentioned in this regard that a number of minor pro communist parties were active in the popular front

from late 1920s. In order to understand the real mode of peasant politics in the 20s and the 30s of 20th century, it becomes necessary to make an evaluation of the minor communist parties working on the popular field. With the formation of the Workers and Peasant Party in 1926, a large number of terrorist turned communists stepped in the popular political area and within a few years similar parties had evolved with different objectives and programmes on the communist line of thinking. These parties had served as a transitional link between revolutionary terrorism and communism in a period when it was almost impossible to work in the name of an original communist party due to a numbers of external compulsions and internal difficulties. These parties had their own revolutionary programmes for the workers also. However, factional squabbles and organizational weakness prevented any consolidation of their poison in different areas of the province. Among a numbs of m parties, special emphasis has been given on the student organizations, the working class parties like the Indian Proletarian Revolutionary Party, Samyaraj Party, Young Comrade League and others. IN comparison with their strength among the workers, the role of these parties remained marginal among the peasants. Apart from a few East Bengal districts those minor communist parties with a peasant political orientation failed to overlap the politics of the Krishak Samities controlled by the Cøngress and the KPP in the 30s. Interestingly the anti zamindar sentiment of the Kisan Sabha made a common ground with the KPP who fought the election on the same cause in 1937. However KPP's zeal to keep the intermediary landed interests did not fit well with the Kisan Sabha who unlike the KPP tried for the total socio economic empowerment of the peasantry so that they could fight for their cause independently.

Nevertheless the minor communist parties and the Kisan Sabha could not become an alternative of the KPP in agrarian politics of Bengal and more or less continued to move for specific issues of peasant discontent in several occasions. The Third chapter of this present study leads to a general overview of the situation how in absence of a concrete radical language of politics, communal forces had a grip over the popular political file and why the minor political parties failed to check the tendencies of whole scale communalization of popular politics in late colonial Bengal. Beside this the mutual relationship and the political adjustments of different minor political parties has been discussed as a natural corollary to the remaking and unmaking of politics in the 1930s of the 20th century.

In the last chapter of this study specific issues have been taken to assess the nature of politics of the leftist parties at the of the Second World War. Here an attempt has been made to trace the main facades of Bengal politics so that the political commitment and circumstantial obligations of the minor political parties could best be viewed with reference to the political maneuverings of the major political parties like the Congress and the Muslim League. The rise of the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Forward Block was the most noteworthy event of this period. The shifting allegiance of the Communist Party from National Front to Peoples' War policy added new dimensions in the political scenario of Bengal in the wake of the Second World War.. In this chapter these issues have been focused to make an understanding of Bengal politics before and after the war so that the changing character of the political parties could be viewed as an indicator of future course of politics in Bengal. In this regard ,one

may recall the condition of the Radical Democratic Party, the Congress Socialist Party and the KPP which seem to have been defunct in terms of their ideology and political goal. However, the political bequest of these parties in Bengal remained as much as exciting like the Hindu Mahasabha or the Muslim League after the election of 1946. The role played by the Forward Block in relation to the other parties specially that of the KPP and the Hindu Mahasabha after 1941 has been analyzed in this chapter meticulously because the Forward Block seems to have been the single party in Bengal fit for fighting communal forces. But in the light of the available documents it appears that it failed to serve the historical purpose at this crucial juncture of Indian history. Interestingly none of the minor political parties were able to respond to the important political issues which were going to decide the fate of Bengal in 1946-47. At the time of communal clashes almost all the minor political parties remained silent and even the voices of the popular minor parties did not sound as may be expected. Most of the minor parties who had taken an important role in the 30s, failed to be a decisive factor in Bengal especially on the question of an independent sovereign Bengal proposed by some leaders from both the Hindus and the Muslims. It is a matter to be noted that most of the minor parties which had emerged in certain historical moments with definite aims and objectives proved to be either indifferent or having no voice at the time of the ultimate crisis. Nevertheless, it is true that at the final year before partition some of these parties were historically non-existent. The last chapter makes an investigation why the active minor political parties could not raise their voices over the politics of the major parties and simply played a role as a silent spectator at the time of the final catastrophe in 1947. Keeping in view these issues this study has attempted to present the



role of the minor political parties from 1921 (when the working of the Bengal legislative Council started under the rule of the Diarchy) to 1947. Within this period historically one may experience the situational political adjustment of the minor political parties according to their self-seeking attitudes and on any political issue either national or provincial, they appear to be perplexed. It is likely that had there been any positive response from the minor political parties, the future of Bengal as well as the identity of Bengalis would have been different and the history of Bengal might have been written otherwise.

Chapter I

The Test of Gandhism and Factionalism in Bengal Politics; The Swarajist Phase

The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s as the guiding spirit of the Indian National movement has since been a subject of scholarly discussions. A good number of historical literatures have devoted itself in examining Gandhi and his 'ism' from different point of views. But it can unanimously be said that at the beginning of 1920s largely because of the all pervading leadership of Gandhi, the various isolated movements against the British rule came under the banner of a strong national organization although some indefeasible controversies soon came up to the popular front on the questions that how far the re-oriented Gandhian Congress would be successful in mobilizing the conflicting interests of the country including regional, sectional and communal by a settled political ideology. This heresy of politics soon acquired a hold over the regional sphere and in Bengal, politically the most advanced province, 'Gandhi seemed to have been challenged mainly on ideological grounds'¹ In this perspective it is important to look over the key tenets of this new type of politics on the basis of which Ghandhism was put on a test in Bengal.

In Bengal a large number of Congress followers became attached with some minor political parties which were more less Ghandhite in attitude

but more Bengali in nature. Some of these parties were formed on an all India basis; however, its activities were shaped up in Bengal. In this line the Swaraj Party first appeared in 1923 as 'the minority challenging faction within the Congress and an organization running candidates for the legislature outside the preview of the Congress.'²

Mahatma Gandhi moved the Non-Cooperation resolution under the Presidentship of Lala Lajpath Rai at the special session of the Congress held in Calcutta (1st September, 1920). Although it was approved over a qualifying amendment from Bipin Chandra Pal,³ severe opposition came from Chittaranjan Das who was of view that the Congress should not boycott the reformed councils but use them as instruments of struggle.⁴ At Nagpur (December 1920) C R Das tried his best to go up against the ratification on non violent non cooperation but Gandhian charisma won him over. A group of Bengali Congress leaders including C R Das and Bipin Chandra Pal let Gandhi have a test of his political principles. This shift was not a smooth one and a microscopic study is required for a proper understanding of the political heartbeat of the then Bengal. It is true that when Gandhi appeared in Indian politics the spirit of nationalism was more articulate and well groomed in Bengal than in any other parts of India. Long before the advent of Gandhi a strong spirit of militancy arose in the national paradigm of Bengal. In the beginning of the 20th century the spirit of nationalism it received a kind of institutional expression all the way through the formation of a large number of local *samities*. They were convinced that independence could never be realized without a well spread national struggle and without it, the programmes of national development would be a futile one. They in general carried the

tradition of extremism and their ultimate aim was to attempt complete independence by any means. Gandhi wanted to merge the Indian national movement with his experiment with non-violence because according to him it would help in building up a new social system –the primary requirement for India the objective of attaining independence by hook or crook. Gandhian philosophy of non-violence had little to do with the established militancy in Bengal and unlike the rest of India this characteristic continued in Bengal for a long period of time and gradually passed from ideological level to the institutional level of party politics. It is easy to assume the basic points on which the militant nationalists differed from Gandhi but it is difficult to conclude why the nationalists in Bengal showed a kind of un willing acceptance towards Gandhian model of politics and at institutional level a kind of tumult had emerged purely on methodological ground. In fact Gandhi himself was aware that the people would follow him on tactical ground at first, but the spirit and efficacy of his ideas would soon convert them to a believer not merely a follower only. He admitted in 1942 that, “ If I had started with men who accepted non violence as a creed, I might have ended with myself. Imperfect as I am, I started with imperfect with imperfect men and women and sailed on an uncharted ocean”.⁵ Undoubtly Gandhi introduced what the historians call, the face of mass movement in Indian national movement as well in the Indian national Congress because according to Copland the Congress was synonymous with Indian nationalism.⁶ Bengali nationalists found the new Congress to be used for a nation wide struggle against the British but Gandhian model of politics offered them little than the expectations they already dreamt off and in

the succeeding decades a set of parallel struggles overshadowed Bengal politics in relation to the struggle against imperialism.

Mahatma Gandhi's rise to the Indian National Congress inverted the balance of regional leadership in Indian politics from Bengal and Maharashtra to a wider distribution among the north Indian provinces. The long standing religious and political tradition as has been engineered by the ideas of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda and Aurobinda Ghosh almost acquired a populist character in Bengal and it provided the support base for a nationalist struggle based on national extremism and liberal rationalism.⁷ The imperial stereotype of weak and effeminate Bengalis was out of fashion in the 20th century and the cult of *shakti* was developed into a motivation for the freedom fighters of Bengal. The Gandhian politics 'did not appeal to them except in so far as they were effective in launching a militant mass movement.'⁸ The Bengalis being proud of their cultural achievements searched every possible corner to carry on its exclusiveness but failed to check the tide of Gandhian notions of politics, which reversed the established status quo in politics largely controlled by the Bengal Congress leaders. After 1907 ideological heterogeneity affected Bengal Congress to a greater extent and in the second decade of the 20th century Chittaranjan Das became able to occupy a pivotal position by successfully employing Bengal's cherished tradition of political preponderancy.

It is likely to be noted that the British system of land tenure, lack of industrialization to a greater extent helped in the formation of the Bengali middle class who in virtue of their English education monopolized every

field of public life in Bengal. These people commonly known as *bhadralok*⁹ in Bengali parlance were hailed mainly from the upper caste Hindus and they maintained considerable distance from the agricultural production group. The social stratification in Bengal was largely contributed by the conditions imposed under colonial rule and these classes had a definite impact on the process of political mobilization in Bengal. On the other the disproportionate development of Hindus and Muslims resulted in unique political tensions that the economic grievances of the Muslim peasants gradually obtained an unexpected character. The British consciously drew local factional rivalries into broader communal antagonism by opening up channels for the selected community and caste based units into the metropolitan political world. It can not be ignored that the momentum generated by the Non Cooperation and *Khilafat* movement enabled the Bengal Congress under C R Das to put together a coalition of several distinct forces¹⁰ including Calcutta based politicians to the rural leaders from the both the communities and revolutionaries as well. This indicated a kind of political pragmatism and it offered some alternative discourses to link up the political activities of two different political domains¹¹ by meticulously drawing the series of alliances between Calcutta aristocracy, revolutionary terrorists, rural *bhadralok* with small renter interest, popular peasant leaders and most notably the new Muslim leaders coming out from the wave of *Khilafat* agitation. In this perspective J. H Broomfield pointed out that the period from '1918-1925 was the high point in Muslim involvement in Indian nationalist politics in Bengal.¹² But after the death of C R Das in 1925, the alliance of diversified political interests failed to sustain its impact on Bengal and the political language of Bengal came to be expressed in a

conflict between metropolis and its hinterland in the form of a power politics between Calcutta based politicians mainly from the Hindus and the local Muslim leaders who were searching for a faithful ally among the low caste politicians from the districts. Its true that the gap between metropolitan politics and that of the local one was threatened with factional disputes while the growing ideological and methodological clashes between the Indian and provincial leadership failed to sustain the basic elements of common Bengali viewpoint and eventually a second partition of Bengal became inevitable, if not unavoidable. But one cannot deny that with the emergence of C. R Das new experimentations with politics set in motion in Bengal. The Bengal Congress under the leadership of C R Das went on its own path for launching a revolutionary mass movement far beyond the Gandhian model of Non-Cooperation. Das in any angle was not anti Gandhi or his movements rather Das's own approach towards the movements not only exposed the charisma of long intellectual and exclusive tradition of his soil but also his recorded credentials to form a mass political organization.

Gandhism at Crossroads

In a special session of the Congress at Calcutta it was declared that the goal of the Congress should be the attainment of *swaraj* by legitimate and powerful means. Mean while Gandhi negotiated with the *Khilafat* leaders and chalked out a programme of Non-Cooperation including boycott of the new reformed council. These programmes were not welcomed with acclamation in Bengal, except the support of some staunch *khilafatists*. It is interesting to note that according to one report, out of a total of a total

5873 registered delegates only 2753 voted and of the Bengal delegates 551 supported his resolution and 395 opposed.¹⁴ In fact Das had received the prize of his Muslim alliance that the report of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry committee referred, "In the Subject committee all Mohammedan members except Mr Jinnah voted with the Mahatma, while many prominent non Muslim nationalists supported Mr Das who led the opposition to Mahatmaji."¹⁵ On the other, Gandhi managed to command preeminence through his non Bengali support that the *Bengali* wrote "... the small majority in favour of Mr. Gandhi's resolution was determined by the votes of Marwari and Hindustani communities."¹⁶ Though this Calcutta session proved to be a triumph for Gandhi but it was not a defeat for the Bengalis because they only compromised on some fundamental points of Gandhi's programmes like a non-violent Non-Cooperation movement against the British. At the regular Congress session held at the end of December 1920, Das and Gandhi came to a more concrete understanding.

From the Nagpur Congress Gandhi became what Jawaharlal Nehru called the 'permanent super president of the Congress'.¹⁷ But C R Das started his journey on an independent path with an assurance from Gandhi that he would be free to pursue his own political programme.¹⁸ that he could shape the non-cooperation campaign in whatever way he wanted to do in Bengal. In fact the Nagpur session accepted the resolution based on the terms of Das-Gandhi pact.¹⁹ It contained Das's proposal of making *swaraj* the goal of the impending struggle and organizing peasants and labourers under the Congress with the withdrawal of the council boycott clause. What C.R Das and his followers opposed was basically the

methods by which Gandhi wanted to start his Non-Cooperation movement. They found no justification on the sacrifices of the professional and service classes instead of the big business merchants and the common masses as a whole. The main point of difference between this two centered round the question of using mass campaigns as a weapon to reach the goal. What Gandhi wanted, was to push the government institutions in redundancy by restraining *satyagraha* but Das wanted to “work out the principle of non cooperation from within the councils” and for this purpose “work should be under taken in all directions to that a call for the enforcement of the complete programme may be made within the shortest time.”²⁰ Gandhi’s victory in the Calcutta session resulted in the withdrawal of twenty-four Bengali nationalists under Das’s leadership from the council election, indifferent to the resolution passed by the Congress. Das and his followers never wanted to divide the nationalist spirit emerged under the Gandhian leadership and Das tried to mobilize opposition to Gandhi on the basis of a more radical programme judged by its practicability. His intention was to modify Gandhi’s non-cooperation programme according to the norms of a strong diplomatic political action by reducing the moralistic touches from it. In opposition to Das a small Gandhian group emerged in Bengal in around Jitendralal Banerjee and Shyamsundar Chakrabarty whose attraction was more to Gandhi than to other regional leader in Bengal. Other Ghandhians included P C Ghosh, Suresh Banerjee and Nipendra Chandra Banerjee. This last man being a Gandhian by heart always retained doubted about non violence and he believed that it was difficult for a Bengali *shatka* to follow Gandhi from teeth to toe.²¹ It was obvious that many of the Gandhites in Bengal never became free from the

ambivalence on non violence because the spirit of militancy prevailing in Bengal politics from pre Gandhian period had always put a question mark before the policy of non violence in Bengal. At the time of the special session of the Congress at Calcutta in 1920 the Gandhians of the Bengal Congress gained the support of a section of middle class who were attracted to the policy of opposing council entry after getting being affected by the post war economic depression. The faction under Jitendra Lal Banerjee and Shyam Sundar Chakrabarty managed to gain the Marwari support against Das in the coming session at Nagpur, but Das did not give them a walk over and secure on his behalf the support of the revolutionaries mainly from the *Dacca Anushilan Samity* and this alliance became one of the most land marking decision in the subsequent politics of Bengal Congress.

Das's alliance with the revolutionaries backed him to stand against Gandhi in Bengal. Gandhi on his part showed tremendous farsightedness in implementing a compromise with C R Das thereby overlooking the anti Das stand of Shyam Sundar Chakrabarty, Jatindra Lal Banerjee and the Ali brothers because Das's support was essential for the success of his non-cooperation agenda. Thus for that time being Gandhi's calculated intervention pacified the growing animosity between the two factions of the Bengal Congress. It is noteworthy that Das never surrendered before Gandhi rather he mobilized the masses according to his line of action even sometimes in opposition with Gandhi. Bengal Congress divided between Das and J.L Banerjee failed to provide the basic impetus for a easy progress of the Non Cooperation movement. It was noticed that a very small extent the different items of the non cooperation programme

like giving up offices, titles, boycotting foreign goods, promoting *swadesi*, came to be fulfilled in Bengal ²² and in the middle of 1921 when Das's main opponent Jitendra Lal Banerjee resigned from the Bengal provincial Congress committee, Non Cooperation movement entered into a new phase in Bengal. This phase was basically mastered and supervised by C R Das who successfully consolidated his position over the Congress machinery by drawing up new elements under the orbit of the Congress in Bengal. Under his leadership new currents of Bengal politics seemed to get galvanized when a new group of Muslim leadership was brought into focus along with a growing localization of political tides.²³ Under this network, new political fronts were opened up among the peasants and the laborers. But the abrupt curtailment of the Non-Cooperation movement by Gandhi suddenly altered the entire facade of the movement and Das's efforts faced a halt in Bengal.

This present study does not provide scopes to deal with why and how this movement was left unfinished in Bengal. Without exaggerating this issue one may conclude that the mass campaign which C R Das had done during the movement provided him with a strong support base in Bengal. In spite of a numbers of shortcomings during this movement, Bengal Congress gradually established an unequivocal mastery over the rural electorate of Bengal. The subsequent developments in Bengal politics proved to be successful in organizing what it called the era of representative politics by bringing together two least familiar worlds of politics. The coming phase of council politics scored its success upon this political union specially when the Bengal Congress went under radical changes to fit with a new political environment. In this new age of

council politics the dialect of factionalism began to be shaped not merely on the lines of mutually beneficial patron client network rather a strong sense of ideological pragmatism became the chief operator in manipulating electoral gains.²⁴ The first minor political party i.e. the Bengal branch of the Swaraj Party was established on the second model where the clients or the followers supported it not for petty personal benefits, but in response to the ideology of a particular leader like C R Das. A close look at the Das' recruits in Bengal would expose that three of his young lieutenants Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta (J M Sengupta) of Chiagoing, Birendranath Sasmal (B N Sasmal) of Midnapore and Subhas Bose of Calcutta worked as a second rank leadership under Das. Although Sen Gupta had a great adherence to Gandhim and Subhas Bose, he had shown strong inclination to militant revolutionary spirits. despite his professed obedience to the Gandhian ideology of non violence²⁵ Both of them were seen to make use of the revolutionaries to reinforce their organization in Bengal.

It is likely to be mentioned that after Das's death (1925) the factional fight between Subhas Bose and J M Sen Gupta became too much acute and the sudden death of the later offered Bose a single walk over in Congress, However, the factional political trends had never lost its significance as far as the Bengali village politics was concerned because here the ideological rift between pro Gandhi and anti Gandhi rural political workers continued for a long period of time. It may be pointed out that the waves of factionalism what C R Das had balanced and checked very diplomatically during his lifetime, now went out of control after his death and this sort of factionalism what Gallagher²⁶ had made

responsible for the decline of Congress in Bengal, persisted for long in Bengal. Even it remained very much active behind the emergence of different minor political parties in the coming decades in Bengal. This factor to a large extent also engineered the course of Muslim politics in Bengal though the paradigm was different in case of this backward majority.

The birth of the Swaraj Party might not be viewed as a dramatic one. The spirit of forming a separate party was culminating when Congress entered into a new genre of political action in the 1920s. Immediately after the Gaya session of the Congress (1922) C R Das declared his resignation of the office of the Congress President and on 1st January, 1923 the Swaraj Party was organized within the Congress with C R Das, as President and Motilal Nehru as the secretary of the party. The vulnerability of Das's politics at the Gaya Congress was counterbalanced by the revolutionaries of Bengal but why and how C R Das gained their support was at that time a mystery.²⁷ This nexus, according to the Government was happened to be the 'most dangerous development in Bengal politics.'²⁸ The emergence of the Swaraj party made the no changer Gandhians upset and serious efforts were made on their parts to have a compromise. The draft was finalized and ratified by the Swarajist leadership at the All India Congress Committee meeting at Allahabad 1923, declared that the minority party would cooperate with the majority party for the constructive programme.²⁹ The goal of the party was the attainment of *swaraj* and with the slogan of 'speedy attainment of full Dominion Status.

In the manifesto adopted at Allahabad on 22 February, 1923, it was stated that:

The immediate object of the Party is the speedy attainment of full Dominion Status...The party will set up national candidates throughout the country to contest and secure the seats in the Legislative council and the Assembly....They will, when they are elected, present on behalf of the country, its legitimate demands as formulated by the party...for their acceptance and fulfillment within a reasonable by the Government. If the demands are not grantedoccasion will then arise, for the elected members of this Party, to adopt a policy of uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction within the Council with a view to make the Government through the councils impossible..³⁰

Das moved to win over the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and ‘ by the third quarter of 1923 C R Das had succeeded in capturing the Bengal Congress.³¹The triumph of the Swarajist in the election of Bengal Legislative Council late in 1923 made the Bengal Congress virtually swamped by the pro- changers that the *Statesman* wrote “ Bengal had declared itself Swarajist. In every kind of Bengal constituency, the Swarajists have triumphed”.³² However, the rapid advancement of a minor political party like the Swaraj Party was not possible by one-man leadership only. The composition of this party demonstrated that its success story was written by many yet the actual plot came from C R Das who himself was from the section of upper middle class. Like the other parts of India the more sophisticated upper middle class people drew closer to the Swarajists in Bengal. The so called Big Five Tulsi Goswami, B C Roy, Nirmal Chander Chunder, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Sarat Chandra Bose were the supporting pillar of this party along with some young politicians with hidden potentials. The social homogeneity in its

leadership fortified the party but an unusual and mysterious combination of landed aristocrats, big businessmen, and lawyers proved to be fatal for this party in a long run. This Party paid true attention to the peasants and labour causes. Das's vow of 'swaraj for the 98 percent' attracted a good number of Congressmen both from the cities and *mufussil* but to what extent the lower middle classes were won over is a point to be discerned. It was beyond doubt that C R Das moved for incorporating the new Muslim leadership into the arena of Swarajist politics and it helped to remove an aged social stigma in Bengal. Over fifty percent of the Muslim seats in Bengal council were won by the Swarajists in 1923 when the famous Bengal pact had not even been materialized. The bulk of the rank of the party was supplied by the revolutionary parties. With the emergence of the Swaraj Party these people found new avenues of action for a total exploitation of their enthusiasm. C R Das by heart was not a supporter of militarism but he found in the revolutionary groups a readymade source for supplying cadres for his party while the revolutionaries of Bengal had taken the Swarajist political activity as a coat-of-nail to carry on their programmes. In this case both of the sides were benefited. The revolutionaries on the one hand tried to use the Congress as a camouflage to fulfill their dream, the Swarajists on the other hand became indebted to the revolutionary parties for the success of the Swaraj party at the Bengal council. Das's intimacy with these people never gave his party a clean chit as far as the suspicion of the government was concerned. To what extent Das was successful in channelising these people remained less important whereas his alliance with this people became the headache of some Congress leaders that a certain amount of misunderstanding grew between Das and Gandhi who was not at all

ready to spare the violent activities even if they selflessly sacrificed their lives in various occasions.

The differences between Das's faction and Gandhian faction in the Bengal Congress became heightened in various occasions. When at the Cocanada Congress in December 1923 the proposed Bengal Pact was placed as a national one, serious controversies came to pass in and outside the Congress. Unfortunately at this point in time Bengal once again found her voice choked before the mainstream of national movement because a large number of Bengali Congress leaders scared to get out-of-the-way if the proposal which was made particularly on the interest of Bengal, would not get proper consideration from Gandhi. The Gopinath Saha resolution again moved up some sort of resentment between the two. The Government hold Das responsible for the insurgencies in Bengal particularly for the Gopinath Saha incident.³³ When the Bengal Provincial Conference at Sirajganj paid homage to the self sacrificing martyr Gopinath Saha, European community became very much sure that the Swaraj party had encouraged and was encouraging political assassinations and intimidations.³⁴ Not only the Europeans but criticism also arose from different corners of the Gandhian Congress also. As a result, at the All India Congress Committee conference at Ahmadabad, Gandhi threw an open challenge to the Swarajists holding offices in the Congress.³⁵ and had published his own Gopinath Saha resolution, which defeated Das's amendment on the resolution by a short margin of eight votes. This voting according to Gandhi was an eye opener to him even if the amendment in his opinion 'was in breach of the Congress creed' and 'the policy of non violence'³⁶

he apprehend, was wearing down of soil beneath his feet at least in Bengal.

At the end of 1924 some agreements were permitted between Das and Gandhi on the basis of the Calcutta Pact and it allowed both the factions to work from the Congress organization in their own ways though on the point of council entry differences persisted. Realizing the futility of the boycott Gandhi wrote in *Young India*, "I am just as keen a believer as ever in the five boycotts, but. ... Whilst we maintain them in our persons, there is no atmosphere for working them"³⁷ In fact very tactfully Gandhi organized the All India Spinners Association for the orthodox followers to carry on the programmes like *charkha* and other constructive programmes while maintaining enough place for the Swarajists on the official platform of the Congress. This changing approach of Gandhi surprised many leaders of Bengal including Subhas Bose for whom 'it may be that he found that the position of the Swarajists to be too strong in the country to be able to over through them and so he bowed to the inevitability'³⁸ or Gandhi realized the call for a change in tactics in changed circumstances. Gandhi's growing closeness with Das turned the wind in Bengal and after his visit in Bengal his influence began to rise undoubtedly, as pointed out by D G Tendulkar, "He own the hearts of every section of the society"³⁹ Time was changing rapidly and the no changer devotees of Gandhi found no justification in this policy of compromise because the Swarajists according to them were neither faithful in constructive programme, nor in non violence, therefore any sort of adjustment with this party would change the course of Gandhian politics in Congress. Gandhi tried to mitigate this criticism of his

followers by issuing statements at the Belgaum Congress in favour of his action⁴⁰ but it failed to satisfy neither the orthodox Gandhians nor a section of the allies of Das particularly the revolutionaries who were anxious of seeing Das surrendering to Gandhi. A section of the leading newspapers openly paid their concern for this 'artificial' and 'inorganic' union between C R Das's *swaraj* which 'is essentially a political concept', while the concept of *satyagraha* as enumerated by Gandhi 'is essentially a religious ethical movement'⁴¹ The effort of reconciliation between this incompatible elements was to ruin the Congress ultimately because the *Bengali* repented, 'He (Gandhi) had sold the Congress as a political organization to the Swarajists.... he has killed the Congress'.⁴² Whatever might be the actual nature of the situation, it offered some best suitable solution for C R Das who after getting vary much 'anxious for an early settlement with the Indian political problem,'⁴³ tried to have a better constitutional system favorable for political settlements. In his own word 'we are determined to secure swaraj and political emancipation of India on terms of equality and honorable partnership in the empire'.⁴⁴

C R Das was neither a rebel nor a opportunist and he was acquainted with it well that, what he had done after the Gaya session, 1922, was to strengthen the Congress as an organization. It was not acceptable to everyone. Being very pragmatic in policy and methods, he did not forget to make the proper diagnosis of the existing political situation and prescribed a suitable medicine for a constant revitalization of the Congress. He recognized that unity rather than rivalry could alleviate differences between these two fraternal organizations and a sense of fellow feeling only could heal the injuries increasing day by day upon the

Congress. Clarifying his stand in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1925, he said, "We want to construct a system which can be work with success and we enable us to do good to the masses."⁴⁵ When asked about the intention as to why he preferred to destroy the council, he said "this rotten structure is occupying the place where a beautiful mansion may be erected... we want to destroy in order that we may be able to build up"⁴⁶ Das expected to get some positive response from the British but no complete announcement had made about constitutional reforms in India. In his presidential speech at the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Faridpur(1925) Das stood for Dominion Status, denounced revolutionary violence, supported Gandhian sculpt of constructive programme and promised cooperation with the Government on the basis of some considerations.⁴⁷ By welcoming Das's speech Gandhi wooed the Swarajists while the Congress circle turned out to be apprehensive that "Gandhi by a series of obiter dicta adopted the Swarajists as his attorneys and political representatives... yielded more and more...that he effaced himself and a complete surrender".⁴⁸ Nevertheless the compromising mood of Das was however condemned by the revolutionaries. His offer of friendship to the British received cold reaction and at the Faridpur conference revolutionary leaflets were circulated in criticism of Das and his party.⁴⁹ The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 4th May, 1925 described his policy as a 'neo moderate' policy and Bengali novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay described Das's speech as a triumph for the Moderates in an article published in the monthly journal *Basumati* (*Asad*, 1932 B E).⁵⁰ It can not be denied that the opposition of the revolutionaries lobbed him in poor health that it was somehow not viable for him to retain control over the revolutionaries at a time maintaining cordial relationship with

the British. After realizing the real nature of mere obstructionist tactics useless in keeping the lawlessness and repression on check, Das 'speeded up the drift towards constitutional opposition and cooperation in the Swaraj Party'⁵¹. But with his untimely death in 1925 the escalation and development of the Swaraj Party came to a standstill. His death coincided with an epochal change in Bengal politics that the fragile balance of power between the different political groupings, so far had been trapped under his personal capabilities, now came to be bankrupted into fragments and very soon simmering factionalism broke out in more virulent form. In Broomfield's opinion the Swaraj Party which was 'itself largely *Bhadralok* in composition' builded up a popular following by providing accessible symbols to the masses without offending the *Bhadraloks*⁵², now fall into a 'sudden expose of a status group (*Bhadralok* elite) to political extinction or in the disruption of balanced social aggrements.⁵³

After the demise of Deshbandhu the Swaraj Party own an undiluted victory in moving the entire national organization under them. But they were not in a position to carry with them this newly gained potency of continuing Non-Cooperation into the Legislature with extra vehemence. Infact their previous performances were not at all satisfactory in terms of making the Government tense or stirring reactions among the public. It is here necessary to have a quick look over the earlier functioning of the party in Bengal. With the coming of Mahatma Gandhi all shades of people representing various classes and sections of the Indian society come up to the fold of the Congress. Gradually some groups and factions, the goal of which was the same to achieve freedom, came to get operated

within the Congress during Gandhian era. The Swaraj Party emerged, as a protest movement against Gandhi by C R Das and Motilal Nehru in front, however, in every respect Gandhi was considered to be the worthiest exponent of freedom in Bengal also. What stuck Das most was the limit of Civil Disobedience as to the unlawful laws, instituted under the guise of 'law' and order; and he thought that the cause of justice could be served better by challenging those legislations from within the council. The stand of the Swarajists produced deep fissure in the Congress rank and the conference of the AICC at Gaya and Das declared, "I have no other alternative, as I can not associate my self with most of the resolutions passes in the last session of the Congress....it is my duty to tender my resignation."⁵⁴

A severance within the Congress was almost definite. Gandhi's disappearance along with his discredited magic brought some more sensitive elements like the no changers, the pro changers and the responsive cooperationists in the political forefront.⁵⁵ Moulana Azad tried for an concurrence between the two parties but it was in vain. The position of Gandhi was quite interesting. In June 1922 Gandhi preferred for a declaration of the original boycott programme so that those who did not uphold the council boycott plan were required to resign from the AICC. Das being the Congress president in 1922-23 failed to mould the Gandhian opponents on the line of his Swarajist programme. Gandhi in 1924 admitted that the Swarajists represented a very strong body of public opinion in favor of council entry and the 'no changers should believe that the proper place for the Swarajists is inside the councils and not outside.'⁵⁶ In spite of these, Gandhite Congress men in Bengal

opposed Das in each single way and in July 1924 some of them formed their own organization, the Bengal Non-Cooperation League. After the establishment of the Swaraj Party, rural Gandhians who strongly believed in the reconstruction of the villages became busy in local *khadi* centers and other constructive works, far away from the city based electoral turbulence. Here one thing must have to be cleared that the Gandhians were not a homogenized consolidated group against the Swarajists rather differences existed among them. The Gandhian constructive works characterized by a degree of difference in patronage, local bonding, pattern of works were under taken by different rural Gandhian centers ⁵⁷ If this was the picture in the country side the educated city based Bengalis as mentioned earlier remained less enthusiastic about Gandhian programme and the so-called leaders tried their best to capture the control over Bengal Congress. These 'Gandhians' had capitalized the political vacuum created after the arrest of Das during the visit of the Prince of Wales at Calcutta. In the long run Das tactfully mobilized the AICC, which extended its hand towards Das thereby leaving the Gandhian no changers in disarray. This success of Das was further emphasized by the defeat of most of Moderates in the election of 1923 and Lord Litton faced serious difficulties while searching for some popular personalities for the post of the ministers because 'there were no personality whom all the members of the Moderate party – if party it could be called- accepted as leaders'. ⁵⁸ This decline of the Moderates definitely gave some new impetus to the Swarajists and their understanding with the Independent Nationalists ⁵⁹ and it was proved to be beneficial in near future.

The absence of any Hindu minister moved two Moderated in favour of the Swarajists on the question of rejecting the salaries of two Muslim ministers and when discussions were tuned in high on the issue of implementing the Bengal Pact (that is giving 60% of all government posts to the Muslims once self government would be attained) not only the Muslim Swarajists voted with their fellow Hindu *Swarajits*, but H S Suhrawarthy, a Muslim Independent Nationalist defended Das and his goodwill. Though the Independent Nationalists did not endow with full-fledged support for a Hindu Muslim Pact, they assisted the Swarajists on other issues in the council. The consensus between the Swarajists and the Independent Nationalists helped in counter balancing the vicious circle against Das and his action to a greater extent.

This adjustment of the Swaraj Party with the Nationalists though not on ideological basis but on the basis of need, made Das able to safe and sound an absolute majority. This confidence accelerated the actions of his party in later years, like the control of the Calcutta Corporation in 1924. Indeed Das monopolized a measure of support from the politically conscious Muslims, the stimulus of which came from the alliance of the Swaraj Party with the *Khilafat* Committee in Bengal. Although such a alliance was necessary for the then Bengal, it came to be shattered after the closing down of *Khilafat* in 1924. This adjustment between two 'strangers' however was not politically in correct and it failed to sustain its earlier success that the Swaraj Party could not get the Muslim masses on their side while campaigning against the new Bengal ordinance.⁶⁰ C R Das asked on the floor of the council, 'Does the application of this lawless laws, these repressive orders, executive decrees – can it possibly

put an end to revolutionary movements? In the history of the world has revolution been ever checked by repressive legislation?'⁶¹ The Swarajists won the battle at last but it had left the Muslim question exposed. Sectional or sectarian symptoms were already appearing on the communal physis of Bengal, now the question of numerical preponderance being a standard of attaining political power hit the structure upon which the communal symphony was composed in Bengal. What is interesting that none of the sections representing the Muslims from both in and outside Calcutta were united on principle rather factional disputes was as common like the Congress among these groups. A concordance between conflicting interests achieved among the non Swarajist members in the council could have been resolved in a tendency for using numerical superiority as a mere passport to get political domination. Surprisingly the Government encouraged their efforts as J.H Broomfield points out 'in the hope of securing tactical advantages in its own political defence.'⁶² The support of the Muslim Swarajists and the assistance of the revolutionaries acted as the two main pillar of this party in its earlier stage. Gradually the signs of disintegration became evident and new crisis began to change the priorities of Bengal politics. The phase of Gandhian challenge was almost in decay at least on methodological grounds, the heresy of council entry was on the way to get resolved. What now amplified the crisis was the tripartite contest between B. N Sasmal, Subhas Chandra Bose and J M Sen Gupta for the domination of Calcutta Corporation. Whether caste or any other aspects as such catalytically ruined Sasmal's chance of becoming the chief executive officer of the Corporation was an overrated subject, still a question of mark could definitely be put before the entire episode as why

Das had shifted his stand when Sasmal was pushed back and why he failed to give any satisfactory answer to Sasmal when was asked for some justifications for the humiliation he passed off. ⁶³ This type of 'authoritarian', 'inflexible' politics of the Hindu *bhadralok* smashed the reputation of the Swaraj Party as well as of the Bengal Congress. The discrepancy between high caste elite and the rising low caste *bhadralok* in and out side Calcutta gave way to the rural -urban dichotomy resulting in another tried of factional dispute inside the Corporation. There were faction within factions ⁶⁴ and Das successfully managed to keep the ball rolling so that the factors like caste, community or place of origin could not get a foothold in the course of decision-making process in Bengal politics. But this was nothing more than a momentary engagement because very soon the Corporation was converted into a bargaining bag in which every one was looking for their share. The contemporary language of politics could easily be utilized by sectarian forces in maneuvering the majority of the Muslims that they had done a mistake in joining the Swaraj Party. ⁶⁵ Their discontentment was augmented further when the party failed to satisfy the demands of the Muslims regarding appointments in the Corporation ⁶⁶, in terms of the statutory provision for representation in Municipalities as envisaged by the Bengal Pact. According to *Muslim Hitaishi*, the Muslims should for the time being detach themselves from the main stream of struggle and should extort all their rights from the Hindus by taking a separate stand. ⁶⁷ An under guised wicked mechanism was on the way of disrupting the Swaraj Party. The political mandate, which this party received from the electorate, did not have any connection with communal and religious matter and it was expected that the party would function just on the basis of which it had

fought the election. On the other the craze for government services was not over. The spirit of non-cooperation with the legislature came to be proved idealistic because the advanced community already had shown to what extent they could go for maintaining their political dominance in Bengal. The preeminence of the Calcutta based high caste politician limited the sphere of a mass political party at the cost of a smooth but speedy alienation of the provincial politicians particularly of the low castes in origin.

Whenever the popularity of a city based mass leader began to push him into the courtier of city politics, the difficulties and inner tension of urban politics seemed to have been poignant enough to expose the inherent weaknesses of city centrism. It was unfortunate that the support base of a provincial leader time to time was going to be converted in a 'reservoir of numbers' from where the materials of popular support could easily be extorted whenever there was a need to demonstrate it.⁶⁸ Europeans on the verge of this problem drew local factional rivalries into the broader arena of caste and class antagonisms that was getting a communal colour rapidly. CR Das being a master in the art of forging alliances and making understandings among various interests put together a coalition of several forces including high caste professionals from Calcutta, rural leaders of popular movements, business magnates, labour organizations and the revolutionary cadres. The status quo was maintained by giving representation at the Swarajist camp. The inner deficiency of the frazil alliances was impending to get exposed and when the clock started moving back, the Europeans desperately jumped to take advantage of the condition. They manipulated those elements which were thrown to the

edge of frustration resulting from the on going clash of city and *muffosil*. The Europeans banked on this clash to gain a readymade support against the Congress by drumming up the alienated elements. The Muslims and the lower caste Hindus⁶⁹ were victimized to an extent that the communal riots of 1926 soon spoiled the process of nationalist coalition carefully constructed by Das. Bengal was passing through the most unpleasant moment within a year of C R Das's bereavement. The power catcher cliques centering round the leadership in Congress brought out in the open the hollowness of Bengal Congress vis-à-vis the Swaraj Party.

Swarajists on the popular fronts

The weakness of the Swaraj Party in representing the interest of the peasants and laborers had worsened its practicability as a mass political organization. Before going into this episode it is important to have a glance over the Gandhian model of mass politics on the basis of which later developments received its core impetus. The three movements (Ahmedabad, Kheda, Champaran) Gandhi led in 1917-18 were 'sub political' according to Judith brown⁷⁰, they on the whole proved to be the harbinger of Gandhian mass politics. A deeper insight into this period focused on the streams of forces which were concomitant in channelising the mass politics in the early twenties of the 20th century. If one may be categorized as Gandhian model of mass politics under the banner of a all India organization, the second received its stimulus from the international Communist movement which emphasized that the salvation of India was nothing less than a proletarian revolution.⁷¹ But these men were astonished to see the defects of an abstract idealism on which the Gandhian Congress was moving. Neither it had any economic

programme to carry on the masses with them, nor did it hesitate to give shelter to the *zaminders* and millionaires thereby overlooking the interests of the poverty stricken workers and peasants. In Bengal confusion and controversies devoured the political mind that the idea of mass involvement was soon to come into clash with land and industrial interests. The commercial and trading classes rose to prominence after the rise of Gandhi and it clashed with the long-standing supremacy of the Bengali intellectuals lacking any actual commercial interest. Gandhi's contact with the business community aggravated difficulties for those energetic cadres who already had opted for organizing pickets and *hartals* against the will of the commercial populace. Gandhi's cautious move regarding the participation of the peasants and laborers into any political action ruined the hopes for a joint stand and different socio political ideologies were put across the unfinished work by simply moving the toiling masses around itself. C.R. Das tried his best to carry on the task of channelising the cultivating and working class in a proper way, but in a province like Bengal where the majority of the peasantry and a large section of mill laborers were Muslims, the success of his attempt was likely in a blue moon.

The non-cooperators definitely utilized the grievances of the workers and formed trade unions to give expression to them. The non-cooperators themselves were benefited by proving their worth as leaders of a mass movement but lack of experience in controlling the labor unrest shifted the forces of their movement from thru real interest of the laborers to a mere political agitation. Gandhi himself had strong conviction about using the labor causes for political end that they did not want to include

the strikes within the network of non-violent non-cooperation. During the Chandpur affair C R Das actively scored a high energy in channeling the railway and steamer strikes for a national purpose though these 'strike mania' as noticed by F Andrews pushed eastern Bengal on the very border line of violence. C.R Das accounted for a natural merger of the sectarian labor movements in the national movement represented by the Congress and hoped for a synthesis between the clashing interests of capital and labor.⁷² He had good faith in organizing workers within the Congress. In clear cut way Das approached his fellow Congressmen to organize the toiling forces under a strong workable committee unless the laborers and peasants would set up their own organization by disassociating themselves 'from the cause of *swaraj*, which will inevitably bring them within the arena of peaceful revolutionary class struggle.'⁷³ Some scholars may find here the narrowing down of labour politics by determining their course of action within the *bhadralok* nationalist paradigm where the workers were denied to be represented by themselves rather by their propertied countrymen.⁷⁴ In India from the very beginning the leadership of the workers' movement was taken by the petty bourgeoisie intellectuals and it is a undeniable fact that these leaders contributed to the development of trade union movement in India. Even though Das and Gandhi both reacted differently to the need of mobilizing workers for nationalist cause they were determined to avoid all forms of a class conflict as far as possible. Gandhi had no belief in class analysis. To him all evils were within the machine itself hence neither he considered capitalist ownership as a curse on the society with industrial advance nor he justified any forms of class antagonism because any miss understanding between the labour and the owner could be

solved, he believed, through arbitration. It is here that the trade unions could function in a positive way and when the all India Trade union Congress came into being, he endeavored to keep aloof this association from any kind of activity that would lead the workers into violent politics and in class conflicts.⁷⁵ C R Das on the other wanted to politicize the workers for using them as a base in institutional politics. During the non-cooperation movement C R Das promoted the workers by involving them into strikes in European concerns while the Gandhians in Bengal tried to minimize the sphere of workers' politics within the jute mills. The Bengal Central Labour Federation or BCLF was established with the initiative of the *Khilsafatists* in 1921 and this organization in an true Gandhian fashion offered to settle strikes in the mills all the way through negotiations. In consequence with the all India politics as framed by Gandhi, the BCLF leaders like Shyam Sundar Banerjee, Jitendra Lal Banerjee and Md Mashin opposed the participation of workers in political struggle and condemned the Chandpur strike in east Bengal backed by C R Das. They in fact considered the workers totally 'unfit' for non violence struggle because of the evil effects of the industrial civilization where the charm of free simple pastoral life had replaced by the 'brutalized conditions in mills and factories where passions and prejudices find full play'⁷⁵. In reality the workers did not sit dumb, they exacted pressure on the leaders to consider their strike as a part and parcel of the movements toward *swaraj*, but what they expected brought nothing satisfactory and gradual mass upsurge among the workers alienated themselves from the Gandhian trade unionists.⁷⁶ The detachment between the workers and Gandhi-led BCLF made the situation easier for CR Das and by the middle of December 1921 a huge

number of jute workers started courting arrest under the leadership of Das. ⁷⁷The large-scale participation of the workers in the nationalist agitation doomed the prospect of the BCLF, while the panic of a unbridled mass uprising threatened the elite leadership in the Congress. Despite the rapid decline of communal amity at the level of elite leadership in post Non-Cooperation era, the workers marched for defending their interests by fitting themselves into the Communist political avenues.

National Congress in India never considered the working classes as the most potentially charged force to be properly used against capital and imperialism rather they paid a very scant attention towards this vast unrecognized mass. Even when the first all India organization of the Indian labor, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed, the Congress showed nothing but negligence towards this organization and it became evident from the fact that the Nagpur Session (December, 1920) of the Congress, held after two months from the formation of the AITUC remained silent on the organization and tried to determine the labour question from their own view point. Gandhi's dislike and his aversion towards AITUC limited its scope of getting all round acceptability, although a change of mind very soon altered the situation when in 1922 a committee was formed to help the AITUC in expanding its activity among the labourers. J M Sengupta the leading man ⁷⁸ from Bengal joined this committee. The Congress connection with the AITUC was not a natural affair. As soon as the leaders like CR Das, Subhas Bose or Jawaharlal Nehru became involved with the AITUC, the seeds of later day contradictions began to mature in the form of a ideological conflict

between their principle of class collaboration and the in-style philosophy of class struggle. C R Das sought to utilize his new political rhetoric 'swaraj for 98%' to get the labourers in confidence when at the conference of the AITUC in Lahore; he announced 'labour represents 98% of the population of India when we consider that labor also includes the peasants'.⁷⁹ Das's strategy of popularizing his policy of council entry among the masses hit the target and he swept the poll in 1923 including those constituents where the electorate constituted a good number of mill employees like in the industrial belt of Barrackpore where Swarajist candidate Dr B C Roy defeated well known Moderate Surendranath Banerjee with large margin. In spite of strong orientation for the labour issues the Swaraj Party failed to identity itself with the labor causes and in reality turned its attention towards the organized world of institutional politics where 'elite conflict' soon paved the path for a wider sectarian conflict.

Indian political scenario in the 20s of the 20th century had exposed to a peculiar ambivalence of the doctrine of class being parochially resolved in some readymade justifications. The inadequacy of the Bourgeoisie party in legitimating the class question precipitated a through change for cultivating the worker peasant causes in an autonomous way. But as this mean unleashing a horizontal movement of the worker peasant masses against the imperial lords and against the stereotypes of stern exploiting pattern drafted by the foreign and native capitalist class along with the feudal allies. It was however a sumptuous risk for the higher class leadership to emboss the revolutionary activities of the workers and peasant masses. The Swaraj Party experienced the same sort of fate. They

were energetic enough in breaking the post non-cooperation dead lock, but their physiological bankruptcy in legitimizing the worker peasant question in side and out side the legislature enervated their movement of 'swaraj for 98%'. As soon as the British Government realized the isolation of the party from the masses they looked for every possible chances of exercising their imperial motives. In the post Non Cooperation era, situation in Bengal as well India was very much ripe for experimenting Socialism when the Communist party of India sent a programme at the Gaya session of the Congress in 1922. In relation to this it is here important to refocus on why and how this emerging party first stepped in the official politics of India. It was definitely M N Roy who first lit the lamp of an Indian Communist Party, but the Communist movement was not at all a one-man show because the other Indian revolutionaries who had connection with Moscow were Birendranath Chattopadhyay, Dr Bhupendranath Dutta and Abani Mukherjee and many others.⁸⁰ One of the foremost emissaries of Roy in India was Nalini Gupta about whom one secret imperial record referred, " It was through his efforts that the Communist center in Calcutta came into being."⁸¹ Not only this, the so-called father figure of Bengal Communism Muzaffar Ahmed, as these sources mentioned, was converted to Communism when Gupta second time visited India in 1922 and made contact with Ahmed,⁸¹ although Ahmed discarded any kind of influence of Gupta in him while entering into the camp of Communism.⁸³ In 1922 infact two streams of thought was centering round the embryonic Communist movement. One was to carry on a definite struggle and the other was to function within the Congress as a separate socialist trend. Whether the Bengal revolutionaries were genuinely mesmerized by the

creed of Communism or they were the just fortune seekers that to obtain money and arms from Soviet Russia, remains a matter to be resolved, but the links of the *Yugantar* and *Anushilan* members with Roy added a great stimuli to the rank and file of the emerging Communists in Bengal and vice versa. Nalini Gupta and Abani Mukherjee helped in relating the small Communist bodies with the Comintern and at the Ahmadabad Session of the Congress a new idea was vented with the distribution of the Roy's manifesto.

The Leninist theory of 'alliance of worker with peasants' constituted one of the chief postulates of Roy's thesis and in C R Das he found the person he was searching for influencing the economic programme of the Congress. The rise of the Swaraj Party appeared to him as a milestone in the development of leftism in Congress political platform. M N Roy was moved by the charisma of C R Das whose liberal ideas were already developed even before the Russian Revolution. Das's speeches ⁸⁴, his involvement with the labor movements and above all his close proximity with the revolutionaries styled him in a Communist fashion at least in the eyes of Roy. In reality Das was opposed to Communism at a time retaining real interest in organizing the working class movement. The rejection of Roy's programme for a progressive economic reform at the Gaya session as well as the defeat of the Das's faction indicated the failure of the first Communist attempt to capture and move the Congress for a new methodological experimentation.⁸⁵ Roy's critic of Gandhi met with some new dimensions after the abrupt curtailment of the Non Cooperation movement, the real reason behind was the emerging clash of

interests among the diverse elements within the Congress which was silently marching towards a struggle between the classes. The then situation in India offered Roy a stronger conviction upon which Lenin once differed with him. His justifications for why in India and in other relatively advanced colonial countries bourgeoisie force could not be a revolutionary force began to get weightage within the dialectic of Indian society under which the Gandhian version of politics got formulated. The very settled and at a time opportunist rhetoric of the dominant class was bound to determine the actions of Gandhi whose being imagining as *Mahatma* opened up avenues, according to Roy, for him to impose his 'reactionary ideas' on an 'objectively revolutionary movement composed of backward masses.'⁸⁶ The sudden abandonment of the Non-Cooperation movement opened up two paths of the national movement. One could be council entry or could be a wide spread mass struggle, the later was steered by Roy and accordingly at Gaya session Singaravelu Chettair endeavored to publicize Communist programmes as the first Communist speaking at a Congress session. An emerging minor political party vehemently sought the support of a major party in implementing a different course of action. With sheer disappointment, Roy in an article at *Inprecor*, confessed 'we sought to strengthen the hand of the left wing but only succeeded in frightening it.'⁸⁷ Roy aimed to give a twist in the Congress policy in a fashion of trial and error, a risk factor was prevalent from end to end. In a letter to Singaravelu before the session he avowed 'My plan is to have the programme complete before the Congress at Gaya and struggle for its acceptance there. If we succeed in this we will have the Congress. If not we will have to adopt a new line of action, vis the organization of a new mass party.'⁸⁸ Even after the Gaya

session, the dilemma of Roy was not over. He was still hopeful to persuade C R Das to make a return from the policy of council entry to the original idea of 'swaraj for the masses'.⁸⁹ Later when Das formed the Swaraj Party Roy characterized it as 'neo constitutional' thereby condemning C R Das as 'declassed'. All of these events indicated the need for a 'left wing party with a clear consciousness of its social nature' and a second split in the Congress was necessary according to Roy, to separate 'revolutionary forces from the embrace of the right wing'.⁹⁰

Notes and References

1. Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *Constraints in Bengal Politics; 1921-1941, Gandhian Leadership*, Calcutta, 1984, p.ix.
2. Leonard Gordon, *Bengal; The Nationalist Movement*, Delhi, 1974,p.191
3. Bipin Chandra Pal moved the amendment. It proposed a mission to England to present the Congress demands and it asked for the formation of a representative committee to devise a non-cooperation programme suitable to various provinces. C. C Biswas, *Bengal's Response to Gandhi*, Kolkata, 2004, p.80
4. In this connection Jawaharlal Nehru has argued that Chittaranjan Das led the opposition not because of any apathy towards the spirit behind the resolution but because he 'objected to the boycott of the new legislatures.' Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, New Delhi, 1962, p.64
5. N. K Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, Ahmadabad, 1975, n, 10, p.44
6. R Copland, *The Indian Problem*, New York, 1944, Part III, pp.23-24
7. For details see Papia, Chakrabarty, *Hindu Response to Nationalist Ferment*, Calcutta, 1992, pp.3-7, pp.65-100

8. Leonard Gordon., *op.cit*, p.296

9. This group of people commonly known as *bhadralok* was drawn mainly from the three upper castes of *Brahmin*, *Baidya* and *Kyastha*. The contemporary British administrators defined *bhradralok* as 'disposition of caste tempered by matriculation'. This definition does not reveal the socio economic background of *bhadraloks* and the alternative term offered instead – 'the middle class'. See Bidyut Chakraborty , *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle class Radicalism, A study in Indian Nationalism : 1928-1940*, 1990. S.N Mukherjee, *Bhadaralok in Bengali Language and Literature; An Essay on the Understanding of Caste and Status*, in *Bengal Past and present*, Vol.181, 1976. J H Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society; Tweekth Century Bengal*, Barkley, 1968.

10. Rajat Kanta Roy, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal; 1875-1927*, New Delhi,1984, p.375

11. Here two different political domain indicate the organized world of government, parties legislature etc and the unorganized world of politics i.e. politics of the common masses particularly of the peasant communities. The organized world of politics incorporates the processes around the state while the unorganized world of politics lies outside the institutional state apparatus. See Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal Politics and the Muslim masses, 1920-1947* in *Journal of the Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 13,1, March 1982 and Bidyut Chakraborty, *op.cit*, pp.5-6

12. J H Broomfield, *The Social and Institutional Bases of Politics in Bengal, 1906- 1947*, p.139 in Richard. Van. M Baumer (ed) *Aspects of Bengali-history and Society*, New Delhi, 1976
13. Leonard Gordon, *op.cit*, p.298
14. *Bengalee* , 10 September, p. 298
15. This committee was formed by the All India Congress committee after the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in order to consider the question whether the Congress could accept Civil Disobedience in any form after the suspension of aggressive activities
16. *The Bengalee*, Editorial, 10 September 1920
17. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Towards Freedom*, Boston, 1958, pp.110-111
18. Prithwis Chandra Ray Choudhury, *Life and Times of C R Das: The Story of Bengal's Self Expression*, London, 1927
19. *Ibid.* Also see Gopal Krishna, *The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organization in Journal of the Asian Studies*, Vol.25, n.3, 1966.

20. See Hemendranath Das Gupta, *Chittaranjan Das*, Delhi, 1960, n.41, p.48
21. Nipendra Chandra Banerjee, *Crossroads*, pp.216, 300-301, cited in Leonard Gordon., *op.cit*, p.176
22. I B 1920, Non Cooperation Movement in Bengal, January 1921.
23. For details see Goutam Chattopadhyay,*op.cit*,pp.68-88
24. See Bidyut Chakrabourty, *op.cit*, pp.101-105
25. *Ibid*, p.102
26. Gallagher John, *Congress in Decline; Bengal 1930-1939*, in *Modern Asian Studies*, 7.3, 1973, p.281
27. GI, Home Department, Political File No.61 of 1924.
28. GI Home Department, Political File no.379/VII (part-II) of 1924
29. AICC File No.14/1923, NMML, New Delhi
30. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol.1, PP.254-55

31. Goutam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle; 1862-1947*, Delhi, 1984, p.55
32. *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 1 December 1923
33. *Indian Annual Registrar*, 1925, Vol. I, p.87
34. At the Bengal Council J .M Sengupta clamored for an early repeal of the ordinance otherwise he declared, the *Swarajists* would continue their wholesale opposition. The 1925 Bill that replaced the ordinance increased the power of the Government to suppress the terrorists. *Indian Annual Registrar*, 1925, Vol. I, pp.174-176
35. Gandhi's statement on Congress organization issued at the AICC session at Ahmadabad declared that the executive organization of the Congress should not contain members of legislative bodies because who, according to Gandhi, do not believe in Congress policy should set out of the executive bodies. *Indian Annual Registrar*, 1924, I, 604 (a), See Leonard Gordon, *op.cit*, pp.198-99
36. *Indian Annual Registrar*, 1924, I 629, see Leonard Gordon. *op.cit*. p.201
37. 'The Realities', in *Young India*, 11 September 1924
38. Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, 1920-1948, n.21, p.102

39..D.G Tendulkar, *Mahatma; Life Of Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi*, n.16, Vol. II,New Delhi,1988 p.187

40. Referring to the agreements between the *Swarajists* and himself, Gandhi stated ‘ many no changers regarded it as a lapse if not a betrayal....it is in the interest of the country to give the Swaraj Party the fullest possible chance of working out its own programme without let or hindrance from no changers. The later are not bound to participate in its activity, if they do not like it...the Swaraj Party is a party of orderly progress. It may not swear by non violence as I do but it accepts non violence as a policy and it discountenances violence because it considers it to be useless, if not even harmful.’ For details see D G Tendulkar, *op.cit*, n.16, Vol,II, pp.166-168.

41. *The Bengalee*, 3 January 1925, cited in C .C Biswas, *op.cit*, p.116

42. *Ibid.*

43. According to the biographer of Das, he wanted to utilize the machinery of government in the service of the people. Regarding the council entry Gandhi expressed that he would follow constructive methods to get some profitable out put in spite of following the policy of opposition, if he enter the council. One may find proximities between Gandhi and what Das actually was experimenting at that time but it is in vague whether Das was influenced by Gandhi or not. Hemendranath Das Gupta, *op.cit*, n.41, pp.118-119 see also C. C Biswas, *op.cit*, p.117, n.162

44. P C Roy, *Life and Times of C R Das*, London, 1927, p.201

45. M R Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, Bombay, 1959, Vol II, p.587, cited in Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit*, p.105

46. A leaflet called *Babbar Katha* accused the party in the way that, to safe guard their own existence and to hide their own miseries, they have brought a means of compromise –they have not got the power to disobey the law and they are not willing to admit their failure either. The leaflet condemned the party for not helping those people who ‘lent their power and influence to the Swaraj Party’ and ultimately have been incarnated without any trial’. GB, I B 1925, Bengal Provincial and other Conferences at Faridpur. File No.585/29.

47. Dilip Kumar Chartterjee, *C R Das and Indian National Movement; a Study in His Political Ideas*, Calcutta, 1965, p.165

48. Leonard. Gordon holds that the pacts and alliances, which Das made during the 1921-1925, were based on his personal sincerity than on party machinery. During his lifetime vicious attempts had been made to crush the communal harmony of the province. As Broomfield noticed from 1924-1926 the Government of Bengal tried to take the communalists in confidence so that no compromise could be ensured between the two communities. Das checked the detraction of communal ties but after his death the prospects of a united action even on a limited basis ended. For details see J. H Broomfield, *Elite conflict in a plural Society; Twentieth Century Bengal*, California, 1968, p. 274

49. Broomfield, *Ibid*, pp.242-43

50. Paul Greenough, *The Death of an Uncrowned king C R Das and political crisis in Tweenth century Bengal*, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 28, no.3, 1986, p.437

51. Dr P Sitarammya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, ,*op.cit* p. 259

52. J.H Broomfield, *op.cit*.pp.242-43

53. *Ibid*.

54. Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, Calcutta, 1964, pp.82-83.

55 It was in the form of a Congress Democratic Party was established in 1920 changed its name Responsive Cooperation Party in 1926 to suit the newly created conditions within the Congress. Its eminent leaders were pt Madan Mohan Malaviya ,Dr B S Monjee and B.Chakrabarty. The aim of the party was the attainment of *swaraj* by peaceful means. R K Parashar, *Party Politics in Indian National Congress*, Delhi, 2002, p.78

56.In a speech at the session of the AICC held at Bombay Gandhi clarified certain doubts lurking in the minds of the no changers. S R Bakshi, *Swaraj Party and Gandhi*, Delhi, 1995, pp.157-58; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol.25, pp 349ff

57. National education, *khadi* and agriculture were at the pivotal place in Gandhian centers at Bankura. Local *zamindars*, big *jotedars* patronized these efforts at Sonamukhi, Patrasayar, Gangajalghata, and Jaipur. Rich *mahajans* financed the *Swaraj Sevak Sangha* at Barisal in the works like *charkha*, tree planting and national education etc. At Sutahata in Midnapur Gandhians participated in agitation politics and arranged *jatras* on patriotic subjects. See Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal, *Dakshin Paschim Banglai Jatiyatabadi Andolan*, in *Chaturanga*, Vaisakh-Asad, 1384/1977, Hiralal Das Gupta, *Swadhinata Sangrame Barisal*, Calcutta, 1972, Tanika Sarkar, *Bengal; 1928-1934, The Politics of Protest*, 1987, pp.26-31

58. After the first election in 1920 Surendranath Banerjee and his Moderate followers formed a ministerial party including Hindu and Muslim members. After 1923 the Muslim moderates began to get divided into groups and factions. When the *Swarajists* refused office Lytton found that almost every member of the Moderates both from the 11 Hindus and 18 Muslims wanted the office without even recognizing a well accepted leader of their own. Lytton, Earl of, *Pundits and Elephants*, London, 1942, pp.45-46.

59. Byomkesh Chakrabourty organized the Independent Nationalist Party consisted of 19 members by March 1924. They were ready to accept office on their own terms. Kumar Shib Sankar Roy, representative of the Rajshahi land holders became the president of the council after HEA Cotton. Das asked them to oppose the reserved subjects of the government in every occasion in lieu of his assistance to the nationalists in any matter of the transferred subjects. But they could not form the

ministry and allied the Swarajists. *Atmasakti*, 19 December 1923. For details see E. A. Lytton, *op.cit*, p.45 and Rajat Kanta Ray, *op.cit*, p.318

60. The revolutionary connection of the Swaraj Party was basically responsible for such doubts and apprehensions. It was an open secret and the Government became cautious on it. Several front rank leaders including Subhas Chandra Bose, Chief Executive officer of the Calcutta Corporation were arrested partly under Regulation III of 1818 and under the ill-fated Bengal Ordinance of 1924 the repeal of which became the main slogan of the Swarajist councilors.

61. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 25 January 1925

62. Broomfield, *op.cit*, p.317

63. Rajat Kanta Ray, *op.cit*, p.262

64. When the Muslims under the Swaraj Party did not get the desired posts reserved for them in terms of the Bengal pact, the candidates expressed their will to leave the party and to organize the Muslim community on this issue. Hemamta Kumar Sarkar, *Deshbandhu Smriti*, p.49, cited in Rajat Kanta Ray, *op.cit* p.332

65. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 5 June 1924

66. *Moslem Hitaishi*, 4 January 1924. This paper fanned the fire in an oppressive tone, 'Those who are stoutly opposing the pact should bear in

mind that the Mohammedans will not hesitate to take by force what they are at present demanding in gentle terms.' Papia Chakrabarty, *Hindu Response to Nationalist Ferment*, Calcutta, 1992, p.156

67. Cited in. Broomfield, *op.cit*, p. 324

68. *Ibid*

69. Judith .M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power; Indian Politics 1915-1922*, Cambridge, 1972, p.352

70. *Ibid*.

71. The first noted converts to Communism were the ex revolutionaries Virendranath Chattopadhyay and Narendranath Bhattacharya. Narendranath Bhattacharya better known as Manabendranath Roy founded the Communist Party of India in Taskhand in 1920. Nalini Gupta and Abani Mukherjee shouldered the responsibility of spreading Communism in India and at the Gaya Congress in 1922 Mukherjee contacted with the Congress leaders in accordance with the policy of changing the bourgeoisie nationalist movement in the direction of Communist revolution. See G. Adhiikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party; 1917-1922*, Delhi, 1971, p.157 and Goutam Chattopadhyay, *Communism and Bengal's Freedom Movement*, Vol. I, 1917-1929, Delhi, 1970

72. Rajat Kanta Ray, *op.cit*, p.335

73. Presidential Address, Gaya Congress, 1922, Quoted in Sanat Basu, *Labour Journalism in the early 1920s; A Case Study of Bengali Labor Journals*, in *Social Scientist*, Vol II, no.1, January, 1983, p.35.
74. Subho Basu, *Does Class Matter, Colonial Capital and Workers Resistance in Bengal; 1890-1937*, Delhi, 2004, p.174
75. Sukomal Sen, *Working class of India; History of Emergence and Movement; 1830-1970*, Calcutta, 1977, pp.136-137
76. A letter by Gandhian leader Shyam Sundar Chakrabarty in *The Karmi* (English version) 1st year, March, 1922, Vol I, No. 7, p.85
77. Ali Ahmed, a tramway worker brought allegation against the leaders that the demands of the poor workers were not getting sufficient attention and he pointed out that without the cooperation from the workers the idea of *Swaraj* would not be materialized. *ABP*, 5 November 1921.
78. The Congress took a resolution that a committee would be appointed to assist the Executive Council of the All India Trade Union Congress for organizing the Indian labor both agricultural and industrial. Besides Sen Gupta S.N Halder, C F Andrews, Swami Dinanath, Dr Sathye and Singaravelu Chettiar were appointed P Lakshman, *Congress and Labor Movement in India*, in *Economic and Political Research Department*, All India Congress Committee, Allahabad, p.19.

79. G.Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, vol. II 1923-25, New Delhi, 1974, p.72.

80. *Ibid*

81. Home Department, Note on 'Bolshevik Activities in India, No 184 D, Simla, 23 June, 1923

82. *Ibid*

83. For details see Muzaffar Ahmed, *Amar Jiban o Bharater Communist Party, (Myself and the Communist Party of India)* Vol. I, 1920-29 and Vol II incomplete, 2006, pp.94-100

84. To cite example one can refer to a few lines from Das's speech at Bengal Provincial Conference, 1917, 'Do we invite them (unsophisticated countrymen) to our assemblies and our conferences? Is a peasant a member of any our committees and conferences? Hence our political agitation is unsubstantial divorced from all intimate touch with the soul of our people.' *Deshbaqndhu Chittaranjan, A Collection of His Speeches*, 1926, pp.9-10. In 1922 Das spoke at Dehradun ' I want *swaraj* for the masses not for the classes. I don't care for the bourgeoisie'. See Overstreet G D and M Wind miller, *Communism in India*, California, 1959, p.47 .Das's speech in both the cases has a resemblance with the doctrine of Communism as brought forward by the *Vanguard*.

85. It was stated that 'the necessity of developing the revolutionary consciousness of the masses demands the adoption of an economic programme in the addition to the political programme... By leading the rebellious poor peasantry against the reactionary and loyalist aristocracy, the Congress will.... strike its roots deeply into the masses...' Muzaffar Ahmed, *op.cit*, p. 456

86. For details Overstreet G. D and M Wind miller, *op.cit*, pp.44-58

87. M N Roy, *Origin of Radicalism in the Congress*, *op.cit*. p.19

88. *Ibid*

89. *Ibid*

90. Overstreet G. D and M Wind miller, *op.cit*, pp.44-58

Chapter II

Sectarian Politics and the Minor Political Parties: Early 1920s to 1932

The twenties of 20th century Bengal was provided with a self-consciousness of communal identities. The construction of communal identities was to be viewed in the context of a search for nationhood or a special place within the nation by a group of people for the protection of their community interests. The development and consolidation of Hindu Block in the 1920s in Bengal had received its essential spirit from the so-called ideas of a demographic decline of the Hindus. This idea of demographic decline was first brought before public attention in a series of articles published in the '*Bengali*' in 1909 by Colonel U.N Mukherjee. Later a pamphlet was published on this subject called, '*Hindus—A Dying Race*.'¹ Afterwards the communal common sense of a 'Dying Hindu' emerged as one of the recurrent themes of Hindu political discourse and the so-called anxiety of being outnumbered by the 'growing' Muslims became one of the useful instruments for mobilizing a distinct Hindu electorate. In case of the Muslims the matter was different. The construction of a separate block for the Muslims was to be located on the back ground of the democratizing project taken by the colonial government from late 19th century. Right from the early 20th century a series of efforts had been taken to establish the distinctiveness as well as the exclusiveness of the Muslim community. The basic theme of these efforts was to defend separate electorate for the Muslims that their

representation of the communal groups would be continued with a claim for a separate status within the new political set up. Even after the Lucknow accord of 1916² a section of the Bengali Muslims endeavored to focus on the theory of Hindu dominance in the proposed legislative share for the Muslims in the Bengal council.³ it was the colonial government which totally overlooked or wanted the diversities and of a communal identity. By simply providing equal status to multiplicities different religious communities it underlined the importance of religion as a powerful force to construct a political community, homogeneous in character but divorced from the historical complexities of other primordial identities. Side by side the task of consolidating different community identities other than religion was carried on through the census operations from the later half of 19th century. In the context of this interplay of identity and the politics of democracy Hindu and Muslim identities were constructed in the light of their past, however, the process was not the same. It was different in the scene that the issues of religion, caste and language in both of the cases were handled differently at the time of making experiments with democratic rights in a colonial situation. One can see an underlying similarity between the projects of identity formation adopted by the Hindus and the Muslims respectively. In opposition to the idea of a homogeneous universal nationalism the Muslim League propagated the ideal of communitarian nationalism and the best fitted partner of this theory from the Hindu side the Hindu Mahasabha also utilized the same logic of separate Hindu identity in terms of race, religion, language and territory. The last item i.e. territory made the ideal of Hindu communitarian nationalism more vibrant and less vulnerable than the religious nationalism of the Muslims.

Hinduism means the 'ism' of the Hindus' and the word Hindu has been derived from the word Sindhu, the Indus, meaning primarily all the people who reside in the land that extends from Sindhu to Hindu, Hinduism must necessarily mean the religion or the religions that are peculiar and native to this land and these people' ⁴

This concept of Hindutva had two directions. On the one side it had an appeal of a uniform religion specific to a particular group of people and codified by a single set of collective identity. On the other it had a sheer tendency of dominating other affiliated identities within the category of caste, gender, class or even region. In the changed political circumstances of 20s in Bengal there were enough chances of capturing the contemporary Hindu opinion within the language of sectarian politics . It is to be mentioned here that sectarianism in Bengal politics appeared as the most intense form of communitarian communalism. Unlike the communitarian nationalism this ideology laced the strength and scopes to connect itself with the others, if not in a political way. However, this type of connecting spirit could only be found in the essence of universal nationalism and the absence of such spirit in the ideal of communitarian communalism gave it the negative assertion of sectarianism. Even if the argument that the Hindu Mahasabha ⁵ was born as a supplement of the Congress for not representing the Hindu cause properly by the later, the Mahasabha failed to alleviate the bondage of being seen as sectarian. The 20s of 20th century Bengal witnessed the early developments of a sectarian political language shared equally by the Bengal branch of Hindu Mahasabha, minor Muslim parties and the Swaraj Party after a particular period of time. In the spheres of electoral politics this trend

was too much evident not necessarily in a form of violence but diplomatic maneuvering were done in a fashion that the essence of a sectarian power culture evolved subtly in the arena of organized politics.

I

In 1920s a variety of ideologies emerged on the arena of politics within the confines of colonial public space. The political language of the Indian nationalists now acquired some new expressions in a variety of context. The previous strategies adopted by the nationalists were proved to be inadequate in assimilating all the conflicting interests and the Gandhian leadership, according to Ranajit Guha failed to 'assimilate the class interests of peasants and workers effectively into a bourgeoisie hegemony'.⁶ The use of nationalist volunteers and the ideal of *Satryagraha*-the two most important elements of Gandhian politics became institutionalized in the development of a new discourse of organization, less focused on the colonial-nationalist symposium.⁷ Now the term 'Hindu nationalism' had appeared as a unique combination of different 'Hindu' interests in Bengal with some secular and communal variants of one Hindu interest and both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha contributed in its development. The Congress brand of nationalism did not fit well with the judicious version of 'Hindu nationalism' promoted by Gandhi and the juxtaposition of the communal variant of Hindu nationalism with that one espoused by Gandhi put the secular brand of Congress nationalism in severe crisis. It was even misconceived and misinterpreted. Although the concept of communalism do constitutes a threat to the idea of Indian nationalism in general (the overarching concept of Indian nationalism encompassed the universal

nationalist spirit of the freedom movement with a concept of nation state), the term Hindu nationalism has always been equated with the idea of communalism. Further more 'Hindu nationalism' often becomes 'Hindu Communalism' by simply nullifying the fact that 'communalism' and 'nationalism' are not comparable at all because communalism does not necessarily produce its own ideology rather it is more likely to appropriate other ideological forces towards their respective objectives while nationalism itself is an ideology not a mere historical condition.⁸ Hindu nationalism got benefited from the Congress brand of nationalism because the latter's challenge to state hegemony indirectly encouraged the development of one alternative to the Congress (a self sufficient representative of the Hindus) by the colonial state. But when these ideologies of Hindu nationalism and Congress brand of Indian nationalism went on to be a sole claimant of the vast Hindu community it put the later into another terrain of political oscillation. However, in case of Bengal it was a late affair.

From 1923 onwards the idea of horizontal restructuring of society began to dominate the mindset of politically aware Hindus who had found it obvious to articulate their '*Hindutva*' through the organizational discourse of Hindu nationalism. Hindu communalism very often was perceived as a kind of extreme form of Hindu nationalism but the former should be taken as a historical process cemented by a kind of antagonism towards the 'others' particularly the Indian Muslims. In this background the sectarian political maneuvering went unchallenged in Bengal from late 20s. The ideal of Hindu nationalism emerged as an ideology to shape up a nation (Hindu) on the basis of a common criterion –Hinduism. In the

1920s this ideology entered into the level of political mobilization and the Hindus as a community began to get organized as a political force with the very idea of *Sangathan* as the supreme creed of the Hindu nation.⁹ Unlike the other ideologies Hindu nationalism remained subject to different set of challenges and its institutional expression the Hindu Mahasabha faced a stiff journey at least in the initial phase in some of the crucial centers of politics. Bengal was one such centre. It did not have a vibrant Hindu Mahasabha instead a marginal and ambivalent one till the mid thirties. Afterwards this organization was appeared to be one of the important political forces—an active partner of the political decision making process in late colonial Bengal. It is worth mentioning that at the initial phase the Bengali Hindus who took almost a cold attitude towards the *Mahasabha*, were brought eventually within the fold of the 'community' politics—an affordable means of nullifying some age old socio political problems both within the levels of ideology and practice.

The question of organizing Hindu identity and the idea of institutionalizing Hindu consciousness had a 19th century legacy of 'Resurgent Hinduism' and in Bengal these ideas by no means were directed against other religious communities.¹⁰ As soon as the notions of responsible government put a hold over the Hindu mind the increasing numerical strength of the Muslims as revealed by the Census Reports since 1891 persuaded Hindu endeavors to reinforce their community interests in face of the Muslim claim of 'protection' and 'weightage'.¹¹ These Census operations had a definite role to play in producing intense communal animosity because in it the 'Religions became communities mapped, counted and above all compared with other religious

communities'.¹² In spite of the so-called threats to the interests of the Hindu community, Hindu consciousness in Bengal did not take a concrete character in early 20s because of the vacillation of Hindu mind between idealism and exigencies of the existing realities. The Bengali Hindus had their own grievances definitely but for a considerable period of time they were in a dilemma of how to sustain the syncretistic appeal of Indian nationalism in face of a mounting cry for protecting the 'dying race' from complete extinction.¹³ Nevertheless, in the post Non Cooperation-Khilafat (1921-22) period the factors like demographic common sense and the bankruptcy of pact politics necessitated the urgencies of unifying at least the nationalist Hindus into a single collective body. In fact the question of the imminent extinction of the Hindus was embedded as a force leading to Hindu consciousness from the late 19th century onwards. Besides the popular enigma of a 'Dying Race' a number of publications by U. N Mukherjee like the '*Hinduism and the Coming Census; Christianity and Hinduism*' came out as a direct response to the Gait Circular of 1911¹⁴. Here the author had focused on the horizontal mobilization of the Hindu society in order to be more congruent with the issues of 'number' in politics--- the most important signifier of power. These publications set the background for the future publications like '*Hindu Sanghathan; Savior of the Dying Race*' by Swami Shraddhananda in 1926 and '*They Count Their Gains --We Count Our Losses*' by a Hindu Mahasabhaite Indra Prakash in 1979.¹⁵ The idea of competitive demography intensified antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims and the inner frustration lying within the phrase 'dying' offered the essential impetus to constitute the Hindus on a sectarian model. Two Muslim majority provinces Punjab and Bengal responded

differently to this call for unification. As early as in 1907 the Punjab Provincial Hindu Sabha emerged on the scene but in Bengal the provincial branch of the Hindu Mahasabha came up in 1924.¹⁶

It was beyond doubt that the nationalist imagination, developed at the time of the Swadesi Movement in Bengal, had an impression of being and becoming Hindu in nature and outlook but this situation was totally different from the notion of Hinduism of the 20s because a numbers of new developments had already altered the popular rhetoric of Hindu Muslim unity in Bengal. With the expansion of the electorates from early 20s the identity consciousness of a section of the Bengali Hindus specially drawn from upper caste bhadraloks with landed and professional interests , had to face a open confrontation with some new social groups and individuals hailing from different socio economic background. In his momentous study J.H Broomfield had had shown that these group of people popularly known as the 'bhadraloks' remained more or less a uniform group because of their exclusive socio economic background.¹⁷ From the third decade of the 20th century the so called homogeneity of the bhadraloks was appeared to be fake and void because after the emergence of Gandhi a good number of socio political changes introduced a new dimension to the overall structure of identity and a new set of political actors emerged in both the realm of 'organized' and 'unorganized' politics. In the heyday of Gandhian politics, the Hindu bhadraloks domination of the nationalist politics seemed to have been constricted and irregular in terms of the anti colonial movement of the masses.¹⁸ It seemed difficult for the bhadraloks Bengali Hindus to make a direct entry into the realm of institutional party politics unless

articulating the aspirations of these new political contenders.¹⁹ One such strong political aspirants were the Muslim middle class professionals specially with a rural belonging. Most of them were brought to the constructional politics on virtue of the Act of 1919 which had assured constitutional protection for large minoritues.²⁰ It must be noted in this regard that in the Bengal Legislative Council formed under the Act of 1919 was the actual balancing force between the Hindus (57) the Muslims (39) the Europeans, the commercial organs, nominated members from the Indian Christians, British official and the Anglo Indians. These people in the long run were proved to be the most crucial political force in Bengal politics.

No one can deny the fact that as long as the system of separate electorate had remained the contractual political endeavors by both of the communities would not bring anything positive. The Non Co-operation Khilafat accord in a form of a pact did the same mistakes done at the Lucknow conference.²¹ in absence of mutual understanding and a faith on the goodwill of the other, any attempt of unity would have been a failure. Side by side the use of external religious idioms like Khilafat was to hurt at the core of this unity.²² Unless and otherwise, one Bengali newspaper pointed out, rational education and a equal degree of socio economic prosperity was not achieved, mutual understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims could not be achieved in a real sense. Indeed it would be a lengthy process. It required a complete renunciation of every sectarian prejudice from heart.²³ As soon as the political aspirations of the Muslims went out on its path on the background of 1919 power structure, the undercurrent of sheer annoyance and anxiety seemed to become apparent

from the Hindu side. Employment was one such issue which attracted the attention of the leaders in the new representative system. Both of the communities were now in the threshold of a new politics where the game of number was to become the sole indicators of the political destiny of Bengal. During the debate on the Calcutta Municipal Act, 1923 the future trends of politics was reflected properly.²⁴

At a time when religious affiliation acted as a mask over the actual structure of class power in rural Bengal, the Congress failure to step beyond the arena of *bhadraloks* politics indeed amplified sectarian resentments among the majority of the Muslims by simply 'othering' the Hindus in the high politics of late colonial Bengal. It is to be mention here that the idea of political mobilization for an exclusive Hindu constituency was influenced largely from the Hindu fear of being outnumbered by the Muslims and no wonder that the Hindu blocks in the 1920s were drawn closer upon a sense of insecurity and political impotency as a whole.²⁵ In the 1920s the common sense of a 'dying Hindu' incorporated in itself a similar anxiety for the conversion of the lower castes in a fearful extent. Even after the establishment of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha by Piyush Gosh in 1924, breath taking news were coming from different parts of east Bengal about the conversion of the lower castes by an external 'other' be it a Christen.²⁶ However, a general antagonism towards the Muslims did not simply integrate the Hindus. These were something catalytic forces. Hindu society had its own reasons and urge of unification. The system of separate electorate had already received official recognition in the Morley Minto Report and in the Montagu Chelmsford Act of 1919, even though

Montagu himself condemned the system of separate electorate 'fatal to the democratization of institutions'.²⁷ By 1920s Bengal was already on the way to become a communal volcano. The camouflaging unity of the Hindus and the Muslims during the Khilafat –Non Cooperation period could not bring anything positive for a healthy operation of the electoral politics in the near future. It could be taken as the starting point of the new political dimensions, sectarian in outlook, but a bit camouflaging in character.

II

The withdrawal of the Non Cooperation movement set new possibilities of political action in Bengal. Apart from the debates on the issues of representation and appointments, the tensions of agrarian Bengal came to the forefront on the political milieu as an unavoidable force of action. Set on the binary interests of the Hindu zamindars –mahajans and the bulk of the peasantry comprising of the Muslims and the lower caste Hindus , the undercurrent of agrarian tensions were ready to toss the exiting pattern of legislative politics . Unless these undercurrents of agrarian Bengal were taken into account, no mechanism of representative politics would have been a success in the representative organs like the legislature or different public bodies. The Swaraj Party was the first minor party to appear in the constitutional political arena. The programmes on the basis of which the Swaraj Party had formulated its election manifesto had little to do either of the underlying tensions of rural Bengal or the question of communal representation in Bengal legislature.²⁸ But its programme of council entry required a solid base of support from the Muslims because the party itself was born on this issue.

No other party or group had proposed it earlier in clear cut terms and C R Das first realized the importance of winning over the Muslims to the Swaraj Party. Muslim support was necessary for the party to create a constitutional deadlock in the legislature –the fundamental objective of the Swaraj Party. But what he had done in the actual place was a bit confusing. Instead of paying greater attention on the issue of legislative non cooperation he proposed one of the most controversial settlements with the Muslims, which in turn put a large section of the Bengali Hindus into complete disarray. The proposed Bengal Pact²⁹ not only heightened the range of Hindu susceptibilities but it was apprehended that this pact had set the Hindu community of Bengal ‘a blaze with indignation’.³⁰ A group of up country Hindus and Marwari’s lent their voice in support of the anti pact campaigns.³¹ In most of the protest meeting the twin controversial issues of cow killing and playing music before the mosques were unnecessarily highlighted. In a whole these issues were drawn into the public arena as a part and parcel of a question dealing specially with the issues of reservation subject to the establishment of self government in the province. The inclusion of these twin issues into the Resolution of the pact indeed demoralized its appeal before the Hindus and afterwards they frequently used these sensitive stereotypes as a favorite subject of discussion, if not in a secular way. . The following debates on the pact both in and outside the legislature marked the constraints of party politics where the novelties of the proposed pact, if any, was bound to be appear as a mere bargaining factors with its target at the underdeveloped majority as a tool to be used in favour of the Swaraj party within the legislature. The annulment of the proposed pact further fueled the sectarian antagonisms in Bengal. One may see here the quandary of the

Bengali Hindus at large. Keeping in view the popular Hindu support behind the Swaraj Party it was quite interesting to note that why the Bengali Hindus were too much anxious on the issues of proposed seat reservation for the Muslims at a time when the Swaraj Party itself was emerged on the issue of non cooperation with the legislature. Logically it meant that either the Hindu support base of the party was not a real one or even the mass appeal of C R Das did not have a solid base to cater the needs of his constituencies. Idealistically it indicated the existing obsession of the educated Hindus to government services and this type of endeavors of the educated Hindus were sufficiently reflected by the contemporary Hindu press. By 1923-1924 the leaders of the political parties failed to realize the simple truth that no unity could be achieved by making pacts rather it was the prevailing unity which headed pacts. **The entire drama around the Bengal Pact question, however, exposed the urgencies of identity formation for the Hindus and made almost a necessity to consolidate the Muslim interests in and out side the legislature.**³²

It was a matter of irony that in the year 1923 when C R Das was to move his ambitious venture on Hindu Muslim unity, a meeting of the leading Hindu citizens of Calcutta took place. At this meeting one of the most important decisions was taken by the leading personalities from different political persuasions.³³ One similarity among these leaders was lying in their anti Swarajist attitude. Most of them were upper and middleclass professionals with a urban belonging and a good number of Hindu landed and business interests assembled there to start a Bengal branch of the *Hindu Mahasabha*.³⁴ Piyush Kanti Ghosh of the *Amrita Bazaar Partika*

took the primary initiative here to activate the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha and with the active participation of the Bengal Hindu Sabha, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha emerged to the scene.³⁵ Soon after the establishment of the *Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha* in 1924 some of its leaders tried to project some of the key issues of the Sabha from a Swarajist point of view. It seemed very much natural that a growing political organization would seek for some settlements, if not visibly, with the party in power. It did not mean that the Hindu Sabha reached in a settlement with the Swaraj Party or it had a tacit acceptance on each and every political action of the Swarajists. It was proved from the rigid attitude of the Sabha towards the proposed Hindu Muslim Pact as 'detrimental to the interests of the Hindu Society.'³⁶ However, at the first *Hindu Sammelan* at Patna in 1924 the Hindu Sabhaitis failed to reach an agreement on the fate of the Bengal Pact and it became quite obvious from the conference that it was not still possible for the Hindu Sabha to change the Swarajists.³⁷

The proposed pact had created a unique pulsation in Bengal and the controversies aroused from the pact indicated too some extent in which course the politics of Bengal was going to be moved. This proposed pact received support from a greater section of the Bengali Muslim leaders including a host of renowned *Ulemas* like Maulana Shah Sufi, Abu Baqr, Maulana Afsaruddin Ahmed and others.³⁸ But the attitude of the orthodox *ulemas* had never been free of conflicts. The example of Abu Baqr might be taken here. The charismatic *Pir* was associated with many local organizations like *Anjuman Islamia* (Faridpur), *Anjuman Tablighe Islam* (Rangpur). He never overtly challenged the Bengal Pact but tried his best

to protect Muslim exclusiveness by issuing *fatwa* on the question of music before mosque and declared cow killing as a matter of racial pride for the Muslims³⁹ The ultimate result of these was an arousal of Hindu communal sentiments, best captured in the twin discourses of '*dying Hindu*' and abduction of Hindu Women by Muslim '*goondas*'. The well circulated pamphlets like the '*Bangla Hindu Jatir Khoy o Pratikar*' by Tangail Hindu Samaj (1924) and Saileshnth Sharma Bisi's '*Hindu Samajer Bartaman Samasya*' had played an important role in mobilizing the educated Hindus of Bengal.⁴⁰ The mobilization process included several social problems issues like widow remarriage and women abduction. The sectarian rhetoric of 1920s marked the creation of a new public force around the issues of molestation of Hindu women by Muslim hooligans in the predominately Muslim majority areas of eastern Bengal. The metaphor of Hindu women abduction by Muslims now provided a new dimension to Hindu communal discourse with a call for legitimate action against it.⁴¹ The Hindu Mahasabha leaders now stressed on the necessity of a 'physical culture' as the only remedy to save the Hindus—a physically and numerically degenerated race.

The disaster of C R Das's scheme of pact politics resulted in a steady decline of the Muslims from the side of the Swarajists. The critics of Das fanned the assumptions that 'extravagant concessions' had been provided to a 'inefficient undeserving community' and such reservation formula would bring nothing but petty inter communal bickering.⁴² In this regard Hindu Mahasabha leaders like Lala Lajpat Ray and Madan Mohan Malviya had organized protest meeting in criticizing Das's hasty attempt to solve a question of national importance. Malviya's shifting political

stands was very evident at this juncture. Upto the end of 1923 he was more or less a firm believer of Hindu Muslim unity.⁴³ In case of Bengal he was essentially a sinner on the fence. While reacting to the Bengal Pact he asserted that the pact which 'though was evidently meant for Bengal alone', must affect the relation of Hindu and Muslims in other parts of India.⁴⁴ Infact the non Bengali Hindu leaders in every possible manner had tried to draw the Bengal question on the all India platform by swiftly jeopardizing the Bengali priorities. The tendency of mixing up the cause of Hindu with that of Hindu interest remained as a chief feature of the Hindu Mahasabha movement in mid 20s⁴⁵ and the Bengali Hindus could not identify themselves neither with this type of non Bengali issues or with the rigid militant ideology of the Arya Samaj with which the All India Hindu Mahasabha was attached strongly.⁴⁶ Even on the background of the *Suddhi* and *Saghathan* propagandas, the Muslim press itself expressed its hope that the Bengali Hindus would remain aloof from the Mahasabha movement organized by the non Bengali Aryans.⁴⁷ It was true to some extent. Hindus from north India had rallied together with the middle class Bengali Hindus against the Bengal Pact, but they had missed one significant point that the disproportionate economic development of the Hindus and Muslims and the heterogeneous demographic composition in Bengal produced some exclusive political conditions in Bengal. Side by side two types of undercurrents were active there to influence the Mahasabha movement in Bengal in a different path. A section of the upper caste Hindu Bengali took the Mahasabha movement particularly the Samnghthan movement as a social reform movement like that of the Brahmos⁴⁸, one group of western educated Bengalis found themselves almost in a helpless position because their universal

nationalist spirits was not at all sanctioning a direct involvement with a Hindu organization like the Mahasabha. The consciousness of a threatened Hindu identity simultaneously pervaded the Hindu mind at that time. This type of condition was an exception for Bengal only.

The growing desire of the educated Muslims for a share in government jobs required at least an agreement at the elite level. For a section of the Bengali Hindus counted it as an unfair penalty on them. Basically they had no answers to justify their position. They were opposing to an agreement where the Muslims were to get some seats in the legislature and percentage in jobs in keeping with the ratio of population.⁴⁹ The reaction of the Congress was not at all satisfactory to the Bengal Pact. Many Congressmen including the Moderates, the Extremists and the no-changers opposed it vehemently on the very argument that 'Das had trampled under the Lucknow compromise without waiting to see the finding of the Indian National Pact committee.'⁵⁰ Some accused the pact for being a pact between the Hindu and the Muslim members of the Swaraj Party of Bengal, not between the Hindus and the Muslims in general. Surprisingly the Congress leaders in general wanted to apply the draft national pact in Bengal even if it was prepared in the context of the north Indian communal problems by simply overlooking the grievances of the Bengali Muslims.

After the sudden death of Das in 1925 the Bengal Congress leaders who once at least paid lip support to the pact, stood against it in the Bengal Congress meeting at Calcutta in 1926. They did not even pay little heed to the warning given by Sarojini Naidu that 'by opposing this (Bengal Pact),

you are in fact reenacting a greater partition of in Bengal.’⁵¹ Already the Swarajist Muslims accused the pro Congress Swarajists for breach of trust. Already in 1924 the District Muslim Conference at Sirajganj under Maulana Hussain Siraji had scored a grand success vis a vis the Bengal Provincial Congress Conference under C R Das held at the same time and in the same place.⁵² The result was evident in the legislature that within two years the number of the Muslim Swarajists declined into two in 1926 from twenty one in 1924.⁵³

The political language of militant sectarianism grew faster when Lala Lajpat Rai laid down certain points in a meeting at Calcutta on 11th April 1925 for organizing the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal.⁵⁴ Two issues were incorporated into the political agendas with greater importance than others. These were the question of providing physical training to the Hindus and the question of re-conversion of those Hindus forcibly converted to Islam.⁵⁵ This twin issues were brought from the Arya Samaj scheme of work. However, one very interesting letter from some Ananda Mohan Chaudhury, editor of the *Jasodhar Patrika*, Jessore to the Secretary of Bengal Mahasabha Seth Padmaraj Jain must be mentioned here. In this letter Ananda Mohan Choudhury sought the permission of Padmaraj Jain to convert some Syed Naser Hassim into Hinduism. Hassim was of a view that if the Hindu Mahasabha agreed to provide him financial support then he would be converted to Hinduism along with some other members of his family. He even mentioned about Dr. Abdul Gafur Khan, the brother of Akram Khan (editor of the *Muhammadi*) being converted to Hinduism as Sashi Bhusan Gangului. It was his love for Gita, he mentioned, that wanted to get into the Hindu fold and

requested to make the monetary assistance matter a secret one.⁵⁶ This type of documents indeed focused on the another side of the *Suddhi* programme where a kind of foul play might have been at work, if not in a frequent manner.

Nevertheless, the reluctance of the Mahasabha on the question of a vertical restructuring of society brought the impression that it was to take Sanghathan as a process of horizontal unification focused mainly on composite catholicity and mutual tolerance.⁵⁷ The Hindu Mission-one of the non official partner of the Mahasabha in Bengal helped to project this sense of brotherhood along with a sense of revivalism in the Hindu society at large.⁵⁸ However, it could not be denied that the issues like untouchability, castism, depressed class problems were not handled properly by the so-called Sanghathan movement. Numbers of anomalies within the movement itself spoiled its practicability before the public in a greater extent. In fact in the twenties the Mahasabha failed to acquire a position from where it could claim to be acknowledged as the sole representative of the Hindus Throughout the twenties it remained more or less ineffective to impress a large number of Bengali Hindus. Being played by an up country image the Mahasabha performed badly among a section of the Hindu bhadraloks who were seen to stick desperately to the nationalist ideology of the Congress. Hindu Mahasabha did not take a backdoor entry in Bengal like the Muslim League⁴⁶ but stayed open for Hindus from all political persuasions. Nevertheless, it failed to shake off its image of being seen as a subsidiary of the Congress till the 30s, although the Mahasabha's conception of being a 'Hindu' differed sharply from that of the Congress.⁵⁹ Although the Indian National Congress had

'refused to abandon its secular and pluralistic principles' ⁶⁰ in every occasion, the 'Hindu tinge' present in a form of 'cultural internationality' failed to check the unfortunate distortion of nationalist politics in the coming years. Its failure to repudiate the 'communal nationalists' from the rank and file of the party was equally responsible for this predicament. ⁶¹

III

When Khan Bahadur Musaraff Hossain, MLC of Malda as well as the supporter of the Anglo Muslim friendship, moved a resolution in the council for immediate effect of the proposed employment opportunities to the Muslims as per the Bengal Pact of 1923 the situation once again turned into one of the mutual suspicion between the Hindus and the Muslims. ⁶² C R Das remained very much firm on the question that the provisions of the pact would be fulfilled only upon the attainment of Swaraj. ⁶³ At this stage the Muslim press found the most awaited opportunity to demoralize the Swarajists by simply calling their politics as just 'worthless bluffs, fraud and trickery' ⁶⁴. It was the beginning of the end of C R Das's spell in Bengal not only among the Muslims but also among the Hindus.. The reformed council of 1919 pushed the Hindu bhadraloks at a point of no return. They were to work either among the masses for electoral achievements or resort to sectarian political action. .None of these was acceptable to the Hindu bhadraloks because in both of the cases the overall ascendancy of the bhadraloks might be at a risk. Unfortunately the fear of a possible social upheaval could not be checked for a long. The evidence of increasing impatience among the lower caste Hindus and among the Muslims in general arrested the necessitated the

need to organize the peasants. IN the absence of a proper legislative strategy applicable to both the *bhadraloks* and the masses, the Swaraj Party itself went for a partial subjection to Hindu communal influences. In the succession struggle in the Bengal Congress between J M Sengupta, S C Bose and B N Sasmal,⁶⁵ Hindu communal and terrorist groups made direct entry that in the long run the sectarian forces at least got an obvious boost inside the party. The militant rank and file of the Swaraj Party organized their own platform after C.R Das's death. They were opposed to the concept of Dominion Status or to any demand other than Purna Swaraj⁶⁶. The Muslim side was not at all free of squabbles in mid 20s. The political leadership of the Muslim side was far from united either in its goal or specific interests. A section of the Muslim leadership was on the way of organizing Praja conferences for the Muslim tenants while some popular religious leaders and peasant activists were engaged in mobilizing Muslim support around specific symbols of religious identity and linked these identities with land reform issues.⁶⁷ It was of no wonder that the divisions with the level of leadership as well in the Muslim society at large determined the essential steps to be taken for constructing a political identity for the Muslims. Unlike the Hindus different rival groups claimed to represent the Bengali Muslim interest solely and at the time of the 1926 election the real picture of Muslim solidarity became visible too some extent. Apart from sharing a general suspicion against the Hindus no concrete political steps were not taken by these groups even the Tabligh and Tanzeem organizations performed badly in comparison to the Mahasabha movemet.⁶⁸

It was from the time of the Non cooperation - Khilafat movement, a good number of praja leaders had stepped into the forefront of politics. The peasants in general believed in enjoying the advantages what ever the Government was offering them in the spheres of tenancy laws, local self government or cooperative societies, however the situation changed specially when anti zamindar, anti mahajan propogandas were rising up in the government sponsored peasant associations.⁶⁹ The post war slump in the jute market adversely affected the peasants and a large number of peasants supported the jute boycott campaigns. The mechanism of these boycott campaigns opened the scopes for agitation on agrarian issues. Even the cultivators became aware, one government source informed, of the alternative methods in which he might improve his position and prepare the way for the no tax and no rent campaigns.⁷⁰ In this period the ulemas and the mullahs appeared to be as one of the most potent forces competent of mobilizing rural masses, if not like the politicians.⁷¹ However, until the establishment of a peasant political party, the agrarian issues did not get an actual priority rather the series of experiments in the field of tenancy legislation only stirred up the agrarian condition up to a point of sectarian antagonism . The high politics on the agrarian issues actually rose up in the early thirties with the emergence of the Praja Samity⁷² and different peasant organizations. It is to be noted here that the Hindu zamindars, Muslim jotdars, and the Mahajns protested the Bengal Tenancy Act Amendment Bill of 1923 for their own class interests against the underrayats and bargadars who were provided with occupancy rights in the bill. According to a section of the Muslim press it was ' an undisguised scheme of class legislation for the benefit off the propertied class'⁷³. It destroyed the status quo o far had been maintained

in the agrarian Bengal. The observation of the Hindu press was that 'the demand for Swaraj has become so acute and unavoidable that it was necessary to divert the mind of the people from politics to something else'.⁷⁴ The Muslim rent receivers unlike the Hindus were considered to be a part of the peasantry by the Muslim peasants particularly in the region of east Bengal.⁷⁵ Here lies the crux of the situation that under the influence of growing communal propagandas the peasant politics failed to move in a proper direction. Hindu opposition to the Bill and the Muslim support for tenant interests unfortunately simplified the sectarian question over class question.

The increase in illegal extractions by the zamindars from the tenants and mass ejection of non occupancy tenants and share croppers by the land lords, was introduced by the Bengal Tenancy Act (Amendment 1925)⁷⁶, and the subsequent controversies regarding the 'pernicious zamindari system' concentrated the growing anti zamindar feeling particularly under the influence of some Muslim ashraf leaders like Maulana Ismail Siraji, Masaraff Hossain, Abdul Jabbar Palwan, Ibrahim Hossain and others. A section of these leaders had tried to maintain a secret understanding with the pro zamindar Hindu leaders of the Swaraj Party for narrow class interests and a few of these leaders took the essential initiative to make the Sirajganj Muslim Conference a success.⁷⁷ According to Abdul Mansur Ahmed, one of the contemporary observer, described it as a 'grand success'⁷⁸ but did not refer to the actual paradox of the situation. It is to be mentioned here that the leadership of all the major parties came primarily from the land holding and urban professional families. So each of the leading parties be it the Congress or

Muslim League took part in the land reform debates in a restrictive way so that the support of their immediate constituency could remain intact.

Taking the view of the election of 1926 in front, Muslim leaders of Bengal had shown immense enthusiasm from their part to form political platforms for the Muslims so that non Muslims leaders and the government could realize the strength of their community.⁷⁹ But confusion and fragmentation remained as the most important feature of Muslim politics in Bengal during this period. Leaders like H. S. Suhrawardy, Sir Abdur Rahim, A K Gaznavi, Akram Khan and Fazlul Huq were divided among themselves. While Abdur Rahim and Gaznavi advocated Anglo Muslim cooperation for protecting Muslim interests, Suhrawardy took an anti government stand. Fazlul Huq was in favour of safe guarding the peasant interests. Abdur Rahim in a speech at Aligarh session of the Muslim League expressed the Muslim desire to stand for the British if their demands were conceded.⁸⁰ He described the Hindus as a menace to both the British and the Muslims.⁸¹ In view of the forthcoming election of 1926 a Muslim party on the way to be organized as a counterpoise to the Swaraj Party. Subsequently the leaders like Maulana Asrafuddin , Ahmed Chaudhury, Muzibar Rahman, and Abdur Rashid Khan appealed to the Bengali Muslims of different opinions to form a United Muslim Council party⁸² which was to secure Muslim interest in the next election. In the meantime Sir Abdur Rahim formed the Bengal Muslim Party on March 26 1926 with an objective to remove ‘ disabilities and difficulties’ of the Bengali Muslims so that they could attain power in proportion to their numerical strength.⁸³ The political objects of this party included securing a constitution for India framed on

the basis of a federation for autonomous provinces with the central government controlled the subjects like defense, foreign and inter provincial relations, currency, trade, and communication. Side by side the party wanted to introduce such a political system where the Muslims was to gain 56% representation in the legislative council, local bodies, public services, universities and in other professions.⁸⁴ Abdur Rahim as the Executive Councilor retired in 1925 and he was free to play the communal cards now. He was determined to make the Muslims stand independent out of the nationalist politics. Entering the legislative council at a by election in January 1926 from a Calcutta constituency, he went unopposed because the Swaraj Party could not even put up a Swarajist candidate against him.⁸⁵ What Abdur Rahim had initiated in the realm of electoral politics was to be applied on the popular field now.

Side by side in cooperation with ex Swarajists Muslims like H. S. Suhrawardy, Muzabur Rahman and others, Akram Khan and Fazlul Huq started on The Bengal Muslim Council Party. This party wanted to use its platform in the coming election independent of Congress, yet it failed to stand for a long period. The Bengal Muslim Council Party received the blessing from different Muslim political leaders including some former Khilafists, non cooperators and some Swarajists also.⁸⁶ Very soon factional squabbles injured the solidarity of the party. Infact Fazlul Huq who had an east Bengal connection hardly shared a cordial relation with the Calcutta based politicians like Suhrawardy and others. As a result, shortly the Suhrawardy had announced the formation of Independence Muslim party. Unfortunately the self seeking elements within the party used it for their personal political gain. The declaration that ' We have after all realized that the Congress is a Hindu organization and Muslims

have no chance of holding its leading strings', indicated the extent of frustration and disappointments, the Muslim political parties were passing through at that time.⁸⁷ Unlike the Bengal Muslim Party of Abdur Rahim the Independent Muslim Party was anti British in tone and like the former it remained communally vocal. At the same time this party announced its desire to be with the British bureaucracy than with the Congress if they were put in a condition to choose between the two, however, they had assured to change their policy if the attitude of the 'Hindu' Congress towards the Muslims would take a new turn.⁸⁸ Fazlul Huq's Bengal Muslim Council Party soon vanished from the scene and his followers coalesced with the Independent Muslim Party. Abdur Rahim believed that this party was formed solely on personal ground. It would have no relevance in future because egoism and personal sentiments were very much active there as political under currents.⁸⁹ This party paid sufficient attention towards the problems of the masses that it declared its aim to work for the introduction of free primary education, an useful irrigation system, proper sanitary arrangements, reorganization of the villages, and to defend the rights of the tenants, agricultural and laboring classes.⁹⁰ At the end of the party manifesto it was appealed that We therefore, appeal to our countrymen to join us in their thousand as members of this party and strengthen our hands, and make it possible for us, with their help, to work for the grate cause. We want members, we want workers, we want support, we want sympathy and cooperation and we trust our appeal will not be in vein.⁹¹

Among the 42 renowned Muslim members of this party most of the members were from legal profession and retired government officials like Khan Bahadur Ajjuil Huq, A F M Abdur Rahman, Maulavi Abdul

Karim, Maulavi Abdul Mansur Ahmed, Maulavi Arafuddin Chaudhury and others. Muslim journalists like Maulavi Rafiqur Rahman (the *Khadem*), Khairula Anam Khan (*Mahammadi*), Maulavi Muzibar Rahman (*The Mussalman*) were included into the party besides the members of the local boards, few zamindari and members of the legislative council.⁹² This party attracted the educated Muslims from both the metropolitan and mofussil areas. But it was not a very normal development in accordance to the degree of Muslim political consciousness in both of the rural and urban areas. ‘ Beware of the Muslim Swarajists’, ‘ Be ware of the prodigies of the government’⁹³ and ‘ Cooperate neither with the Hindus nor with the bureaucracy’⁹⁴-----these were the most popular slogans of this party used before the election. It was also true that this party had never make itself free from Swarajist leanings, as it was suspected to bear.⁹⁵ The Independent Muslim Party, emerged out of the influence of the Bengal Muslim Council Party of Fazlul Huq, did not have any ideological bearings rather personal preferences and regional ties had acted as a cementing force in case of the Independent Muslim Party.⁹⁶

These political parties might have been described as mere election time opportunist groups without any practical appeal in the modern sense. But the importance of the minor parties could hardly be underestimated in understanding the mode of Muslim politics in Bengal. It was a fact that under a system of an inadequate franchise, it was not possible for the Muslim leaders to make some extensive experiments in the level of legislative politics. Workers and fund were not readily available at that time. Due to a numbers of difficulties these parties were ceased to exist

within a short while. These minor parties at least indicated the course of future politics in which the Muslim Bengal was going to be directed. Lack of trust on the Swarajist mode of politics remained as the core reason for the consolidation these parties based on Muslim interests in Bengal. The Central Mohammedan Party, the central wing of the Mohammedan Association was formed just before the election in 1926 with a similar approach like the Independent Muslim Party.⁹⁷ The culmination of Muslim political thinking did not identify itself with the liberal ideas and rational thinking of the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*⁹⁸, established at Dacca in 1926. The ideas and values of these group (popularly known as the Shikka group) were opposed by the orthodox Muslim politicians who had hardly any connection with '*Buddhir Mutki*' (emancipation of intellect) movement initiated by this group⁹⁹ It was not only a literary organization. The political consciousness of the Samaj was reflected in the discussion of the Samaj on a particular essay read by some scholar. The following questioners on the topic proved Bengali Muslim's intellectual endeavors to judge any specific idea or any political propaganda. Abul Hossain, in an essay '*Satkara Paitallish*' (Forty Five Percent) strongly opposed Abdur rahim's demand of forty-five percent reservation of government jobs for the Muslims on the ground that it would not help the Muslims to become competent and expressed that there was no such real cause for the apprehension that the Muslims would not compete with the others.¹⁰⁰ The subsequent discussions on his essay indicated the individual thinking of a section of the Bengali Muslims on the fate of their community interests in a fashion not very common with the so called guardians of the Muslim society. It is to be mentioned here a communist connection could be seen with Muslim

Sahitya Samaj in several occasions,¹⁰¹ however their influence was very limited in that sense that their liberal views attracted a small minority of urban Muslims and vast population of the Muslim masses remained outside the arena of this intellectual movement. Capitalizing on the illiteracy and poverty of the Muslim masses the sectarian ideologues continuously tried to demoralize the intellectual rational spirit of the Muslims and with the turn of the decade the Muslim League successfully silenced the voices of those who advocated for Hindu Muslim unity on the basis of democratic and liberal principles.¹⁰² In the 20s the three main Muslim parties—Bengal Muslim Party of Abdur Rahim, Central Muslim Council Party of A K Gaznavi and the Independent Muslim Party By S. H Suhrawardy maintained their independent existence in terms of their political maneuverings, the support of the low caste Hindus, Europeans, Anglo Indians and a few 'responsivist' Hindu bhadraloks changed some of the previous calculations that the election of 1926 marked the end of an era. What Abdur Rahim had apprehended in his presidential address to the Muslim League in 1925 became quite meaningful that the Muslims might form a coalition with other political parties, they could not merge their political identities with other political parties particularly with the Swaraj Party which they had considered to be futile in the Bengal legislative council. From 1927 onwards a different situation had developed in Bengal with some major changes in the realm of constitutional politics.

One ominous cycle of the Hindu communalists with the conservatives within the Bengal Congress became active under the influence of the revolutionaries turned communalists from mid 1920s. After the death of

Das the *Karmi Sangha*¹⁰³ appeared with a new strength of uncompromising anti Muslim spirit and they threw their weight in favour of Jindra Mohan Sengupta in his battle over the 'Triple Crown'.¹⁰⁴ From 1925 onward the course of Congress politics faced two types of evil consequences. The first was a growing isolation of the city politicians from the politics of mass movement in the country-side and the second was a rift between the Congress and the Muslims at least in the arena of council politics. Side by side the tripartite struggle for supremacy between J M Sengupta, B N Sasmal and Subhas Chandra Bose within the Congress¹⁰⁵ and in the Calcutta Corporation was proved to be fatal for the unity of the Congress. At least for the time Sengupta won the battle and was elected as the new Mayor of Calcutta Corporation. The Calcutta politicians did not welcome the candidature of J M Sengupta being a candidate with no charisma to be a representative citizen of Calcutta.¹⁰⁶ Sengupta had his own political skills of handling the Muslim councilors who happened to be the integral element of the Swaraj Party but his growing involvement with the Corporation affairs in Calcutta made him detached from his base in *muffosil*. It was a common problem for the Swarajists –a party which had come into the power with the mass political wave during the non Cooperation movement. Its isolation from the *muffosil* politics became one of the major causes of its decline. In the latter years the Swaraj Party and its parent body the Bengal Congress had neither hopped nor attempted to build a solid support base in the *muffosil*. It was only the Swaraj Party which could provide the basic link between the city and the *muffosil* but after the death of Das all the hopes had gone.

Definitely the adjustment made by J M Sengupta with the ex revolutionaries facilitated his election as the Mayor in Calcutta in 1927,¹⁰⁷ the ex-revolutionaries organized themselves as a powerful pressure group within the Congress but among Das's recruits Sengupta remained as the last man to win Muslim support after the departure of B N Sasmal from Bengal Congress.¹⁰⁸ The Karmi Sangha was supposed to have role in the overthrow of Sasmal.¹⁰⁹ Sasmal had the guts to challenge those who championed the cause of revolutionary terrorism without a sufficient lineage to patriotism. If both Sasmal and Sengupta could jointly stand by the nationalist cause in Bengal, the sectarian forces might be at a check. Sengupta was one such leader who even tried his best to keep a balance between the Hindus and the Muslims in a post riot situation in 1926. He did not dare to take H S Suhrawardy as his deputy Mayor of Calcutta Corporation. It was indeed a tuff decision for Sengupta to choose a Muslim whom the Hindus accused of instigation the rioters in Calcutta.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately Sengupta's attraction for the mayoral chair made him more and more attached with the Big Five clique and the backing he had received from the *Karmi Sangha* turned the situation forever. The re entry of Subhas Bose in the Congress after a short interval further polarized the political situation in Bengal¹¹¹ and the Karmi Sangha now turned their attention to this new militant radical leader.¹¹² The subsequent fight between Sengupta and Subhas Bose for the control of the Bengal Congress¹¹³ not only agencified some outer forces like the revolutionary terrorists into the political mainstream but also alienated the pro Swarajist rural Muslim leaders from the urban centric politics of the Congress. The Swaraj Party in the assembly was now left in a position of not more than a hopeless minority.

From 1927 onwards a different situation arose in Bengal. Now the differences over separate electorate and representation led to the strengthening of Muslim political opinions into another type of groupings. The Muslim leadership now took the issues of the province more seriously regardless of the attitude of the All India leadership. The cooperation of the Muslim leaders with the Simon Commission was the first instance of this sentiment though M a Jinnah organized a session at Calcutta to boycott the commission.¹¹⁴ It was a kind of desperate attempt from the part of a section of the Bengali Muslims. Supporting the importance of separate electorate the Simon commission pointed out that communal representation could not be regarded as the sole cause for communal disturbances¹¹⁵ and the Muslim leadership from Bengal firmly supported the cause of separate electorate for the sustenance of Muslim identity.¹¹⁶ However, the shifting allegiance of the Muslim members of the council and their conflicting claims on their strength in the House make it too much problematic to estimate the actual strength of the Muslim parties in the legislature.¹¹⁷ One official source informed that after the election of 1926, Bengal Muslim Party had 16 members, 8 members were belonged to the Independent Muslim Party and 13 members had no definite party affiliation.¹¹⁸ However, a majority of this section soon joined the Central Muslim Council Party, ~~under~~ the leadership of A K Gaznavi.¹¹⁹ It was true that all of these Muslim members of the House were determined to protect their community interests but in absence of a concrete programme no strong political unity could have been achieved among them. Most of these people were guided more by their personal preferences than anything else. It was quite

e evident from the bitter struggle between Abdur Rahim and A K Gaznavi in early 1927 over the question of ministership.¹²⁰ Getting rejected by the Hindu members of the assembly Abdur Rahim's plea for the ministerial chair went in vein and now he put a counter pressure on the government that the Muslim support base of the government would no longer at work unless the demands of the Muslims were fulfilled.¹²¹ It was a tactics of hitting the birds with one stone. On the one hand he had projected the image of his Bengal Muslim party independent of any backing from the government and also improved his image as the most trusted leader of the Muslims in Bengal. His statements before the press on the stand of the Bengal Muslim Party clearly indicated his intentions.¹²² Meanwhile Fazlul Huq, Muzibur Rahman in cooperation of some Swarajists got engaged in ministry wrecking tactics in 1927 while another party namely the United Council Party came into existence by the supporters of Gaznavi and Chakraborty.¹²³ This party ironically was dubbed as the party of the landlords and in-laws. Among its leading members K.G.M Farouqui and Razaur Rahman Khan was the son in law of Gaznavi and H S Suhrawardy was the son in law of Abdur Rahim.¹²⁴ It indicated the failure of the Muslim members to work an organized block. There was no well extended party rather some council parties in a form of provisional alignments mainly based on kinship priorities or regional priorities.

With a limited strength of working capacity the Bengal Muslim Party perhaps took a firm position on constitutional reforms for the Muslims. In deferent occasions this party moved some proposals of adequate representation, due share for the Muslims in public services and

others.¹²⁵ They had the primary support from the Swarajists but failed to convince the entire Muslim opinion. A section of the radical peasant leaders were still in a position to voice their protest against the 'useless fight' over communal electorate in spite of paying sufficient attention to the practical issues like literacy, diseases, poverty, famine, rural indebtedness and establishment of self government.¹²⁶ Swarajist position on these issues was more or less obscure. For the sake of the so-called unity against the British, they had tried to avoid those issues which were to create communal animosities in the province like the question of separate electorate at least within the legislature.¹²⁷ But once again the so-called non-communal leaders from both the communities were seen to speak the language of sectarian politics when the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill was placed in the house in late 1928. This proposed bill was intended to strengthen the hands of the zamindars by simply overlooking the cause of the bargadars and the underriots.¹²⁸ The United Council party, the Bengal Muslim Party took almost a common pro-zamindar stand including the Swarajists. The leader of the United Council Party even went to the extent of identifying the interests of the zamindars with that of the tenants.¹²⁹ The voting pattern in the Legislative Council on the Tenancy Amendment Bill of 1928 put forward once again the class character of the leaders on the occasion of various amendment debates on the bill.¹³⁰ The prolonged debates on the bill sharply divided the political opinion along class line not on party line.¹³¹ However, the most shameful among the debates was the one brought by Ashimuddin Ahmed in favour of abolishing the irrational system of *Salami*.¹³² All the *Zamindari* interests including the Hindus and the Muslims stood against the amendment and the so-called Hindu

nationalists emerged in favour of the zamindars. The pro peasant Muslim leaders found their voice choked before the covering presence of the leaders like Subhas Bose, J M Sengupta , Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Bidhan Roy in favour of the *zamindari* interests.¹³³ The Amendment was lost by fifty three votes.¹³⁴ The entire drama on the Tenancy Amendment Bill underlined one very important point that the equation of party politics in the Bengal assembly was not tenable enough to challenge the class collaboration of mutually conflicting forces and this sort of class cohesion based on the interests of the propertied elites could become more articulate than the so-called class consciousness of the others.

At a time when the Hindu political opinion in the legislature was seen to be busy in protecting their class interests, it seemed essential to take a glance over the electoral role of the Mahasabha in late 20s. The question of Mahasabha's participation in the election of 1926, sharp controversies arose in the Hindu political arena.¹³⁵ The main problem of the Mahasabha was that it did not have any economic or strong political agenda other than the defense of the Hindus , a issue which the Congress could not take up. Most of the Bengali Hindus were not prepared to put a candidate against the Congress or the Swarajists in the system of separate electorate.¹³⁶ Some local Hindu Shabhas in Bengal considered the Mahasabha's contesting election fatal to the interest of the party as well thought that it would hamper the Sanghathan work in the province.¹³⁷ However, according to a section of the Bengali Hindus it was also necessary to contest the election to protect the Hindu interest with the realm of legislative politics.¹³⁸ But participation in the elections by a party like the Mahasabha was full of other connotations. It was to make

the Mahasabha a separate political party opposed both to the Congress and the Muslim League. Till now the Mahasabha in Bengal was designed more or less as a socio cultural movement aimed at the unification and strengthening of the Hindu society. Politicization of the Mahasabha complicated the situation to an extent that the Hindu press itself got involved into warm discussions on the issue.¹³⁹ Surprisingly the pro election Bengal *Mahasabha* leaders took recourse to some other new parties to contest the election on behalf of the Hindus.¹⁴⁰ the Responsive Cooperation Party ¹⁴¹ Changed its name into Nationalist Party with some members of the Congress Independent group in 1926 at a meeting at Calcutta.¹⁴²

If in the Muslim side there was at least some minor council parties, in the Hindu side there was no stable political party to take up the cause of the Hindus. The Hindu Sabha was still in a formative phase. The position of the Mahasabha was very much ambiguous in case of contesting the election. No body on the Hindu side was sure of what should be position of the Mahasabha in the realm of electoral politics.¹⁴⁴ A section of the Hindu press hold the opinion that there was no need of forming a Hindu party like the different Muslim Party inside the council rather it would be better for the Mahasabha it make its influence felt in the council through the Hindu members if situation required.¹⁴⁵ But they had hardly any answer to the question that how it would be possible especially at a time when both the Hindu members of the Congress and the Swarajists were fell in short to stand for the Hindu cause. But in a communally charged situation after the murder of Swami Shraddhananda in 1926 the Mahasabha could not remain idol for long.¹⁴⁶ The unity resolutions

passed by the Congress in Calcutta in 1927 imbued a kind of independent approach into the Mahasabha movement in Bengal.¹⁴⁷ Unanimous opposition came from the entire Hindu block independent of the pro Congress faction against the Muslim demand of statutory majority in Bengal. The following years saw the ultimate exhibition of mutual hatred and suspicions from the part of the Mahasabha and the Muslim parties in every occasion they met. The All Parties Conference of 1928 faced the same fate of complete disappointment just like the Nehru Report and the Fourteen Points of Jinnah in 1929.¹⁴⁸ Provincial Hindu Sabha and the Hindu members of the council came in full accord at the time of tenancy legislation debates that in no situation the defender of Hinduism as well as the protectors of their economic interests should not face any danger from the Muslim masses in general.¹⁴⁹

The fourteen points of Jinnah were the excellent formulation of what A K Gaznavi had placed in his memorandum to the Simon Commission¹⁵⁰ in 1927. The Muslim leaders of Bengal were convinced enough that although in the District Board elections of 1927-1928 the Muslims swept the poll in Chittagong and Mymansingh---the two Muslim majority areas, this trend would not be able to replace the Hindus because the right to franchise was still based on 'property qualifications.'¹⁵¹ As long as this was the system, the Muslims could not get anything from joint electorate. The impact of communal riots of the previous years already had spoiled the chance of reconciliation the claims of different parties and the Hindu Mahasabha within a last few years had scored noticeable success in establishing its branch through out Bengal. Even from the hilly regions of remote Darjeeling the Mahasabha collected its workers from the local

non Bengali businessmen.¹⁵² In a letter to letter to the Special Superintendent of Police, I. B, Bengal it had been informed that some Swami Sachidananda, connected with both the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha, published a long article in a Hindi paper of Calcutta. It was very much under observation. A portion of the article continued that,

Hindus! It is a great shame to you, in front of you so many country and religious brothers are being converted. Have you no power to save your own brothers. Can you make necessary educational arrangements, where your proper religion can be taught and thus save them from further conversion.¹⁵³

Surprisingly one Hastalal Giri, the Vice President of the Gurkha League was also attached with the Mahasabha activists in Darjeeling. If there were the Gurkhas on one side, lower caste peasantry now became another target of political mobization in Bengal. Right from its first provincial meeting in Serajganj, the anti untouchability programmes of the Sanghathan movement had some appeal among the Rajbanshi peasants of that regions.¹⁵⁴ In The Savarkarian notion of Hindutva each and every religion born in India had a definite claim and they were to be brought under the umbrella of the Sanghathan project because the Hindus were getting outnumbered day by day.¹⁵⁵ The Sanghathan project carried a resemblance with the Sanskritising claims of the Rajbanshis for a Kshatriya status. However the open politicization of the concept of Sanghathan was not free of complexities and inner tensions. Although the Modern Review in an article described suddhi and Sanghathan as a matter of self defense,¹⁵⁶ it did not liquidate the controversies on the subject. In this respect one may ask the question than to what extent the

programme of Sanghathan was employed for the removal of untouchability or other social malice. Extracting from a letter written to Padmaraj Jain, the secretary of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha, by some Nritrya gopal Bhattacharjee , the I B official reported on 2.4.28 that,

....the Namasudras and the Mohammedans of Narail have combined together against the high caste Hindus. The Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha has taken up the causes of the latter. The Hindu Sabha trying to bring disaffection between the two classes, Namasudras and the Mohammedans. Some Nritya Gopal Bhattacharjee was sent to the affected area of the Narail circle. He also attempted to excite the Namasudras against the Mohammedans by expressing in his speeches that the Mohammedans kidnapped the Hindu women, and abducted the Hindu women and got them Nikka marriage to Muhamedans. His attempts in Narail circle have not been successful.¹⁵⁷

One may see here the actual dichotomy of Mahasabha's politics in Bengal. It was the same time when at the fourth Provincial Hindu Conference at Mymansing an ardent appeal was made to remove the curse of untouchability¹⁵⁸ and to purify the existing untouchables for better habits and customs. The Narail incident was very much economic in nature. It was a common feature of east Bengal countryside that the lower caste Hindu peasantry joined with the Muslim peasants against the propertied Hindus. Instead of redressing the grievances of their lower caste brothers, the Hindu Sabha had tried to instigate the Namasudras against their immediate class friends i.e. the Muslims by simply using the stereotypes of women abduction or forceful conversion of the Hindu women into Islam. They went a step further by openly taking the side of the high caste Hindus against the lower castes. It was not known that to what extent the allegations of the Hindu Sabha was true in case of Narail

but their general political mechanism was not at all favorable for the situation there. The bankruptcy of the policy of the Mahasabha in terms of the lower caste came to the forefront within the last few years of the twenties when a large section of the lower castes joined the organized depressed class's movement with a new dalit identity. Now they we claim the same amount of status and facilities from the government as had been provided to the Muslims.

The general configuration of rural interests in Bengal was such that the exploiters could be easily identified with Hindus. The Muslims in general remained aloof from money lending business due to some religious taboos. On the other most of the tenurial interests were under Hindu control and it was defended by lawyers who happened to be Hindus. Therefore the class conflict in the Bengal countryside was caught into the sectarian divisions and the aspiring Muslim peasants had several reasons to think the Swarajist politics as mere pretensions to curb their rights for the benefit of the Hindu landlords. The Hindu *bhadralok's* failure to maintain their majority over the local bodies and district councils especially in a Muslim majority area led to the decline in the position and role of the Hindu *bhadraloks*. The Hindu fear of defeat in the elections held in joint electorates seemed very genuine that in the local board elections in Mymansingh in 1927 'not a Hindu had been elected' in one constituency.¹⁵⁹ The mobilization of the Bengal peasantry on non communal issues like the abolition of all intermediaries between the state and the cultivators by the Krisak Samities did not bring any significant development because the propagandas made by the communal organizations ready spoiled the hope of peasant mobilization of pure

class line. The peasants could not even connect themselves with the anti Jotdar, anti zamindar and anti government pronouncements of the Labour Swaraj Party later renamed as the Workers and peasant party in 1926.¹⁶⁰ This non communal class party wanted to make the workers and the peasants 'more consciousness of their political rights so that they will be able to snatch freedom out of the hands of a few aggressive and selfish individuals'. Unfortunately neither the high caste Hindu zamindar nor the rural Muslimeletes became sympathetic with the causes this party was fighting for. In a general manner the Muslim Jotdar came forward to lead the peasants in collaboration with the ulemas, rural elites and low caste Namasudra leaders against their Hindu oppressors.¹⁶¹

It is to be mentioned here that the actual objective of the Hindu Sanghathan movement was not at all achieved in Bengal. Apart from a few constructive programmes mostly taken by some socio religious organizations like the Bharat Sevashram Sangha or the Hindu Mission in favour of Hindu Sanghathan,¹⁶² A great numbers of issues affecting Hindu society at large remained untouched. The complexities of agrarian class structure and the correlated socio economic issues had never been included into the list of Mahasabha programmes in Bengal rather superficial commitments were made to the Marginal Hindus—the worse affected victim of agrarian class structure in rural Bengal. Side by side the intimacy of a section of the Hindu leaders with the so called conservatives further led to a kind of lackadaisical attitude towards the caste question. It remained undecided where the Mahasabha would launch a movement against the entire system of caste or it would take interest only in the issues of untouchability or the social abuses related to

it. Perhaps it was due this quandary of the Mahasabha that they failed to tackle the untouchability issue from a pure social point of view. They politicized this subject in their own style only to cater the political needs of their party and practically no attention had ever been paid towards the economic, social and educational underdevelopment of the vast rank of people falling into the category of 'untouchable'. This type of situation had a definite role to play in the development of a new type of caste structure subject to colonial intervention. The Depressed Class movement came as the most awaited package for a larger section of the low caste Hindus in Bengal. In fact from 1930s some of the caste leaders went in search for an alternative of the Mahasabha and some of the lower caste masses remained active in the popular fronts of struggle for rights. The first section got directly involved in constitutional politics from early thirties and it was this section which grasped almost all the institutional concessions granted to them in the Communal Award of 1932.¹⁶³ However, on the question of a separate electorate, the Depressed Class movement itself got divided. Mukunda Behari Mallik of Bengal Namasudra Association stood behind the demand of a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes along with Dr B R Ambedkar in 1932.¹⁶⁴ M C Rajah, the president of the All India Depressed Class conference, however, went for an understanding with Hindu Mahasabha leaders B S Munje accepting joint electorate with reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes.¹⁶⁵ From the part of the Mahasabha it was proved to be the most excellent tactics which was to check the further division on of the electorate on one hand and keep its lower caste base in control. However, it was too late. Ambedkar sharply criticized the Hindu Mahasabha as a political group intended to use the Depressed Classes for

combating Muslim influence in politics.¹⁶⁶ However, the Muslim opinion on the nature of the electorate showed a mixed response in late twenties. A section of the nationalist Muslims involved in the Congress now found adequate expression in manifesting the nationalist aspiration of the Muslims. The term 'nationalist Muslims' has been used here to describe the politics of the Muslims who were associated with the national movement and to make a difference between them and the Muslim communalists in general.¹⁶⁷ However, all of these terms should be taken as mere imageries because the term 'nationalist Hindu' has never been used to separate the politics of C. R Das or Subhas Chandra Bose from that of the activities of Malviya, Shyamaprasad Mukherjee or Lala Lajpat Rai. Right from 1919 and after the phase of Khilafat Non Cooperation was over the nationalist endeavors of the Congress Muslims remained more or less quiescent and in the late twenties first these people realized the need for a party of their own. The existing state of Muslim politics in fact necessitated the urgency for a Muslim party to promote the spirit the national spirit among the Muslims. Thus in 1929 the All India Nationalist Muslim party came into existence at Allahabad.¹⁶⁸ In a conference held at 27 July 1929 at Allahabad the central body of the party was organized. A good number of Muslims from Bengal were present at this conference.¹⁶⁹ Mr. Aftabuddin Choudhury, Mr Ghulam Jhilani, Mr Jalaluddin Hashmi, Mr Safaruddin Ahmed and Momed Kashim were the representatives of Bengal along with other Muslim leaders from different parts of India.¹⁷⁰ Twenty eight members were elected From Bengal into the central body of the party. Muzibur Rahman, Shamsuddin and Akram Khan were given the responsibility to organize the party in Bengal.¹⁷¹ Soon some local committees were organized in

different parts of Bengal mainly in the east Bengal region. Akram Khan and Mujibar Rahman and two Calcutta Corporation councilors Abdur Razzak and K Nuruddin were at the charge of the Calcutta committee and Samsul Huda and Ghulam Qadri were placed in charge of the Dacca committee.¹⁷² In the regions of Faridpur and Bogra, the Nationalist Muslim Party found a strong foothold.¹⁷³

Right from its inception his party strongly condemned the system of separate electorate. One of the chief architects of this party M An Ansari declared that unless the system of separate electorate was eradicated, no communal harmony would be established in India.¹⁷⁴ Surprisingly the sharpest reaction came against the party from the Hindu Mahasabha, not from any Muslim political Party. They were scared that some Muslims, in the name of nationalism were trying to pressurize the Congress. Just like the Muslim political forces the Mahasabha strongly rejected the proposals of joint electorate, adult suffrage and reservation for the minorities of less than twenty five percent---recommended by a committee consisting of Ansari, Malviya and Sardar Sardul Singh in 1931.¹⁷⁵ The Hindu Mahasabha was convinced that some disguised Muslims in the name of the Nationalist Party was trying to get inside the Congress in order to take a hold of the party from within.¹⁷⁶ Hindu Mahasabha believed that the proposals and the programmes of the Nationalist Party were sanctioned by Jinnah in fourteen points. They did not find any difference between the Muslim communalists and the so called Muslim nationalists.¹⁷⁷ It is worth mentioning here that earlier in 1926 Malviya joined the New Independent Congress party---a coalition between the Responsivists and the Independent Congressmen.¹⁷⁸ This

party worked closely with the Responsive Cooperation Party which was established in early 1926 within the Congress under the leaders like Malviya, B. S Moonje and others like Byomkesh Chakrabourty in Bengal.¹⁷⁹ this party was not opposed to the Hindu Mahasabha Saghathan movement in Bengal. It declared,

In Bengal it would be a deliberate and pretended blindness now to ignore altogether the Hindu Muslim question. The Responsive Co operation Party of Bengal is a political Party of Bengal is a political party of the Congress, but it is not opposed to the Hindu *Sangathan* or the *Tanzeem* movement, so long as they are kept within very strict limits. The party will not countenance communalism, but it will encourage the growth of the Hindu organization and of the Muslim organization on a national, as distinguished from a communal bias.¹⁸⁰

The politically ambitious *Hindu Mahasabha* leaders in Bengal saw in this party a chance of fulfilling their political desires. The party declared that it was a party only within the Congress, none but members of the Indian National Congress were eligible to become its members.¹⁸¹ However, the members joining this group were mostly *Hindu Mahasabha* members and the actual objects and policies of the party had never been defined clearly. The idea of responsive cooperation did not work, in Bengal because neither its *Hindu Mahasabha* members were eager to fight the government nor its Congress members were ready to do any sacrifice like the Swaraj Party. The Muslims did not see anything attractive in this party and they chose to rally behind the Muslim council parties. These minor Muslim parties were attacked by the All India Nationalist Muslim Party on the ground that these parties were involved more in winning political power as their main objective without any anti British nationalist aspirations.¹⁸² In the resolution adopted for the All India Nationalist

Muslim Party in 1929, it was declared to promote among Muslims a spirit of nationalism and to develop a mentality above communalism.¹⁸³ Unfortunately the Hindu Mahasabha did not bent a little in favour of this party. If the Hindu Mahasabha at least could make an attempt for accommodating the voice of the nationalist Muslims for the cause of Indian nationalism, the communal Muslim organizations might have been checked at least in level.

In fact at that time the minor political parties from both the sides of the Hindus and the Muslims remained in water tight compartments, the Congress had acted as a common link among the entire minor parties specially those formed by the Hindu leaders. The Congress mania in several occasion restricted these parties to take a firm independent stand. Discarding the attitudes of a large section of the leaders, the Communal Award was declared in 28 July 1932. Apart from subjugating the position of the Bengali Hindus in the legislature (Hindus were given 80 seats out of 250 seats while comprising 44.8% of the total population and the Muslims were given 119 seats while comprising 54.8%¹⁸⁴ of the total population), this Award recognized the Hindu Depressed Classes a minority, provided with a separate electorate. The Hindu nationalist now became too much consciousness about the dangerous consequences that might follow if the provision of separate electorate for the Depressed Classes should remain in the Award. Surprisingly, the Bengal Nationalist Muslim Party while condemning the Award and supporting the system of separate electorate took the resolution, informed Liberty, that,

All those nationalist Hindu news papers that have taken up an anti national attitude regarding the Communal Award....are seriously prejudicial to the cause of nationalism in India.¹⁸⁵

Equal impressive was the view of the Europeans on the Award. Edward Benthall, representatives of the Europeans in Bengal was anxious that the proposed Award would reduce the Europeans to a 'non entity' in the Bengal legislature (Europeans who constituted only 0.01% of the total total populations were given 25 seats).¹⁸⁶ The main criticism of the Muslim leaders in Bengal was that the peculiar pattern of distributing seats in the legislature would force the Muslims –the so called majority, to enter into coalition for the purpose of forming a ministry because it would not be possible for them to run the ministry of its own. The Congress was placed in a dilemma that it could neither accept the Award not reject it. It took more or less an ambivalent or non committed stand. This position of the Congress did not fit well with all the sections of the Congress and on July 31 1934 Malviya and M.S any formed a new party called the Congress Nationalist Party.¹⁸⁷ A large number of Calcutta bhadraloks lend their support to this party. A good number of Congressmen in Bengal, disappointed with the decision of the All India Congress, now moved in support of the party irrespective of their factional divisions. This shift of allegiance of some noted Congressmen in Bengal brought an internal division on within the party after a short phase of mutual conformity on the anti Award sentiments. Chapala Bhattacharjee, Dinesh Chakrabarty, Indra Narayan Sen form the Bengal congress joined te new party and Indra Narayan Sen had become the Secretary of the Nationalist Party in Bengal.¹⁸⁸ The *Hindu Mahasabha*

also appreciated the formation of this party to launch a widespread anti Award campaign in Bengal. Their tacit approval of the Nationalist Party also painted the failure of the Congress to organize the Hindus against the Communal Award. ¹⁸⁹

It is to be mentioned that one Hindu Nationalist Party also emerged on the scene in early 30s with an object to fight the Communal Award. It had been stated that the programmes of this party would be based on a more intimate and cordial relationship between the landlords and the tenants to 'tackle the problem of unemployment and to reorganize the educational system of the province.'¹⁹⁰ It seemed that this party had an unofficial recognition of the Hindu Sabha behind it and for the purpose of fighting the coming election some nationalist leaders of some associations like the Indian Association, Bangui Jan Sangha and the British Indian Association had assembled in this party known as the Hindu Nationalist Party.¹⁹¹ This party was not opposed to the Congress ,however, Hindu Sabha connection of the party would not make it possible to run its candidates in the name of the congress. Therefore it was formed as a coalition party with all other important groups to safeguard the Hindu interest in the coming election.¹⁹² these types of parties indicated the development of sectarian but confrontationist politics in 1930s. After a series of constitutional changes, legislative politics slowly passed under Muslim domination and with the installment of successive Muslim ministries from 1927 new political groupings could be noticed within the legislature. The gradual domination of the Muslim politicians received combined support from the European and Scheduled Caste members of the assembly that at the time of the Anti Communal

Award agitation the Muslim leaders in no way looked anxious or threatened from any corner. Despite all the party political divisions the Muslim leaders had shown an unique sense of agreement on the Award and at the Howrah session of the Muslim League in 1933 the Praja Samity, the United Muslim Party and other leaders of different Muslim groups joined together.¹⁹³ It must be noted that the minor Hindu parties those who were against the Award could not move on the same accord with the major party while the minor Muslim parties found Muslim League on their side at the time the debates on the Award. However, the Bengali commonsense of the leaders from both the communities could again be identified at this juncture of history when A K Guznavi in a letter to B C Mahatab, President of the anti Communal Award Committee, asked for opening a dialogue with the Hindu leaders for the communal settlement on the Communal Award.¹⁹⁴ It was a step taken by a Bengali Muslim leader for the settlement of the issue at the provincial level. The proposal of Guznavi did not get sanction from the Bengal Congress on a very useless ground that since Mahatab himself belonged to a anti Congress organization, the Congress National Party, then no adjustment would be possible between the Congress and the Congress Nationalist Party on a simple opportunistic issue.¹⁹⁵ Guznavi's proposal was seen nothing more than a well conceived plan to weak the anti Award agitation of the Congress Nationalist Party and to ensure an equal share in the government services after the provincial election of 1937.¹⁹⁶ Guznavi might have some intentions to pose a challenge before the United Muslim Party to make a balance in the Muslim poetical structure in Bengal.¹⁹⁷

The Award put forward several questions. The failure of the talks between the Congress and the League not only created a division in the Congress but the Hindu Mahasabha also received a chance to make a common cause with the new Nationalist Party. The Nationalist Party for the time consolidated the Bengali Hindu bhadraloks on a real political issue. Moral support from the leading Bengalis like Rabindranath Tagore further strengthened the movement of the Nationalist Party against the Award. He stated that,

It is not that we wish to deny our Muslim countrymen the benefit of their numbers, nor that we suspect them of dangerous designs. It is only that we refuse to accept the fate of all future prospect of mutual cooperation blighted by a scheme which puts a premium upon communal allegiance at the expense of national interest—a scheme which endangers suspicion where there should be trusts and corrupts both the communities by encouraging fanatics to make political profit out of communal passion.¹⁹⁸

The movement of the anti Award organizations did not resolve the question of self government of the Hindus rather the sense of deprivation destructed the Bengali Hindus from their actual political objectives. The Hindu claim of weitage on the basis of their advanced position and their share in the revenue seemed quite unusual. The demand for revisioning the Poona Pact further put the Hindus into equal quandary. It was assumed that the reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes¹⁹⁹ would preserve untouchability and encourage some castes to sustain the Depressed Class status in order to secure privileges in the changed circumstances. The anxieties might have some real ground but it could not be emerged if sufficient measures were taken in this regard. The Hindu Mahasabha and the other Hindu organizations had paid little

importance to the economic and educational backwardness of the so called Depressed Classes and no attempt had ever been made for sharing administrative positions with these people since the introduction of the Diarchy in Bengal. During the Communal Award and Poona Pact debates the Hindu Mahasabha failed to provide any satisfactory reaction to the colonial maneuverings. Its anti Award movement was characterized by a sense of deprivation born out of retention of being denied a dominant position in the province. Not only the Mahasabha but the Congress Nationalist Party also fell into the same ambush of adjusting with the nationalist spirit with that of the threatened self interests of the Bengali Hindus. On the wake of the Poona Pact the Hindu nationalist forces raised their voices to the dangerous consequences that might follow if the provision of the separate electorate for the Depressed Classes should stay in the Award. In spite of resolving the socio economic abuses of the Hindu society like poverty, literacy, untouchability and others, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Nationalist party clamored for the undoing of the separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. One may see here the impatience of the Hindu upper castes to sustain their privileges and the growing aspiration of an emerging Muslim middle class for a share in the privileges it had denied so long. As far as the Muslim Nationalist Party was concerned, it could hardly make any effective impact on the common Muslim masses and remained confined more or less within the confines of elitist political structure. Its too much attachment with the Congress crippled its possibilities of being and becoming of a mass party. Side by side the Congress connection of this party also prevented the Congress from coming into a negotiation with the Muslim League or the non Congress Muslims in an extent.

The Hindu Mahasabha conference of Malda in 1932²⁰⁰ asked for conceding representation to the Depressed Classes in the joint electorate and urged them not to demand for any separate system of electorate. Already Gandhi's stand against the grant of separate electorate to the Depressed Classes infused a new spirit among the Bengali Hindus, but the system of double election accepting the separate political entity of the Depressed Classes forty-three provided the Hindu Mahasabha a new task of consolidating the Sanghathan movement in Bengal, however, the partial response it had made to the caste question not only paved the way for low caste alienation but also dig out the imminent dangers of sectional politics in the near future. In this present study it is not possible to take notice of the different trends of Depressed class politics in Bengal although in a numbers of ways special attention has been made on the mode of this type of politics in the next chapter dealing with the language of popular politics in late colonial Bengal.

Notes and Reference:

1. By 1909 a section of the Hindus realized the importance of number and organizational unity of the Hindu society. Constitutional reforms, census reports and the development of separatist politics imparted a sense of unity among the Hindu society and the urge for strengthening the Hindu society appeared as a vital for building up national harmony also. The book *Hindus –A Dying Race* first consolidated the idea of demographic decline and inquired the causes of discrepancy in the rate of growth of the Hindus and the Muslims. The Census reports had played a definite role in it. The main propositions of Mukherjee were serialized in the *Bengali* in 1909. In 1910 it was published as a book. In this publication deep concern had been paid for the future of the Hindu race threatened by the proselytizing ventures of the other religious communities. Equal amount of concern had been paid the lack of physical attributes of the Hindus. For a detailed analysis see Pradip Dutta, *Carving Blocks; Communal Ideology in Early 20th Century Bengal*, Delhi, 1999, pp.26-47.

2. At Lucknow in 1916, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League accepted separate electorates for Muslims and provided safeguards for the minorities in the provincial legislatures. Hindus were provided with a greater representation in the provinces where they were in minority like Bengal and Punjab while the Muslims were given better representations where they were in a minority. It was the beginning of Hindu Muslim unity in Bengal. Abdullah Rasul of Bengal moved the resolution and it was seconded by Fazlul Huq. The Lucknow scheme of

reforms demanded self government by granting the reforms formulated in the scheme. For details of the resolutions see, GI, Home Poll (B), November, 1916, Nos.452-53. Also see *Report of the Reform Committee* appointed by the Muslim League by Syed Wazir Hasan in the *Proceedings of the Ninth Session of the All India Muslim League*, published by the All India Muslim League, Lucknow, 1917.

3. A section of the pro British conservative Muslim leaders advocated the theory that in the Lucknow Pact the Muslims were deprived of their actual share in the Bengal council. They also asserted that the interest of the Bengali Muslims would only be protected by cooperating with the British for the protection of their rights. Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury (Mymansingh) a *zamindar* and one of the allies of Nawab Salimullah headed this group including a few Muslim aristocrats like Nawab Sirajul Islam and others. Most of these people were non Bengali in origin and most of them were alienated culturally and socially from the rest of the Bengali Muslims. (For a detail of their origin see N. K Jain, *Muslims in India-A Biographical Dictionary*, vol.1, New Delhi, 1979) . Nawab Ali Chowdhury (he was 10th President was the president of the League for a year but had to resign after the Lucknow Pact) and the old guards of the League feared that the so-called unity with the Congress would make their existence critical and they even questioned the right of the young leaders of the Bengal League to speak on behalf of the entire community. For the activities of these leaders see the issues of the *Moslem Hitaishi* of early 1917. Also see, the pamphlet, *Nawab Ali Choudhuri, 'Views on the Present Political Situation in India'*, published in the *Englishman*, 18 October, 1920, p.10

4. V. D Savarkar, *Who is a Hindu*, Hindutva, S. P Gokhle, Poona, 1949.
5. At the Ambala Session of the Punjab Hindu Sabha, 1913, one resolution was taken p that the interests of the Hindu community through out India should be safeguarded on an organizational basis. Accordingly the first session of the All India Hindu Sabha was held at Haridwar in 1915. In 1917 the organization was registered and in 1921 the name was changed into the All India Hindu Mahasabha at Haridwar. See Indra Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha—Its Contribution to Indian Politics*, New Delhi, 1966, p.VI.
7. During the communal tension in mid twenties, the issue of music before mosque emerged as the most persistent themes around which the language of satyagraha was used in a local context that a group of volunteers remained active in support of the cause. Here Gandhian Strategy assumed an independent character and got institutionalized for the sake of practical politics. See John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, Delhi, 2000, pp.138-42
8. *Ibid.*
9. The word *Sanghathan* is translated as organization. The urge to unite and organize the Hindus had always been the central to the plea of Hindu nationalism, the origin of the *Sanghathan* movement is yet to be located. Swami Shadraddhananda helped in its promotion by making it as an attribute of the Aryan Golden Age. See Thurby G.R, *Hindu Muslim Reactions in British India; A study of Controversy, Conflict and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923-1928*, Brill, Leide, 1975,p.164. This idea was also propogated by M N Malviya during the riots in Multan in 1922. See Indra Prakash, *Review of the History and Work of Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Sanghathan Movement*, Delhi,

1938, p.25. The articulation of the *Sanghathan* movement had shifted time to time. In 1938 V. D Savarkar defined it as a movement in included several organizations for a common goal of molding the Hindu race 'into a free and mighty Hindu nation'. (See Indra Prakash, *Ibid*, pp.xv-xvi). *Hindu Mahasabha* came to be considered as the most important part of this movement while in the 1920s the entire *Sanghathan* movement was consolidated and performed in the name of the *Mahasabha* only. See, Zavos, *op.cit*, p.215

10. For details see. Pradip Kumar Dutta, , *op.cit*, pp.1-26

11. *Ibid*.

12. Kenneth Jones, 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census' in N.G Barrier (ed) *The Census in British India; New Perspective*, New Delhi, 1981, p.81

13 On the basis of the census reports U.N Mukherjee worked out that the Muslim population of Bengal had increased by over 33% while the Hindus by 17% in thirty years. (U.N Mukherjee, *A Dying Race*, Calcutta 1909). He referred to the report of the Census Commissioner, O' Donnell of 1891 where the possible extinction of the Hindus had been predicted. (*Census of India 1891*, Vol III, *Bengal*, C.A O Donnell (ed) Calcutta, 1893).

14. U N Mukherjee, *Hinduism and The Coming Census; Christianity and Hinduism*, Calcutta, 1911. This book criticized the provisions made in the circular prepared by E. A Gait, the Census Commissioner. The report was entitled, 'The Census Returns of Hindus' 1910. It proposed 'tests' to identify a Hindu hat according to Mukherjee would encourage the isolation of the low castes from the Hindu category. This threat to Hindu society suddenly moved Mukherjee towards a major shift in his approach

by simply presenting Hinduism as idealized popularism where untouchability was even recognized in a relationship with hygiene.

15. See, J.F.T. Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda*, Delhi, 1981, p.134.

16. The Punjab Provincial Hindu Sabha was born in 1907 as a partial reaction to the Muslim League of 1906. However, the need to defend the interest of the Bengali Hindus was roused also in the first decade of the 19th century on the background of the Anti Partition movement, and it did not take a concrete shape until 1924. In 1907 a United Bengal Conference was organized to investigate the present state of the Hindus specially the declining condition of the Hindu population in general. Publication of the '*Dying Race*' indeed created a sensation in Bengal but the Bengali Hindus in general were anxious to promote a Hindu organization like *Mahasabha*. From any angle they were not at all ready to spare their liberal ideologies derived from their tradition and culture. It was only after 1919 that the requirements of electoral politics too some extent convinced them to form a Hindu organization of their own. It was to be noted here that this Hindu Sabha for a considerable period of time tried to sustain its Bengali priorities but went in vein. A kind of anti Swaraj Party sentiment also moved a section of the Bengali Hindus towards the path of the Hindu *Mahasabha* in Bengal. These situations were quite distinct from the situation of Punjabi Hindus. *ABP*, 12 August, 1923, Editorial See also Indra Prakash, *A Review of the History and Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Sanghathan Movement*, New Delhi, 1938, p.271

17. For details see, Jaya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947*, Cambridge, 1994, pp.5-8.

18. *Ibid*, pp.55-102.

19. *Ibid*.

20. *Ibid*

21. *ABP*, 30 December, 1916, Calcutta

22. *Ibid*

23. Ramananda Chatterjee the editor of *Modern Review* expressed that the Non Cooperation –Khilafat unity was a mere camouflage Equal development of the Hindus and the Muslims in the spheres of education, wealth and perfection only could establish mutual understanding between these communities. *Modern Review*, November, 1921, pp.628-631

24. The Calcutta Municipal Amendment Bill was introduced in the Bengal council in 1921. The primary objective of the Bill was to put a check over the official control in the corporation by extending the franchise. There was no provision for the system of separate electorate because Surendranath Banerjee, the minister of Local Self Government had never approved this system to be introduced in the local bodies because in the corporation Hindu Muslim interest should never been divergent at all. But under the pressure from the communalist Muslims and the European block, he had to agree on the question of separate electorate. In 1923 the Bill was passed with a new addition of the provision of separate electorate. Nirod Bihari Mullick, a nominated member of the Depressed Class category even favored the idea of communal electorate. The entire question exposed the existing realities of Hindu Muslim relation in Bengal as well as the other pressure points within the legislature. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 1923, Vol XI, No.5, p.14. *ibid*, Vol 5, No1, p.516. *Ibid*, pp.127-128, *Ibid*, 1921, Vol. V, No.1, p.483.

25. See the *Census Report* of 1931.p.188.

26. It was reported in the *ABP*, 3rd May, 1925 that in Faridpur a great numbers of Namasudras were assembled at a meeting to decide to get convened into Christianity. Surprisingly a Hindu Sabha conference was going on near the meeting. It seemed that the Namasudras were either indifferent or opposed to the Hindu Sabha conference. The Hindu Sabha leaders were not welcomed into the meeting at all. *ABP*, 3 May, 1925

27. Montagu knew it well that special arrangements for a backward minor was suicidal for the community itself .It would encourage them for further advantages and make them cripple to stand on their own feet. But already the system was recognized by the Act of 1909 and was sanctioned by the major political parties. E.S Montego, *An Indian Diary*, London 1930, p.100

28. The Manifesto of the Swaraj Party was adopted at Allahabad on 23 February, 1923. It described that ‘ The immediate object if the party is the speedy attainment of Dominion Status.....The party will set up nationalist candidates throughout the country to contest and secure seats in the Legislative Councils and the Assembly.... They will, when they are elected, present on the behalf of the country, its legitimate demands as formulated by the party.’ AICC File No 13/1923. However, it was in December 1923 the resolution on the Hindu Muslim Pact was adopted. The proposed Bengal Pact was the result of the realization of C R Das that without the support of the Muslims no constitutional deadlock would be possible in Bengal. For a detail of the resolution see, *AICC* File No 1/1924.

29. The provisions of the proposed Bengal Pact (published in 18 December, 1923) enunciated that the representation in the Bengal legislature be on population basis with separate electorates , representation to the local bodies to be in the proportion of 60 to 40 in every district, 60 percent seats to the community which is in the majority in the district and 40 percent to the minority, 55% of the government posts should go to the Muslims .*Ibid*, 1/1924 , *Indian Annual Registrar*, 1924, Vol.1, pp.63-64

30. In a number of public meetings some leading nationalists denounced the Bengal Pact as a disregard to the nationalist spirit. Surendranath Banerjee took a firm position on this issue and condemned the Swarajists for such a suicidal stand. *ABP*, 23 December, 1923. The Indian association also charged the pact as detrimental to the goal of self government in India. *Ibid*, 30 December, 1923

31. *Ibid*

32. For an extensive picture of the situation see various issues of the *ABP*, January- February, 1924.

33. Byomkesh Chakrabourty, Bipin Chandra Pal, Bhupendanath Basu, Shyamsundar Chakrabourty, Piyush Kanti Ghosh, Padmaraj Jain, and Prafulla Kumar Sarkar took an initiative to organize a meeting of the Hindu citizens of Calcutta in 14 August, 1923. Some big zamindars like Khithsh Chandra Ray of Natore was also involved with them. Mainly the journalists took the lead here except few politicians. *ABP*, 8th June, 1924; *ABP*, 8 April, 1926

35. *Ibid*.

36. *ABP*, 10 June, 1924

37. *Ibid*

38. The *Mussalman*, February, 209, 1924, p.3 The *Jamial-ul- Ulema-I Bengal* at its annual gathering at Tippera on February 20-21, 1924 and the *Anjuman-i-wazir-I Bangla* at its Pabna session on February 1924 supported the pact. *Islam Darsan*, Assar, 1330, H.S June July, 1924, cited in Chandi Prasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims; A Study in their Politicization 1912-1929*, pp.404-405

39. He issued fatwa to prohibit the playing of music before mosque and seized upon the first conflict that broke out in Faridpur. GI (Question of music before mosque) *Fortnightly Reports*, No 24, 1924, May

40. *Bangla Hindu Jatir Khoy O Pratikar* (The Decay of Hindu Society and its Remedy) was written by *Tangail Hindu Samaj Sanrakshani* (preserver of Hindu society in Tangail) in 1924 and *Hindu Samajer Bartaman Samasya* (The Contemporary Problems of Hindu Society) Address of the Reception committee at Sirajganj Provincial Hindu Maha Sammilani, presented by Saileshnath Sharma Bisi.

41. See, Pradip Dutta, *op.cit*, pp.3-50

42. Maulavi Abdul Karim, *Letters on Hindu Muslim Pact*, Calcutta, 1924, p.39 cited in Chandi Prasad Sarkar, *op.cit*. p. 158

43. GI, Home Poll, File No, 187-26-P, *Note on the Activities of Madan Mohan Malviya*, Enclosure to letters to Bengal Government, No.1263-2, 13th August, 1926,

44. *New India*, December, 25, 1923, cited in S. L Guota, *Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya-A Social Political Survey*, Allahabad, 1978, p.293

45. A section of the Bengali Hindus, however, preferred the use of Hindi in lieu of any foreign language in the all India sessions of the Mahasabha. The Hindi language was identified more with non- Bengali cultures rather than the Bengalis and the *Modern Review* feared of mixing up the

cause of Hindi with Bengali Hindu interests would hurt the feeling of the Bengali Hindus. *Modern Review*, May 1929, pp.645.

46. See Craig Baxter, *The Jana Sangh; A Biography of an Indian Political Party*. India, 1971. p.8

47. *Moslem Hitaishi*, 20 July, 1923 expressed that the large section of the backward Muslims, who had opted the Hindu culture after staying long with each other, might be influenced easily by the Suddhi propagandas... It relied on the good will of the Bengali Hindus that they would not encourage such activities of the non Bengali Hindus. *Ibid*, 7 September, 1923

48. *ABP*, 6 March, 1926

49. For details see, Goutam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle 1862-1947*, New Delhi, 1984, p.75

50. *ABP*, 26 January, and 3 February. 1924. In the special Congress session held at Delhi, in September, 1923, a committee was formed with Lala Lajpat Rai and M.A Ansari as two important members to draft a 'National Pact'. Provinces were made for joint electorates with reservation of seats for the minorities in proportion according to the theory population in the constituencies. It was proposed that that Muslims grew up cow slaughter except on the occasion of Baqr Id, that music in front of public worship would be forbidden and the route and time of religious precession be determined by local mixed boards... Apart from the legislature, Das proposed communal representation in the local boards and government survives while the proposed National Pact proposed only communal reservation only of the legislature. *AICC Papers*, File No.25, 1925

51. *Indian Annual Registrar*, Vol I, 1926, pp.85-86
52. GB, Bengal Administrative Report, 1923-1924, p.6
53. GB, Bengal Administrative Report, 1928-1929, p.16
54. *ABP*, 12 April, 1925
55. *Ibid*
56. GB, I.B, File No.279c/1925.
57. *The Modern Review*, March, 1929,pp.339-341.
58. *Ibid*, April, 1929, p.519
59. The Indian national Congress divided the Indians into 'Muslims 'and Non Muslims'. It did not demarcate between the 'Hindus' and the 'non Hindus' within the greater category of 'non Muslims. Unlike Congress, the *Hindu Mahasabha* considered only two divisions—'Hindus' and the 'Muslims' and any person performing any religion of 'Bhartiya origin' fell into the broader category of the former. See '*The Hindu Mahasabha Constitution*', New Delhi, 1940, p.4. For details Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh, '*Struggle for Hegemony and Power*', Vol III, New Delhi, 1994, pp.297-298
60. B.D Graham, '*Congress and Hindu Nationalism*' in D.A Low (ed.) *The Indian National Congress, Centenary Hindsight's*, 1988, pp.183-184
61. For details see Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh, *op.cit*, pp.33-301; Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism In Modern India*, New Delhi, 1979,p.269
- 62.Khan Bahadur Musharraf Hussain moved a resolution that 'out of the total umber of appointments 80% be given to the Mohammedans of Bengal till the number of Mohammedans officials in each class in the employment of the government of Bengal became 55% of the whole'. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, Vol, xiv, No.4, 1924, p.55

63. In the preamble of the pact it was resolved that 'in order to establish a real foundation of self government in this province, it is necessary to bring about a pact between the Hindus and Mohammedans of Bengal dealing with the eight of each community when the foundation of self government is secured.', *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, Vol 4, 1924, p.85

64. *Islam Darshan*, Shraavan, 1330, (B.S), p.413

65. See Goutam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle, 1862-1947*, New Delhi, 1984, pp.95-116.

66. *Ibid*, pp.90-91

67. *Ibid*, pp.95-116

68. GI, Home Poll, File No.10/11/25-Pol, *Report on the Tanzim Conferences*, 1925.

69. *Proceedings of the Home Department Government of Bengal*, 8 A6, B 36-44, 1924

70. GB, Home Poll, 'History of Non Cooperation Movement and Khilafat Movement in Bengal', 3C.395/24, p.5

71. See for a detailed picture Patricia A Grossman, *Violence and the Construction of communal identity Among Bengali Muslims*, 1990, pp.65-66

72. For details see Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal ; A Study of Krisak Praja Party and the Election of 1937*, Dacca, 1972, p.76.

73. *The Mussalman*, December, Shraavan, 1330 (B S).p.413

74. Cited in the Report on Administration of Bengal, 1925-26, pp.xxvii-viii

75. Partha Chatterjee, *Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal 1926-1935* in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. I *Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1982, p.11
76. *Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Council*, 3 December, 1925, p.82
77. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchs Bachhar*, Dhaka, 2006, p.39
78. *Ibid.*
79. *The Mussalman*, February, 18, 1926, p.4
80. H.N Mira (ed.) *The Indian Quarterly Registrar*, 1925, Vol, II, pp.355-57
81. *Ibid*
82. *Ibid*
83. H N Mitra, *op.cit*, 1926, Vol I, pp.65-66
84. Sir Abdur Rahim's Manifesto, *The Statesman*, 1926, p.7
85. H, N Mitra, *op.cit*, p.97
86. *The Mussalman*, June 19, 1926, p.4
87. *Molem Cronicle*, 20 August, 1926
88. *Ibid*, September, 16, p.4
89. *The Englishman*, 7 October, 1926, p.16
90. *The Mussalman*, September 16, 1926, p.4
91. Cited in Gholam Kibria, Bhuiyan, 'Independent Muslim Party' in the *Journal of the Institute of Bangladesh Studies*, Vol XVII, 1994, p153.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *The Mussalman*, *op.cit*, p.4
94. *Saptahik Muhammadi*, October 15, 1926, p.2
95. *The Mussalman*, 22 October, 1926, p.5

96. Gholam Kibria, *op.cit.* p.153

97. See Bazlur Rahman Khan, *op.cit.*, p.20

98. *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* was established in Dacca in 1926. Professor Mohammad Shadidullah presided over the first meeting of the Samaj. Most of the Dacca university professors and students were associated with this Samaj. Kazi Abdul Waud, Kazi Najrul Islam, Lutfar Rahman and other Muslim intellectuals were involved in the organization. The sole purpose of this Samaj was to free Muslim mind from every type of bondages and influence the Muslim mind with humanistic rational ideas. See Niranjn Haldar, '*Buddhir Mukti Andolan O Kazi Abdul Wadud*' in Kali P Kalam, Calcutta, Magh, 1380, BS , pp.589-591 cited in Amalendu De, *The Muslim Sahitya Samaj of Dacca (1926-1936)*, in the *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies, Institute of Historical Studies*, Vol. xxi, 1981-82, Nos.2 & 3 , p.10

99. The term *Buddhir Mukti* was the catch line of this movement. The mouth piece of this group was the *Shiksha*, and the people around this group were called the '*Shikha group*'. It was styled in the manner of the Young Bengal group of Derozio. Kazi Abdul Wadud and Abul Hossain remained as the guiding spirit of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj and the '*Shiksha Group*'. See Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Creative Bengal*, Calcutta, 1950, pp.13-14

100. Adhul Hossain, *Satkara Paitaliish*, Sankalpa, 1372, B S, pp.36-37, cited in Amalendu De, *op.cit.*, p.14

101. Kazi Nazrul Islam, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, Muzaffar Ahmed, were associated with the Samaj. See Amalendu De, *op.cit.* p.14

102. *Sankalpa*, 1372 B Sp.40, cited in Amalendu De, *op.cit.*, p.21

103. The Karmi Sangha was active as the militant wing of the Swaraj Part. They had never accepted the Hindu Muslim pact of Chittaranjan Das but were kept under control by the leadership of Das. They had no sympathy for the elite circle of Calcutta leadership, popularly known as the Big Five. This group was composed of the Jugantar revolutionaries and they had a Hindu communal bias for ever. After the death of Das they had tried to tock the leadership of the Swaraj Party under their control. See Goutam Chattapadhyay, *op.cit*, pp.90-91; Hemendranath Dasgupta, *Subhas Chandra*, Calcutta, 1946, p.90

104. Mahatma Gandhi had a direct influence on the selection of J M Sengupta as the new leader of the Swaraj Party. He was a loyal supporter of Gandhi and after Chittaranjan Das; Sengupta was appeared to be the most suitable person to keep Bengal politics under the control of Gandhi. Sengupta at a time became the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, the leader of the Swaraj Party and the Mayor of the Calcutta Corporation--- popularly known as the 'tripple Crown'.

105. For details see Rajat and Ratna Ray, *Zamindars and Jotdars ; A Study of Rural Politics in Bengal*, *Modern Asian Studies*,9,1,1975, pp.88-102

106. J M Sengupta was from Chittagong Congress .According to the standard of the Calcutta politicians he had a low profile background. They considered Sengupta a '*bangal*' (East Bengali) with no lobby in Calcutta. At that time Sengupta practiced in the High Court of Calcutta while living in a rental apartment. See Hemendranath Dasgupta, *op.cit*, p.90

107. Goutam Chattopahyay, *op.cit*, pp.90-91; Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Biplbi Jibaner Smriti*, Calcutta, 1982, p.454

108. Birendranath Sasmal, a leader of the Midnapur Congress was thrown out the political scenario from the Krishnanagar Conference of the Bengal Congress Here he voted for the Bengal Pact and took an anti terrorist stand. However, J Gallagher's opinion on Sasmal's departure had created one stereotypes of political behavior in the 20s that the low caste and mufossil background of Sasmal was responsive for his overthrow from Bengal Congress by the upper caste *bhadralok* leadership of Calcutta. See J H Gallagher, 'Congress in Decline, Bengal; 1930-39', in *Modern Asian Studies* 7.3, 1973, p.597

109. It was due to the preponderance of the numerically stable Karmi Sangha that anti terrorist and non communal B N Sasmal had to accept defect in the Bengal Congress especially on the issue of the Bengal Pact at the Krishnanagar Conference in 1926. See the oral transcript of Bhupati Mazumdar, NMML, p.119; J H Broomfield, *op.cit*, p.279; *ABP*, 28 May, 1926

110. Sengupta was asked for the justification of choosing Suhrawardy as the deputy Mayor of Calcutta Corporation. See *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 15 May, 1926

111. When Subhas Chandra Bose released fro jail and entered into the Bengal politics again the Jugantar group and the Big Five gave their support to Bose against the authority of J M Sengupta. The Karmi Sangha, most of the members of which were affiliated to the Jugantar group, now turned their attention towards Subhas Bose. They preferred Subhas Bose than Sengupta because the militant radical image of Subhas Bose had left an impact on the revolutionaries. Hemendranath Dasgupta, *op.cit*, p.90, Padmini Sengupta, *Deshapriya Jatindramohan Sengupta*, Delhi, 1968, pp.74-76.

112. *Ibid*; Jadugopal Mulherjee, *op.cit.*p.454

113. Dasgupta, *op.cit.*, pp.95-96

114. See A K Gaznavi's press statement; *The Statesman*, November 27, 1927 cited in Bazlur Rahman Khan, *op.cit.*, p.36

115 The Commission remarked that 'under existing condition in Bengal separate communal electorates must be retained for election to the legislature , and should be extended to all local self governing bodies as well where adequate representation should be provided fir all communities.' Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, Vol III, Calcutta, 1930, p.171 and see Gwyer and Appadorai, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-47*, Vol I, pp.247-248.

116. The Muslim leadership supporting the separate electorate said that the introduction of joint electorate with adult franchise would not help the Muslims because Muslim women's (equal in number with the male folk of the community) reluctance to go to the polling booth would doom the possibilities of the victory of a Muslim candidate. Therefore separate electorate was a necessary to maintain the Muslim identity in Bengal. Fazlul Huq, K M Faruoki, Abdur Rahim and some others were in favour of constitutional reforms. *Indian Quarterly Register*, Vol II, July - December, 1926, p.98

117. Bazlul Rahman Khan, *op.cit.*, p.20

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*

120.The third Reformed council started function from 1927 and continued to 1929.After being elected in the election of 1926, Abdur Rahim , the leader of the Bengal Muslim Party, entered the assembly

with a large number of followers. But he could not be appointed as a minister because no Hindu member agreed to work with him. Thus A K Gaznavi and Byomkesh Chakrabourty were selected as ministers. After that in cooperation with the Swaraj Party, the Bengal Muslim Party brought a no confidence motion against the ministry and special attract was made on Gaznavi as a misfit for ministerial power. The ministers were accused of for depending on official votes to save their existence. See *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 25 August, 1927, p.261;

Indian Quarterly Register, Vol II, July December, 1927, p.261

121. See the speech of Abdur Rahim on 8 May, 1927 in *The Statesman*, 9 May, 1927

122. In a statement he had declared that the if the Representatives of the Muslims of Bengal could take a decision that they would no longer be the dependents of any Hindu organizations, they should equally imply that resolution in case of the British government also. *Indian Quarterly Register*, Vol II, July December, 1926, p.98

123. *The Statesman*, 18 March, 1928, cited in Bazlur Rahman Khan, *op.cit*, p.20

124. *Ibid*

125. See *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, Vol xxx, No.1, 31 July, 1928, p.45

126. See the speech by peasant leader Asimuddin of Commilla, *Ibid*, pp.71-72

127. *Bengal legislative Council Proceedings*, 1st August, 1928, p.100

128. For a detail account of the Bill see Goutam Chattopadhyay, *op.cit*, pp.

129. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 7 August, 1928, p.397

130. One example may be put to clarify the matter. On the issue defining the actual an actual character of a tenant most of the *Swarajists* and Congress leaders voted in a manner that the *bargadars* would never be in a position to prove that he was a tenant. The original amendment was brought by Jogendra Chandra Chakraborty, a Congress member of the House. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 13 August, 1928, pp.45-47; *Ibid*, p.121.

131. The pro peasant Muslim nationalists in every occasion voted against the amendments which were anti peasant in character. On the question of identifying the *Bargadaes*, *Adhiars* or *Bhagidars*, one Muslim member Abdul Momin strongly protested against bringing these people into the category of 'Servant and labourers'. The original amendment was brought by one Congress MLC. All the *zamindars*, *Swarajists* leaders and the Congress leaders voted in favour of the amendment. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 14 August, 1928, p.163

132. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 3 September, 1928, pp.823-24

133. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings* 4th September, 1928,pp.927-928

134.*Ibid*.

135.For details see Richard Gordon, ' *The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress* ', in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.9, No.1-4,1975,pp.183-200; For the controversies within the Mahasabha on that issue see *ABP*,2 March,1926.

136.The *Mahasabha* did not give any clear socio economic programmes different from the Congress. Therefore putting candidate in the election

meant that Mahasabha had to fight on a pure communal term and simply as a Hindu body. A good number of Hindu leaders were not yet prepared to fight the election independent of the Congress on a Mahasabha ticket. See *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1926. I.p.398; Indra Pakash, *op.cit*, pp.28-58

137. In the Provincial Hindu Conference of Mymansingh in 1928, the speakers expressed their anxiety on turning a socio religious organization into a political party or a Hindu party in specific. They were of a view that a political Mahasabha would not take interest in Hindu Sanghathan or Suddhi movement. The Dacca Hindu Sabha also protested against Mahasabha's political role as harmful to its own objectives and national interests. *Modern Review*, May 1928, p.728; *Ibid*, May 1926, pp.608-609; See the views of Lala Lajpat Rai in *ABP*, 14 March, 1926

138. For a detail see Mayukh Ranjan Sarbadhikari, *Hindu Mahasabhar Ashi Batsar*, Ccutta, 1936, p.15-20; Interview with Sree Binoy Kr Garg, Member, *All India Hindu Mahasabha*, New Delhi, (dt.10.12.2007)

139. See, *ABP*, 17 March 1926, *Modern Review*, *op.cit*; *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 26 April, 1928

140. A section of the Bengali Hindus mostly belonging to the Swaraj Party formed the Indian National Party in 1926 to contest the election independent of the Congress under the leadership of M M Malviya. Lala Lajpat Rai and others. Byomkesh Chakrabarty in Bengal joined the party., see the letter of Lala Lajpat Rai to Motilal Nehru on 24 August 1926. *Indian Quarterly Register*, Vol II, July December, Calcutta, 1926. p.31

141. The object of the Responsive Cooperation Party was ' the attainment of *Swaraj* by peaceful legitimate means.' It was to organize resistance at

the local level, however, they party took a responsive cooperative method for an easy working of the council. They thought it to be essential for the establishment of full responsible government. For details see J S Sharma, *India's Struggle for Freedom; Selected Documents and Sources*, Vol III, New Delhi, 1965, p.1108

142. *Indian Quarterly Register*, Vol II 1926, pp.34-36

143. *Ibid*, p.34.

144. The ambiguity was further increased with a statement of Lala Lajpat Rai in the Calcutta session that the Hindu Mahasabha had no definite political role to play except to define the position of the Hindus in relation to other communities. ABP, 12 April, 1925.

145. *Ibid*.

146. GB, Fortnightly Report, 1927 First half of January.

147. See AICC Papers G64/1926-28.

148. At the All Parties Conference, 1928, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League could not come to an agreement on the reservation of seats for the majority in Bengal and Punjab. see *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1928, I, pp.13.; The Nehru Report proposed joint electorate for the majority in Bengal and Punjab. However, a section of the Bengali Hindus asked for reservation of seats for the Bengali Hindus on population basis at the all parties' conference in Calcutta. The Hindu Mahasabha's stand on the report was one of rigid and categorical. *Ibid*, 1928 II, pp.419-420; GB, Home Poll, File No.165/1929. *Ibid*, 1929, Vol I, p.365

149. A K Gaznavi press statement, *The Statesman*, November 27, 1927, cited in Bazlur Rahman, op.cit, p.36; Gwyer and Appadorai, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-47*, Vol I, pp.247-48.

- 150, Goutam Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.*p.102.
151. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol I ,p,122
- 152.GB IB,326/29(a)
- 153.*Ibid*
- 154.*ABP*,5 June.1924.
- 155.V D Savarkar,*op.cit.*p.4
- 156.GB IB 326/29,(a)
157. *Ibid*
- 158.*Ibid*
- 159.For the results see All Parties Congference,1928,Report of the Committee Appointed by the Conference to Determine the Principles of the Constitution of India,pp.154-5, cited in Budyut Chakrabourty, *The Communal Award of 1932 and its Implications in Bengal*, in *Modern Asian Studies*,vol-23,3,1989.p.497.
- 160.G Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol II, New Delhi,1978,p.676.; ‘Genesis of Workers and Peasant Party of India’ in Adhikari, *ibid*, Vol,II,p.98.
- 161.For the details on Bharat Sevashram Sangha, see Swami Nrmalananda, *Satabdir Nabajagaran,Acharya Swami Pranavananda*, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, 1391,B.S, pp.2-10.;for Hindu Mission see the *Modern Review*, April 1929,p.519.
163. On 16th August 1932 Ramsay Macdonald, the Prime Minister of Great Britain published the Communal Award for India. It was stipulated that Muslims would get 48.4 percent of seats, Hindus 39.2 and Europeans 10 percent. There was also a provision for separate electorates

and reservation of seats for the so-called Depressed classes among the Hindus.

General Seats—80

Muslim -----119

Anglo Indians and Christens---6

Europeans—11

Commerçe, industry, mining and plantation—19

Labour—8

Others—7

Total---250.

See *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.II,1932,p.54.Bidyut Chakraborty,*op.cit*,p.502.

164.*Ibid*,1932,I,p.332.

165.*Ibid*,pp.333-334-Rajah-Moonje Pact.

166. B R Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, Bombay, 1946,p.22.

167. See Mushirul Hasan, *A Nationalist Conscience*; M A Ansari, *the Congress and the Raj*, New Delhi,1987,pp.175-181.

168.*Ibid*,p.188.

169. See *Mussalman*, 21 March,1931.

170.*Ibid*.

171.*Ibid*.

172.*Ibid*,

173.*Ibid*.

174.*ABP*, 11 August,1932.

175. In 1931, a committee consisting of Ansari, Malviya and Sardar Sardul Singh proposed a plan for adult suffrage and joint electorate with reservation for minorities of less than twenty five percent. The Hindu Mahasabha at its annual conference of Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha in Bengal expressed the view that the plan of the above mentioned committee was to benefit the minority at the expense of the majority community. *Indian Annual Register*, July, December, 1931,p.254.

176. See B S Moonje Diaries, cited in Mushirul Hasan,*op.cit*,p.198.

177.*Indian Annual Register*, July December 1931,pp.260-1.

178. *Indian Quarterly Register*,1926, Vol II,p.64.

179.*Ibid*, 1926, Vol.II,p.34.

180.*Ibid*,pp.36-37.

181.*Ibid*.

182.*Ibid*, Vol I, July December,1929,p.350.

183.*Ibid*.

184. David Page, *Prelude to Partition, The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-32*, Delhi, 1982,p.34 cited in Bidyut Chakrabourty, *op.cit*,p.499.

185.*Liberty*, August 24,1932.

186. Bidyut Chakrabourty,*op.cit*,p.502.

187.*Ibid*,pp.512-513.

188.*Ibid*.

189. Hindu Mahasabha Paper,C/8,N N Das to Indra Narayan Sen,General Secretary, Congress Nationalist Party,Bengal,24/8/1935.

190.*Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, Vol.I,11,No 4,p.360.

191.*Ibid*,p.367.

192. *Ibid.*

193. See Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan; All India Muslim League Document*, Vol II, Karachi , 1969, p.194

194. It was proposed that the Award could cease even earlier than ten years provided there was a mutual agreement between the two communities to the effect. A .K Gaznavi to B C Mahatab, 18 December, 1936. cited in 109 n, Bidyut Chakraborty, *op. cit.* p.515.

195. NMML, B C Roy Papers, Mahatab to Roy, 18 December, 1936..

196. Bidyut Chakraborty, *op. cit* , pp116-117.

197. *Ibid.*

198. See Report of the Bengal Anti Communal Award Movement, published by the Secretaries, Bengal Communal Award Committee, Calcutta, 1939.

199. *Ibid.*

200. *Indian Annual Register*, 1932, II, pp.328 (b), 328.

Chapter III

Popular Politics and the Minor Political

Parties: 1920s to 1939

The Non cooperation movement drastically changed the character of the national movement in India. The constituency of national politics went far beyond its elite led national confines and Mahatma Gandhi's arrival on the political scene introduced several new dimensions to the nationalist politics. A crucial interplay of different factors laid the foundation of a new kind of politics challenging both the internal and external enemies. The involvement of new social groups in the national movement widened the scopes for searching a new political order articulating new socio economic issues which had never taken into consideration previously. The decision to merge Non Cooperation movement with the Khilafat causes provided the base for organizing a broad mass movement with support from both the Hindus and the Muslims inspite of several limitations. During and aftermath of the Non Cooperation movement the Congress leadership successfully promoted the causes of popular misery with a new language of political strategies and from this point the hitherto undefined factors figured the subsequent courses of national movement in India. In the pursuit of 'discovering' as of 'making' the nation¹ the Congress leadership found new constituencies of support which projected the narrative of a popular politics, more significant in terms of its hidden potentialities to capture a huge political audience.

By accommodating the peripheral social groups into the struggle, the Congress leaders had tried to translate the demands of these groups into one homogenous anti British movement.² Such a mobilization regardless of all vertical and horizontal differences of Indian society appeared to be risky in terms of maintaining the power relations from a multi class political platform. The party's problem of organizing an alternative politics of capturing mass support against the alien rulers without resolving the conflicts among the people themselves exposed the limitations of the Congress as mass political organization within a few years of the new episode. The dichotomy between mass action and elite called action in different levels of politics and the Congress problem of integrating various aspirations of various people into the principle of anti imperialism made it difficult to determine the new pattern of politics where the varied dynamism of regional socio economic conditions were as much as important like the political actors involved in the levels of mass mobilization. By acknowledging the necessity to link the truths of Moderate and Extremist ideas Gandhi transcended different political currents at different points of time, that is by slowly creating scopes for the 'counter hegemonic' politics of the Congress over the common people against the 'hegemonic' character of the imperial rule which sought to achieve its authority over the casteist, communal and parochial segments of colonial society.³ Therefore an effective leadership of nationalist struggle has had to crystallize the different currents of politics to evolve their respective realities so that both of them could be accommodated within one political process.⁴ The credit goes to Gandhi and Congress equally for evolving an exclusive language and idiom of mass politics that could make sense to the peasants specially---a new technique of

political action and a mass oriented political organization was too much necessary to provide an ideological rationale for the anti British popular sentiments.

The extent of involvement of the peasants into the national movement was indeed a crucial one ⁵, but the actual puzzle began when a good number of examples have been shown to prove the obligations of the Congress leaders in taking a pro peasant stand in a given situation and its natural tendency to sanction only the permitted participation of the peasantry in the movements involving compromise and including consensus of termination.⁶ Thus the role of the leadership in case of the popular movements becomes difficult to determine. The questions how did the leadership involve itself in organizing the popular movements or if they only responded to the popular pressures and popular discontents generated confusion into the total scenario. It can't be denied that from the Non Cooperation era a large number of leaders with both rural and urban belongings provided these popular grievances a more coherent focus and the Indian peasantry being habituated with sporadic revolts fought under their traditional leaders were found to be ready to adjust with the new situation coming out of their way.⁷ The question of ideology remains crucial here not in the sense of an objective force but in the sense of an objective basis of political activity.

The minor political parties had their different mechanisms to carry on the struggle for each and every strata of Indian society including the intelligentsia, the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, youth workers artisans women and even the landlords. Being equally challenged by the

divisions of caste, class, regionalism and religion , the minor political parties time to time made temporary adjustments with what the situation demanded and sometimes their (un) happy marriages with communal or castiest ideologies made it easier themselves to get incorporated into the imperialist ideological discourse.

It is pertinent to note that the Non Cooperation movement initially was started in the urban areas but in course of time it spread to the villages and the undercurrent of peasant political consciousness flowing beneath the constitutional political waves soon began to expose the bankruptcy of a struggle hitherto being fought without addressing the issues of the peasantry. In Bengal a chain of factors like bad harvest, post war inflation, unemployment etc linked up with the agrarian crisis precipitated by the war. Growing dissatisfaction not only among the peasants but also of the professional classes, industrial workers small businessmen, landlords and overall the educated employed youth contributed substantially on widening the political horizon of the masses.⁸ However, it should not be concluded that the Congress under Gandhi motivated the peasants only rather the peasant participation in the Non Cooperation – Khilafat movement should be seen as a part of the enthusiasm fashioned by the sporadic Praja (tenant) movement⁹ emerging as an important political force in Bengal by the early 20s in accordance with the same process that had brought the new Muslim leadership under limelight.¹⁰ The polarization of politics into communal line was in fact matter to be galvanized in near future; the symptoms of sectarianism could hardly be avoided even in early 20s. Side by side the necessity of mobilizing the peasant masses into a broad oppositional movement

opened up new scopes for greater maneuverings by the organizations and leaders from the sphere of a politics ordered according to the legal political principles of the colonial state and also by the nationalist enterprises seeking to appropriate the popular movements within the structure of an alternative national organization of state power. The possibilities of mobilization created under a historic context should be scrutinized in terms of that political action informed by its own consciousness functioning within a new structure of 'class struggle'.¹¹ The complex design of 'class struggle' and the problem of 'consciousness' created several other channels of inquiry in case of late colonial Bengal because here within larger context of social formation the 'conscious' leadership provided by the urbanized middle class brought a number of unforeseen problems with the subsequent development it hardly had any control over. The most significant development could be seen in the formation of new parties of mass mobilization although their programmes and activities never followed any simple linear process of interaction with the dynamics of class struggle especially in the countryside of Bengal. In the 1920s the entry of the new leadership into the Congress organization at district and provincial levels was one of the major developments in Bengal. In many occasions this new leadership wished to perform from the same political administrative structure laid down by the colonial state and in many cases they failed to acknowledge the danger of incorporating the popular movements into the bourgeois political movement based on the notions of constitutional principles and capitalist economy. It should be mentioned in this connection that the people who refused to be incorporated, had their own methods of resistance and the consciousness which informed them had a definite role

to play in constructing the sense of a community, maintained organized leadership under Gandhi definitely felt the necessity of uniting different sectional regional interests but in time they were found to be lacking the art of mass mobilization in a true nationalist pattern. In the beginning of 1920s a vertically linguistic affinity and regional belongings had the tremendous possibility of weakening the boundaries of elemental and economic groupings, the task of 'mobilization' did not become an easy one for the parties because the problem of identifying the 'classes' in a clear economic term always remained a conflicting one. For the minor political parties particularly which owed its origin to one or more factional disputes of a major party, the primordial bonding were seen to be appropriated in terms of the narrower interests less fitted with the appeal of nationalism. The course of popular politics followed by different minor parties was bound to fall within the pre determined limitations of a mass movement and the reasons they were at a dilemma in every crucial level of decision making largely owed to changing structure of power relations in Bengal country and especially beyond the state domain of political activity.

I

The Swaraj Party emerged as the most prominent minor party in the first half of 1920s. ¹¹It was expected that the party would be able to politicize the masses by supporting some real demands of the 'people'. The validity of the politics what this party desired to practice lasted as long as it could sustain the spirit of anti British agitation but it lost its relevance as soon as the narrow vested interests emerged in most of the important

political functions they wanted to perform within an institutional political set up. ¹²The institutionalization of politics worked as a general criterion for the success of an organized domain of state politics and the latter as mentioned earlier always showed an inclination towards integrating the idioms of popular politics into its own political boundaries indeed with a transformative approach. Das's zeal to organize the labor and peasantry went hand in hand with the main programmes of the party i.e. the attainment of Swaraj by 'the people of India by applying all kinds of legitimate and peaceful means' and was thus to see that the power exercised by the bureaucracy was recognized as flowing from the people of India .the success of such a plan largely depended on to what extent the party could utilize an autonomous subjectivity of unanticipated mass action while exercising a different structure power relations conducted through an institutional language of political culture.

The efficacy of a non communal class based organization became evident when the peasants and workers party (renamed as the Workers and the Peasants Party) appeared in 1926 with twelve Muslim members out of its sixteen members. ¹³ The Labour Swaraj Party was originally formed under Muzaffatr Ahmed, Qutubuddin Ahmed, and Hemanta Kumar Sarkar and Quzi Nazrul Islam in 1925 This party had tried to maintain its independent character from the very begining yet options were open for the for the members to join either the Congress or the Swaraj Party for. Actually the Labour Swaraj Party and the Workers and Peasants Party drew its support basically from the 'left wing of the national movement' and particularly of the Swaraj Party. ¹⁴ In this perspective it became important to trace out the relationship between the WPP and the

Communist Party of India. It was expected that the communists could function largely through the WPP to reach the masses and the WPP would act in a way of 'an organized left wing will endeavor to secure the adoption of a militant programme of mass action by existing organizations' and not in the nature of an 'international class party of the proletariat'.¹⁵ The notions of legality stayed as the prime factor behind the idea of organizing a revolutionary mass party as a part of the Congress while maintaining a strong communist control over it at the same time. The main difference between the WPP and Communist Party laid on the formers proposal of permitting a collective membership of different mass bodies including the trade unions and the later's proposal of only individual membership.¹⁶ The Workers and Peasant parties were launched primarily to politicize the masses in absence of a mass based communist part. It was a tuff decision for the communists to chose between a legal mass party working as a left wing of the Congress and an independent but illegal Communist Party. Very naturally they opted for the former even though contradictions regarding the very nature of this party had never been sorted out. The changing ideas of M.N Roy in this regard could be cited as the best example of the inherent tensions the communists were passing through at that time."¹⁷ Roy was too much eager to utilize WPP as a mere 'cam fledge' for the illegal communist party.¹⁸ S A Dange and some others leaders preferred the left wing mass party within the Congress with the object of radicalizing the Congress movemet.¹⁹ The WPP organizations were the best tool before them to serve the twin purpose of transforming the Congress towards a leftist orientations will as the prepare the conditioned for the emergence of a Communist party in the true sense of the term because the congress, they

thought had failed to reflect the hopes and aspirations of the eighty percent. The expectations of the later group were fulfilled to some extent that already in 1927 three members of the WPP of Bengal were elected to the Bengal Provincial Congress committee and two were elected to the All India Congress committee.²⁰ But neither the communists nor the WPP could claim the credit for radicalizing the politics in an independent fashion. The logic of establishing a Communist Party had never been wiped out because 'it is only due the banner of the Communist Party', mentioned M. N. Roy 'that the masses can be organized and led into the national struggle'.²¹ The gradual absorption of 'given theory' by the Indian communist should not be interpreted as catalyst behind the sectarian politics adopted by the Indian communists by the end of 1928. The performance of the WPP was not very good in terms of establishing a working class hegemony over the national movement but it had recorded some success in terms of providing an anti imperialist platform to organize the labour unrest across the country. In this connection it must be referred that India had a working class with its own distinct class consciousness.²² In case of the Bengal jute mill workers it could be noticed that the peasant past of those workers actually created a kind of midway existence of them that they had continued to sustain the community consciousness of his peasant self against the working class consciousness.²³ The term 'class' unlike the classical Marxist way here denoted one of the complex factors of identity formation²⁴ where the question of horizontal unity among the workers stayed as a subject of making and unmaking. The community loyalties of the workers created condition for vertical alliances of the elements in the social hierarchy across class barriers and this process often created cleavages with the

class along and impeded working class cohesion.²⁵ These factors had a direct impact on the language of working class politics from late 19th century.²⁶ As a result the question of 'class formation' as well as 'class consciousness' was appeared to be a process of contestation between a numbers of institutions like the political parties , the trade unions, the mill owners and above all the dichotomy of class and community consciousness as well.²⁷ After the rise of the Communist Party the language of popular politics had inserted some new agencies of political mobilization and the different forms of social ties among the workers were proved to be the immediate political fabric for working of the political parties . In fact in the 1920s it became obvious that the political language of class awareness²⁸ adopted by the right wing nationalists was full of contradictions. Their silence on the issues of 'class antagonism' as well as their lack of understanding of the bondages of caste and community identities present in a class , had little to offer with the changing rhetoric of working class politics as a whole while the evolution of the WPP was expected to strengthen the forces of the left in the national movement and on the other it would prepare the way for a powerful class leadership of the revolutionary peasants and the workers.²⁹The new political mechanism of this party opened a phase of grater informant of the workers into the political process as well as it had shown the zeal for building up a working class constituency on the realm of nationalist political tinkering.³⁰ Its attempts to build a working class constituency led this party to an open confrontation with the Swarajists and the Congress on the issue of the scavengers.³¹Here some pertinent questions may arise. Did the workers remain passive respondent? Did they have any voice in redefining the course of labour politics according

to their own political vision? If it was so then how did the workers negotiate with the 'outer' influences? It was true that the workers were not matured or trained enough to take up the lesions of a 'revolution' but in a numbers of occasions the workers were seen to identity the issues of wider political significance. It was not sure whether the WPP was utilized by the workers as a simple barraging force or in many occasions the leaders were compelled to support such demands which had hardy any resemblance with their ultimate objectives.³² Some times these parties were also crippled by some technical difficulties and the workers themselves initiated the whole movement without any direction from outside. It was evident in case of the Jute workers strike in Bengal. In one of the strikes at the Fort Gloster Mill at Howrah, the WPP affiliated jute workers union failed to perform their work according to the demands of the situation because the workers had already lost their faith on these outsider 'babus' who were suspected to have connections with the management.³³ The difference of opinion among the leaders themselves weakened the very source of strength and their socio cultural difference with the workers limited the scopes for widespread popular movements in the industrial field.³⁴ However the pattern of working class politics in the forth coming decades witnessed a numbers of shifts against the background of new political development in a post depression scenario. This period was too much crucial for the intensification of state sponsored communalism among the workers. The language of radical politics was proved to be vulnerable in face of growing sectarianism among the workers.

In late 20s it was found in Bengal that both the radical nationalists and the communists were ready to move with a common propaganda.³⁴ For the colonial government the left nationalists were much more dangerous than the theoretical communists because any alliance between the radical forces were to strengthen the anti government movements. It seemed essential for the government to make some understanding with those interest groups whom the lefts particularly the communists threatened.³⁵ The landowning and the trading classes were expected to become the most dependable ally of the government even if no alliance was possible between the government and the capitalists.³⁶ On the question of maintaining industrial peace the capitalists whether European or Indian were ready to accept some legislative measures and for the government these attempts were to much necessary for neutralizing the working class militancy to the most possible extent. ³⁷The general strike of 1929 marked the turning point of labour movement in Bengal.³⁸ However, internal squabbles and legal checks restricted the chances of an organized protest from the WPP in Bengal.³⁹ However, the WPP in this period had shown some wide ranging possibilities including that of a left consolidation. But for the sake of a 'true communist 'party , the gradual liquidation of the WPP after 1929 indeed worsened the situation for the workers to carry on its united struggle against the joint repression of the government and their native partners.⁴⁰

After 1929 a good number of minor communist groups emerged on the political scene along with a new trend of youth radicalism .It would be misleading to describe these organizations as self sufficient political parties rater they should be treated as a link between revolutionary

nationalism and the ideal of communism in a general sense of the term.⁴¹.. The formation minor communist parties was the part of the same experiments what the Indian communists had done in case of the WPP and they repeated the matter in near future as well. These parties were to act as a transitional organization which could lead these people towards 'real communism' under the strict guidance of the communists themselves.⁴² Unfortunately most of these minor parties were either dissolved or joined the major communist wing within a few years of their formation. The Young Comrade League emerged as a youth wing of the WPP in 1928.⁴³ Its political effectiveness largely depended on how could it successfully adjust itself with the complexities of nationalist movement and its objectives were proved to supportive in this sense.

The object of the League is to organize a radical and militant movement of the exploited and oppressed young man and women for the redressal of their immediate grievances and the establishment of the independent republic of India on the basis of the social and economic emancipation of the masses.⁴⁴

The Young Comrade League infact served to be a connecting link between the communist movement and the ex revolutionaries of the Anushilan and the Yugantar.⁴⁵ So the League always received financial as well as moral support from the communists of Bengal. Even the programmes of this party were formulated to justify the importance of the communist party in Bengal.⁴⁶ The leaders like Dharani Goswami or Gopen Chakrabourty wanted the WPP to cooperate with the National Congress, now they took a very peculiar stand on the very mechanism of the minor communist parties.⁴⁷ From the same pandal of the Provincial Congress Committee at Rajshahi 1930 , the Young Comrade League

leaders charged the Congress for their compromising tendencies and they denounced the Civil Disobedience Movement as a 'spontaneous mass revolt without a clear revolutionary programme and without revolutionary leadership'.⁴⁸ At the same time a good number of Young Comrade League leaders went to the remote areas of east Bengal villages with a view to mobilize the peasants against the exploitation of the zamindars and mahajans.⁴⁹ Their entire scheme of work took a crucial turn when civil disobedience programmes of the Congress attained some currency in Bengal countryside. It was this period when the militancy revolutionaries like the Yugantar, Anushilan and other groups posed a treat to the government and the political understanding between radical Congress leaders and the communists caused headache for the government specially in the East Bengal countryside.⁵⁰ Here the common peasants indifferent places openly discarded communism, and the local leaders openly encouraged as the government officials and zamindars suspected, a kind of 'non payment complex' among the peasants particularly in the areas where the Hindu zamindars were predominant.⁵¹ It was alleged that the communists by taking advantage of the general economic crisis after the great Depression were taking recourse to various ways, either in mass meetings or in secret conclaves by which people in general, peasants and cultivators, specially Mohammedans are asked to make a common cause against moneylenders, traders and land lords. The local market which is owned by the local zamindars been boycottedgeneral foodstuffs are not so easily available as before.'⁵²

It was resulted in a polarization of the rural population into the tenants and rent receivers. But these efforts did not prove to be beneficial for a political party because the non payment movement actually remained as an economic issue in the early 1930s⁵³ Before the Congress could play a positive role in this respect, the peasant leaders successfully put forward some radical economic programmes on class line. In some cases the reluctant leaders were pushed forward by the peasants from below or some times the more enterprising leaders motivated the peasants from above. The activities of the Young Comrade League fell into the second category although the peasant response was not at all same in different places. The social background of the leaders had played a crucial role in this situation⁵⁴ Most of the Young Comrade League workers like Sudhanshu Adhikari, Pramatha Bhoumik, Bishnu Adhikari, Nagen Sarkar, Moni Singh, PramathaGupta, and Nirad Chakrabiurty etc represented the high caste Hindus who had to work mostly among poor tribal and Muslim peasants. ⁵⁵Despite a kind of apathy towards the Congress, these local level leaders were quick to realise the importance of the Civil Disobedience movement in Bengal. They did not hesitate to ally with the Congress left wing and even with the official Congress workers for an easy going of the Civil Disobedience movement in different areas of east Bengal countryside.⁵⁶ Such a combination was to being effective as long as it coincided with the discontents and the aspirations of the peasants. But these leaders did not realize the actual important of class politics in this situation because it was understood either in narrow economic terms (it was to provide some new economic benefits or to secure the existing ones) or in a mere constitutional terms (it was to provide sole legislative facilities). Such an understanding

arrested the scopes for a wide spread political struggle (not in the name of 'class' only) based on an ideology if nota theory. The minor communist parties and other radical forces failed to bridge the gaps between narrow economic struggles and the broad socio political struggles demanding a total transformation of peasant consciousness.⁵⁷ It was evident from the Kishoreganj Riot of early 30s in Maymansingh.⁵⁸ Since 1929 the Young Comrade League leaders had developed an anti *mahajan* sentiment among the poor peasants there. The credit of convincing the peasants also went to poor Muslim singer cum peasant, Abdul Jalil whose compositions moved the peasants in support of the Young Comrade League leaders.⁵⁹ Despite a numbers of limitations like government repression and others, these leaders had left no scope to organize these peasants on pure class line. Even one Sangrami Krisak Bahini was formed with the rebel peasants of Pakunia and Hosennpur areas. It was a combined effort by the leaders like Wali Nawaz, Nagen Sarkar, Khondakar Dalu Mia and HatemAli.⁶⁰ Surprisingly the peasants first attacked a Hindu moneylender of Pakundia without being properly directed by the leaders, soon they looted shops and houses belonging to both Hindu and Muslim ,moneylenders.⁶¹ Their next target was a Hindu moneylender cum talukdar Krishna Chndra Roy, who was brutally murmured after a short confrontation.⁶² Everywhere the indebt peasants wanted to destroy the debt deeds to evade payment while the poor peasant took interest in looting the property of these rich mahajans and talukdars. ⁶³A good number of historical account has been written on the nature of the Kishoreganj Riot including the most balanced one by Sugata Bose.⁶⁴ Definitely the rupture of rural credit and the subsequent change in class power created the possibilities for new bond between the

peasants on religious line, ⁶⁵ but why the movement so quickly took a communal turn was an issue likely to be answered within the so called theory of government repression and the arrest of the leaders at the high time of the movement. What was a non communal peasant movement on economic terms, now turned into a communal riot by simply agencifying some outer elements like the *mullahas* and *maulavis*.⁶⁶ These elements had intense influence over the peasants but one should not simply accuse them for the communal twist in Kishoreganj. Here the movement was initiated by the communists, carried on by the peasants leaders and was taken into control by the communalist politicians including some quasi political groups like the Krisak Samities or the Anjuman-I Islamias.⁶⁷ The Young Comrade League failed to sustain the spirit of a peasant insurrection in Kishoreganj and ultimately a serious ambiguity emerged regarding the objectives and motives of the participants. Apart from the maulvis, a section of the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha activists also aggravated the situation in Kishoreganj.⁶⁸ The disturbances throughout the central and north western east Bengal were characterized in terms of a Hindu victim hood. The immured works of the Young Comrade league failed to check such tendencies from the inception. Here laid their lack of understanding of the importance of the struggle to be fought both on the terrain of ideology and practices. It was also evident in the relative adherence to militant revolutionary programmes the Young Comrade leaders had emphasized from the beginning. In spite of educating their cadres for an overall transformation of the peasant consciousness on ideological line these leaders only encouraged an immediate recovery of the peasants from existing anomalies. This limitation also affected their relationship with other political parties. It was evident from the very

short-lived alliance the Young Comrade League made with the Congress left, the radicals and with a section of the local Congress leaders. When the Congress left became busy with the infightings within the rank of the Congress after Gandhi's retreat in 1932, the Young Comrade League leaders were made responsible for the riots and the pro Congress Hindu zamindars placed their demand before the government to ban this party as early as possible.⁶⁹ The Communist Party raised revolutionary peasant slogans before the public to capture public impression in support of the movement. The peasants of Bengal were asked to stay with the militant peasants of Kishoreganj, but all of these efforts were not sufficient for mobilizing the people in great extent because already the nationalist press successfully put forward some contradictory reports on the Kishoreganj incident with an open consent in favour of strong government interference there.

The situation is a serious one and if the authorities do not want the tragic scenes of Dacca to be repeated in Mymensingh they should lose no time in tackling it with firmness and determination.⁷⁰

The Kishoreganj uprising was proved to be a testing ground of the nascent community groups in Bengal. Indeed the arrest of the Young Comrade League leaders soiled the spirit of militancy movement a lot; it could not be denied that this party took the lead in organizing the youth forces into the realm of popular politics of Bengal. The factors of success or defeat were of little value for this phase of communist movement in Bengal, the endeavors and militant spirit of the youth works of this party raised immense hopes and aspirations before the common masses of this province.

The fate of the minor communist parties remained almost same throughout the early 30s. The parties working on the youth and labour front faced the common difficulties. The Bengal youth League came into existence in 1930.⁷¹ In the early years this organization jointly worked with the Bengal Provincial Students' Association –the student wing under the influence of Subhas Chandra Boser. Later this party shifted its allegiance to communism and joined with the Bengal Labour Party. Now, this party truly became one of the advocates of labour interests in Bengal. It supported the strikes of the post and dock workers in Calcutta in 1934 jointly with the Communist Party and the Labour Party.⁷² But in terms of the student politics in Bengal this party could hardly been found to play any constructive role like the All Bengal Students Association (ABSA) or the Bengal Provincial Students Association (BPSA). Apart from observing an 'Unemployed Week' in 19345, the Youth League had contributed nothing important into the political aspirations of the youths.⁷³ The credit pf organizing the youths almost went to another organization called the Chatra Yuba Samsad which worked under the direct control of the Calcutra committee of the Communist Party. Infact these minor communist parties were caught within the same theoretical dogma about Gandhi led mass movements like the CPI. They did not even correlate themselves with the Congress led national moment irrespective of the fact that the Civil Disobedience movement for the first time offered them a wonderful chance to establish an alternative hegemony over the masses. A great amount of their energy was lost for organizing a common anti Gandhi platform like the 'League Against Gandhism' as early as in 1934.⁷⁴ The first rank leaders of the Youth League, Labour party and the Communist Party were involved into this programme. The political

programmes of the Youth league had revealed the strength of its ideals at least for a limited period of time. It was proved that ideological strength was not enough for the success of popular politics because other than ideologies some historical experience was essential for radicalizing the national revolutionary sentiments as well as to politicize the other classes. These parties missed one point that the establishment of a new social order largely depended on the regeneration of the cultural forces so that egalitarian order could be established. Unless and otherwise the youth were made conscious of the very nature of inequality and crisis in the society, be it an economic, casteist or communal, the true ideal of communism would not take root. Most of the minor communist parties hardly paid any attention to wipe out the social divisive forces instead they concentrated mostly on some economic and political demands. The WPP, The Youth League, the Labour Party and others were seen to use the slogans 'Lal Jhanda Ji Jai', 'Inkilab Jindabad', 'Mazdur Kisan Hukumat Kin Jai'⁷⁵ at different occasions but no slogans were raised for fighting the caste prejudice among the workers. These parties even stayed in disarray when aggressive communal speeches were delivered to capture public sentiments both among the workers and the peasants. The slow progress of communalism into the popular political front could be seen also among the rank and file of the peasant workers especially when the Praja Smities were appeared to make their presence felt among the peasants. In a letter (12.2.29) to Muzaffar Ahmed, Hemanta Sarakar from Kusthia informed that.

The work of the peasant conference in progress.....The party of Samsuddin Ahmed is making agitation against us. Rajib Tarafdar made Afsar Maulavi the president of a meeting yesterday and formed the Nadia branch of the Bengal Rayot Conference.

Samsudin and Afsar Maulavi made speeches in the meeting against the peasant conference. In am getting no help from the Hindus here. Besides this a section of the Mohammedans is against us. The Congress party is carrying the propoganda against me.⁷⁶

Internal conflicts and external pressures seemed to have been a regular feature of communist movement of Bengal in this stage. Mistrust and leadership problem had created so many schisms within these parties that the local leaders often asked for inference from the top. In case of the Workers and Peasant Party it was very much frequent. In a letter to Muzaffar Ahmed dated 7th February, 1929, Gopal Basak from Dhakeswari Cotton Mills Workers Union, Dacca may be put here as an example.

All our comrades have got more or less defects and we had in time mercilessly criticized in our meeting and tried sincerely to correct them, it would not have made such misunderstandings and mistrusts with which e are confronted now.Doubts have arisen in my mind with regard to the party...some have gradually secured admittance in our party and they want to drive both myself and you away from it They want to establish their own supremacy by utilizing 'Labour' as a cats paw. I want to have your opinion about them.⁷⁷

Regarding the state of working class strikes, same type of accusations were placed before Muzaffar Ahmed, the chief guiding force of the WPP in Bengal. " When there is actual need for your assistance your party does not seem to be unanimous for help, while certain men are allowed to take big in your party's name with its apparent approval"--- some K. Ghosh informed Ahmed in a letter dated 16th February, 1929.⁷⁸ Most of the minor communist parties met with the same fate of complete breaking down of their internal order and discipline within a short period of time,

however, the parties which arrived on the popular front in the 30s had faced with some greater difficulties than the so-called factionalism of government repressions.

The Communal Award of 1932 brought a change into the class relations in industrial and agrarian sectors. The idea of horizontal alliance between the workers and the peasants on pure class lines was proved to be a myth now because the indemnification of communal tensions opened new channels of political coalition what Bengal had never experienced before. The more communist parties specially the youth parties took a lead in this period because of their comparative open-mindedness and broad outlook. Apart from economic issues, these youth parties had paid attention to some social issues like early marriage, dowry, remarriage of widows, inter caste dining, abolition of casteism, improvement of primary schools etc. They even talked about a model agricultural firm so that the peasants could earn independently.⁷⁹ In most of the youth conferences held in different districts, communist ideas were delivered before the audience besides national issues like complete independence.⁸⁰ Interestingly the Indian Proletarian Revolutionary Party⁸¹ happened to be the only party which realized the importance of Civil Disobedience in India and unlike the CPI it had tried to reap advantages from the spontaneous mass upsurges of 1931 at least in the district level. *Samya* and *Gananayak* were the organ of this party. In the later several revolutionary slogans were published like '*Chasi Majur Shason Pratisthita Hauk* (Let There Be the Rule of the Peasants and the Workers) or *Shreni Sangram Jaiyukta Hauk* (Class struggle be victorious) etc.⁸² The party members were known as *Gananayak* Group.

After a few years of intensive works this party merged with the CPI.⁸³ As an alternative to revolutionary terrorism and Gandhian non violence, one less highlighted Samyaraj Party for a few years made its mark in the popular political arena.⁸⁴ It was resulted from the efforts of the radical section of the Swarajists in Bengal with a WPP connection. From 1928 onwards Samyaraj Party started its action on communist line of violent mass movement in Calcutta. In a letter dated 10th November, 1930 by some Abani Balli (Abani Choudhury according to a secret Government letter no 13/BOI/24-IV) to one unknown recipient, informed that, You know perhaps that since may 1st Niren Sen, Aghore Sen, Badal Ganguli and Sudhin Chakraborty left the WPP and started a people's party along with Miss Pravabati Gupta which had gone into liquidation in two months. Then these people and many others had started a Samyaraj Party which exists till today.⁸⁵

In comparison to the other parties the Samyaraj party was truly militant in nature. Individually this party formed unions among the scavengers, carters, dock workers, jute workers and transport workers and sometimes with the help of the Bengal Labour Party and Bengal Kirti Kisan party---the communist organization of the working class Sikhs in Calcutta.⁸⁶ It was their credit that the Samyaraj Party openly denounced Gandhi and his politics in every political occasion while the other parties failed to show that courage.⁸⁷ It was perhaps the single party which took equal interest in peasant, labour and youth movements. In Mymensingh it had acted as an ally of the Young comrade League⁸⁸ while in the youth front it had worked with the All Bengal Students Association⁸⁹ and with the Workers League in the labour front.⁹⁰ Irrespective of the fact that this party had never shown any restrictions in cooperating with any of the

existing communist groups, it had always maintained its individual identity from the politics of the Bengal Labour Party, Young Comrade League, Workers' Party of Bengal or the Karkhana Group. ⁹¹

On the light of the above discussion it must be pointed out that peasant issues did not get primary attention from most of the minor communist parties barring a few exceptions like the Young Comrade League or the WPP in an extent. Most of these parties got confined ultimately into Calcutta and its suburb lacking a grass route connection with the agrarian politics of rural east Bengal. Here they had to depend either on the local Krisak Samities or on some radical Congress workers. It was only after the adoption of United Front line ⁹² that the fate of communist movement had changed in Bengal. In spite of the ban imposed of the 13 minor communist parties and pro communist groups in 1935, ⁹³ new possibilities were opened for the communists in this period. However, tactical confusions and political realities in India made the united front line an impossible one in Bengal. The CPI was seen to avoid any clash with the Congress rightists carefully at a time criticizing them for compromising with the imperialists and their Indian agents. The police reports stated that while executing united front policy with the Congress, the CPI secretly carried on the policy of violent revolution as a corollary to the Satyagraha movement of the Congress. ⁹⁴ In a province like Bengal where the communists were forced to work under the legal cover of some other parties, the policy of 'exposure through participation' was proved to be vulnerable;. It was stated that. 'The struggle against national reformism will have to be based much more than hitherto the concrete exposure of every national reformist maneuveringson advancing

concrete proposal for the struggle against imperialism as against the conciliatory maneuverings' ⁹⁵At the same time it was urged in the Communist Review that 'there being no other alternative than secret work in Bengal, it would be best to concentrate under the legal cover of the Congress upon the correct work of the party and this would also help in the All India Congress work of the party comrades'.⁹⁶ The real implication of this type of politics was proved to be incomprehensible for the inexperienced communists who had no practical knowledge on how to tackle the challenge of becoming a true communist(entirely on Bolshevik model) at a time making adjustments with existing realities. The political bewilderment of the communists became more acute in the realm of popular politics from late 30s in Bengal.

II

In order to have an understanding of the political language of popular politics it is necessary to check the agrarian issues employed by different minor parties in politicizing rural Bengal after the 'great economic depression'. The crisis in production relations and the emergence of a newly enfranchised rural electorate created some exclusive opportunities for the all existing parties including some new one like the Muslim League or the Krisak Praja Party (hereafter KPP) in the thirties. All of these parties were very much interested in transforming peasant consciousness towards their desired course of action, legitimized by a certain norm of ideology. By sanctioning a huge enlargement of the rural electorate including a rural weightage to the Muslim seats (111 out of 117),the India Act of 1935 ⁹⁷ extended the chances of transforming

peasant consciousness around an ideology of anti urbanism which was successfully exploited in complementing casteist and communal ideologies on the eve of the election of 1937. During this period one question emerged whether the peasants could equally be treated as a 'class' like the workers or if so then how much such notion of a 'peasant class' was viable on its own. The success of party politics in rural Bengal largely depended on how such issues were tackled either by mere constitutionalism or by extreme radicalism because a happy marriage of this two type of politics could at best be employed for organizing the peasants towards systematic class demands. Unfortunately none of the parties were skilled enough to radicalize the agrarian issues under the new constitutional arrangements while providing minimum scopes to the peasants for legitimizing their own consciousness of becoming a class of its own.

It can not be denied that by 1920s the peasantry in Bengal was on the process of emerging as a class and an essential linkage had already been established between the peasants and a more radical type of anti imperialist movement. At the time of the Khilafat movement a new Muslim leadership put forward the demands of a vast section of the peasants in Bengal in their status as tenants or *praja*. Such organized effects culminated into an influential praja movement throughout the decade centering around a good numbers of praja samities all over the east and north Bengal.⁹⁸ The leaders continuously voiced some basic demands like a) reduction of rent b) abolition of illegal exactions c) reduction of interest rate and the d) abolition of the landlord's fee on transfers of ryot's land. The establishment of the Nikhil Banga Krikak

Praja Samity (hereafter NBKPS) in 1929⁹⁹ boosted up the possibilities of an organized praja movement in Bengal. The programmers of the NBKPS emphasized the urgency of abolishing zamindari system and the establishment of the Democratic Self Government.¹⁰⁰ Both of these objectives were of prime importance for the *samity* to capture peasant support as well as to articulate the interests of a new Muslim middle class gaining currency in Bengal after the withdrawal of the Swrajya Party from the arena of legislative politics in late 20s. This new Muslim leadership shared a strong radical sentiment with the communists although their agitations did not find any practical meeting ground except some few occasions because of a basic suspicion that the communists had no sympathy for the Muslims in general. Apart from its 'official distance' from the Congress and the Communists, the praja movement in early thirties could not maintain any separate identity because the Bengali Muslim peasants were found to get available for any real movement, so long the cause remains morally valid. The example of Tippera Krisak Samity could be shown here because in Noakhali Tippera region the Muslim leaders of this *samity* were found to preach the message of 'Bolshevism' among the peasants in a close connection with the Congress.¹⁰¹ However it was generally the Congress left under Subhas Bose which helped the radical leaders of the *samity*¹⁰² in launching non communal militant movements throughout the region in early thirties. It remained perhaps the sole organization which for a considerable period of time sustained the spirit of secular populism in their programmes and activities especially during the anti moneylender and anti landlord movements by 1934. On the other this *samity* could easily be credited for diminishing the line of difference between communism and 'true'

Islam¹⁰³ at least in the level of practice. It was evident from the sense of solidarity what the *samity* supporters shared on a pure class line even as being provoked by other identical appeals. Unfortunately they could not transform such consciousness into an independent class action irrespective of the fact that they had the essential elements including the 'outside' forces which could provide necessary ideology and organization what these peasants were lacking to become a class for its self. But in real place it did not happen. The emergence of the Krisak Praja Party as a faction of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity (hereafter NBPS) ¹⁰⁴ changed the entire situation by introducing an alternative form of politics simultaneously challenged by some other political variations initiated by the United Muslim Party ¹⁰⁵ and the Muslim League in later years.

In the post Depression era the emergence of a section of prosperous peasants popularly known as the *jotdars* ¹⁰⁶ raised some new possibilities in agrarian Bengal. This section of the peasantry became the prime beneficiaries of the new constitutional arrangements because no other segment of the rural society was in a position to obtain opportunities from these new arrangements.¹⁰⁷ While the rentier and money lending classes were under pressure due to the loss of income and high prices, the poorest section of the peasantry were to fall into extreme misery. The root cause of peasant discontent in the vast region of east Bengal in the 30s could be situated on this background of extreme hardship which left the peasants with no choice but to respond to the call of every political party be it of the communists, the socialists, the nationalists, the Krisak Praja Samities¹⁰⁸ or even the communalists. For this reason the 30s of late colonial Bengal might have been described as one of the most productive

phases in the history of popular politics in terms of constructing new identities for the masses in general and the peasants in particular. This task of constructing new identities or to transform the existing one was done differently by the minor parties working among the peasants. The name of the KPP comes first in this regard because it emerged as the sole political organization which for a considerable period of time captured the imagination of the peasants in an uniform manner so that a sense 'commonness' could have been achieved against the zamindars and moneylenders. However the mechanism of this so-called unity was different from the communists at times. The most common problem encountered by all of the parties remained within the framework of appropriating interlocking identities in the discourse of Muslim peasants. The language of class released possibilities for articulating the dual identities of 'Muslim' and 'peasant' in a same discourse. But in a bid to achieve quick electoral success, this language of class had never been deployed beyond the limits of anti zamindar movements whereas the class identity could at best be employed in the spheres of social transformation at large . On the other it was this intense social engagement which allowed the language of religion a hold over the class affiliation of a Muslim peasant thereby shifting his status into a communal one. Until the foundation of separate organization of the Muslim peasants as a homogeneous unit both of this twin affiliations, as instances showed, were provided with separate rooms at a risk of situational overlapping by one another. The Swarajist ¹⁰⁹ apathy for permitting agency to the peasants in the 20s increased the chances of addressing the issues so far had been treated more or less separately by the individual leaders whether silently or overtly. It was a result of the

maneuverings jointly made by the rich peasants and non cultivating classes that in the mid thirties peasant agitation on class lines were no longer remain a threat for a more confident government which now turned its attention towards the 'constitution oriented politics initiated by the KPP and the United Muslim Party (hereafter UMP). The government infact found this parties a suitable ally against the communist although at the same time it maintained some sort of reservations about the political bodies formed as a 'part of the electoral organization of a political party'.¹¹⁰

The gradual pre-eminence of the KPP over the political arena itself signaled some major shifts in the level of popular polices in agrarian Bengal. The most important one was the ascendancy of one praja identity over other corresponding identities so that the lower strata of the peasantry could at best be identified with the higher echelon of the peasantry within same bracket. The addition of the term 'krisak' before the *Praja* Party in 1936 on the demands of a section of the party¹¹¹ indicated the importance of attracting the lower peasantry so that a homogeneous movement could be organized either by pacifying or by channelising peasant belligerency into a desired course of action. It was an unique unity .Questions may arise why the lower peasants joined with the tenure holders and the propertied peasants in spite of fundamental differences in interests and why even the spirit of militancy could not be sustained in several areas where already the peasants were seen to be moved on class lines.¹¹² In the first instance it may be answered simply that in absence of a well structured class based party, the poor peasants failed to cross the limits set by their immediate patrons while in the

second instance as in case of the Tippera Noakhali region the peasants were bamboozled by the camouflage of their immediate patrons who reached directly to the peasants with radical programmes like abolition of zamindari or other pro peasant legislative measures. It was an unprecedented event in the history of Bengal because the immediate class enemy of a poor peasant took the position of his liberator on virtue of a minor political party which in time emerged as one of the major parties of the province like the Congress or the Muslim League a little after.

The political arithmetic of Bengal was changing quickly before the election of 1937. In terms of a new political coalition between the traditional Muslim aristocrats and the prajas mostly representing the well to do jotdars, the KPP appeared first to utilize one for the sake of the other. Both of these sections were eager to achieve electoral success and required the support and protection of the other. But none of these groups were ready to give up an inch for the betterment of the cultivators. Even the radical revolutionary programmes taken by the KPP did not satisfy a majority of the leaders. However it could not be said how far the presence of a good number of radical leaders within the KPP¹¹³ influenced the revolutionary programmes of the party reflected in its election manifesto.¹¹⁴ But an undercurrent of class dynamism and revolutionary radicalism always remained within the party which could have been seen in growing factionalism during the working of the new ministry after election. This radical spirit of the party had never relieved the Muslim aristocracy and a section of the praja leaders although the KPP in reality did not bother about a through change of the existing society on socialist structure. With a mixed representation from different

strata of rural society, the KPP emerged as the meeting point of different interests. The Election Board ¹¹⁴ of the party was constituted in a manner that both the progressive middle class and conservative landed class could get a chance to accommodate the agrarian issues in their respective language of politics. But it was a risky attempt because they had hardly anything in common with the lower peasantry except strong abhorrence against the Hindu landed interests. Definitely there were some leaders like Shamsuddin Ahmed of or Abdul Karim ¹¹⁵ who seriously cared for the peasants but the majority of the leaders did not have a predetermined principle and a clear vision of their programmes. It was true for the entire praja movement in Bengal. A numbers of conflicting interests had never make it free from mutual suspicion and even the erstwhile veteran leaders like Akram Khan, Abdul Momin, H.S Suhrawardy Abdul Hamid, Rajibuddin Tarafdar, Tamizuddin Khan and others preferred to refrain from joining the KPP in 1936 and continued with the Praja Samity. It proved to be fatal for the movement itself because within a few months these people joined a new party ¹¹⁶ which had little to do with the 'krisak praja' politics in Bengal.

In this regard one point should be mentioned that the main allegation brought against the KPP was that of its Congress and communist connection which had less in common with the Muslim interest in Bengal. The KPP was alleged for its open adherence to Congress and secret connection with the communists in several public statements made by Moulana Akram Khan. ¹¹⁷ Khan and his associates wanted the Praja Samity to become a 'non communal Muslim origination' in a fashion the Congress was working as a 'non communal Hindu organization'. ¹¹⁸ But

such a tactics of 'non communal communalism' did not work for KPP because the issue of Muslim solidarity remained as a 'false cry' ¹¹⁹ for the party which was to simultaneously with the Congress and the communists in different levels of popular mobilizations. As long as the KPP worked on pure economic lines, it had to face the charges of being a pro Hindu, pro Congress and pro communist organization. Interestingly the UMP openly alleged the KPP for advocating class struggle before election ¹²⁰ while the later had yet to confirm the different notions of class between whom a true economic war could be fought. However all of these allegations were provided with an anti Muslim overtone because neither the Congress nor the Communists, according to the anti Haq faction were sympathetic with the cause of the Muslims. The merger of this faction with the UMP in 1936 forced the KPP to take up some new challenges which had nothing to do with its basic programmes. An 'unnecessary' but explicit question of Muslim solidarity was put before this party there by shattering every alternative possibility what the KPP could offer for the poor peasantry of Bengal. Right from its inception the UMP tried to brand KPP not 'a purely Muslim organization' ¹²¹. The urban based landed aristocrats of the UMP had the blessings of the Dacca Nawabs ¹²² and they emerged as the most powerful electoral alliance against KPP. They scored their first success when a section of the *praja* leaders joined them but they failed in the second test when Haq snubbed their proposal of a united struggle. They were left with no other way but to seek help from out side Bengal. These outside elements bought a new twist into the situation when a new business lobby under the guidance M.A Jinnah clamored for Muslim solidarity all over India. A group of non Bengali Muslim businessmen in Calcutta became active

simultaneously. From the beginning these people tried to assert that only Muslims could look after the interests of their fellow Muslims. They even demanded that the government should only recognize communal trade unions¹²³ and the Muslim League should be entertained with the capitalists in the official level for every important economic decision¹²⁴. In Bengal this group formed their own platform' the Majlis Party before election and began to manipulate other parties like the UMP or the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (hereafter BPML) on the line of all India Muslim solidarity over the provincial issues.¹²⁵ But they did not get the success overnight. Not only they failed to convince Haq on the question of getting into the League after a short but dramatic phase of mutual consensus, the BPML now appeared hostile to the Muslim League Parliamentary Board. The BPML which had hitherto been remained defunct and isolated now came under the influence of some the *praja* leaders who were holding different posts in the BPML at the same time.¹²⁶ On the question of enhancing the power and prestige of the All India Muslim League ((hereafter AIML) in Bengal one letter dated 4th December, 1936, by S. Suhrawardy to Jinnah could be mentioned. On the eve of the election he wrote:

I do think the question of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League should be taken in hand.....Nevertheless it is of importance for the future maintenance of the party. Unless we have our sort in a vast organization we cannot maintain the party together. We must have branches everywhere so that party opinion will compel the members to abide by their pledges. It is not possible to have an organization of the Parliamentary Board in any logical form with a hostile Bengal Presidency Muslim League running side by side.....It is necessary for you therefore to put the finishing touch and start afresh.....¹²⁷

Within a few months after the election Suhrawardy again paid his concern that,

The necessity for having Moslem organization is so imperative that I am afraid we shall have to take up the work soon. If you want to run the League here, we are prepared to assist but if you are really lukewarm about it and do not very much care whether we should run the League here or not, please let me know so that we can start our own separate organizationI would of course like to point out to you that the present condition of the League is undemocratic and the future body should not have a subscription of more than four *annas* a year.¹²⁸

But a careful Jinnah had never taken any hasty decision regarding Bengal. He did not even trust Suhrawardy like the non Bengali trading community of Calcutta. Among the twenty members committee appointed for conveying a provincial branch of the League, six were from the business community and four were from Dhaka Nawab family. Surprisingly Suhrawardy was missing while Ispahani and Khawaja Nuruddin were included into the committee.¹²⁹ This trend clearly indicated the pattern of politics the Muslim League was going to play for Bengal. It also set some other problems before the Bengali Muslims. The issue of Bengali vs. non Bengali Muslim identity remained as one such problem among them even after the birth of Pakistan. They were forced to solve another puzzle when they were asked to become a true Indian and a true Muslim at the same time. Although the gradual but successful mobilization of the ML after election solved the problem of identifying the true enemy for the time, the Bengali Muslims hardly get any safety or security from the 'invisible' enemies working in and outside the community. The common masses specially the peasant and the laborers

became the worst sufferers of competing loyalties and fragmentary nature of politics in post election years. They were pushed into the background of extreme bewilderment when a KPP League entente was made for the sake of administering Bengal. This entente emerged to decide the fate of the millions as a situational need and such adjustments, as it was proved earlier, could not ripe any fruitful result for the overall improvement of the population.

The election manifesto of different parties revealed some interesting points in terms of popular political demands. Not only the KPP's 14 point manifesto stood close to that of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (hereafter BPCC) and in general its agrarian programmes received heartiest support from the Congress left. The outlawed communists, the Kisan Sabha¹³⁰ leaders, the trade unionists and the pro communist labour leaders tried to use the platform of KPP for their own political benefits.

Keeping in view the above situation , the sub regional variations of agrarian politics in east Bengal required a special mention. Parallely with the KPP, the pro communist Krisak Samities evolved a kind of predominance over the peasantry specially in the regions of Tippera, Noakhali and Mymansingh .¹³¹ However under the policy of 'united front', it remained quite difficult to differentiate between the CSP, CPI, Kisan Sabha and the Congress. They were seen to work sometimes from one plat form. The Praja Party dissidents also made a common ground of interests with the CPI and the Congress. The class consciousness of the peasantry in several time came to be identified with the 'no rent' movements under the Congress while in other time the non Congress

peasant movements reflected the sense of belonging among the peasants under communist influence. Here the peasantry was not very fragmented and some common set of interests bounded them together.¹³² In fact in mid thirties neither the Congress nor the CPI had two many alternatives in regard to their political commitments. Although the Congress attitude towards the tenancy legislations (as in case of the Tenancy Amendment Act of 1928)¹³³ smashed up its repute to greater extent in the past, now it turned towards organizing class based movements of the peasants against their Hindu masters. One should not see it as a political benevolence on the part of the Congress rather the situational compulsions forced the party into the tide of organized peasant movements on class lines. The CPI preferred Congress to work with at a time when the official banning of the party disturbed its general course of action for a long period of time. But for the Congress the task of recovering its image did not become an easy one. In early thirties the Congress was closely connected with the local Krisak Samities in the Tippera region.¹³⁴ The wave of Civil Disobedience movement attracted a large numbers of Muslim peasants into the fold of the Congress and the no payment campaign of the local Krisak Samities stirred up their expectations to a high extent. Keeping in view the arguments of Sugata Bose,¹³⁵ it could be said that with the rupture of rural credit in the aftermath of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the social equilibrium in east Bengal countryside was torn apart because the previous dependence of small peasant economy on the talukdar and *mahajan*¹³⁶ was lost. The scarcity of credit in the post Depression period ended the justification for further repression from the part of the mahajans and automatically the anti mahajan grievances turned into violent movements in different areas.

The spirit of the Krisak Samities received considerable strength and vigor from the anti *mahajan* sentiments of the peasants in Tippera Noakhali region. But the situation took a hasty turn when the Krisak Samities were drawn into the platform of electoral politics after 1935, factional rivalry and ideological differences grew at large within the Samities as an indivisible part of the new system. Ashrafuddin Choudhury, one of the leader of the krisaks Samities in Tippera had a strong connection with the Congress while Ashimudin Ahmed developed a relation with the communists.¹³⁷ Ashimuddin and his associate Yakub Ali were more interested in organizing the peasants on pure class line and the former defeated zamindar Faroqui in the Tippera Central Constituency in the election of 1937.¹³⁸ Before the assembly election the Krisak Samities of these regions either had a Congress allegiance or had sympathy for the communists. The KPP in the meantime had tried to give an impression of unity to the Krisak Samities but Fazlul Hun's pro Congress inclination did not make all the leaders satisfied. Ghulam Sarwar of the Noakhali Krisak Samity openly criticized Huq and his party for their adherence to the Congress.¹³⁹ What was surprising that Sarwar conveyed his desire for making an electoral alliance with the UMP which had nothing to do with the cause of the peasants.¹⁴⁰ The ascendancy of Ghulam Sarwar in the Krisak Samity signified the influence of the non peasant elements into the movements because Sarwar himself was an eminent pir of that region. He was elected in the assembly on Krisak Samity ticket from Noakhali.¹⁴¹ It indicated the Congress failure to get the support of the Muslim masses in that region as well as the efficacy of non Congress and non communist language of peasant politics in spite of a Samity – Communist connection in the region in general. The understanding

between one non cultivating group like the rural *ashraf*, *maulavis*, and *pirs* with the rent collecting Muslim jotdars was appropriated into the political language of Islam and the traditional Islamic influence in Noakhali ¹⁴² worked for its success in mid thirties. After the election what became too much interesting was the said involbment of some pro communist Krisak leaders into violent acts against the Hindu mahajans with the help of Muslim communal leaders. ¹⁴³

Keeping in view the natural pattern of Hindu zamindar-mahajan relation with the Muslim peasants, it becomes difficult to make out the real limits of communal violence and economic movements in rural Bengal particularly when the non communal political forces remain at stake for different reasons. This non communal pro peasant forces might have become one determining factor in either neutralizing or subduing the communal forces in rural Bengal but as in case of Noakhali Tippera region they were kept in a state of extreme vulnerability right from their appearance into the domain of electoral politics. ¹⁴⁴ The Congress bonding with the Krisak Samity lost its charm on account of the decision taken by the high command on the issue of forming a coalition government with Huq. ¹⁴⁵ It was in fact a great loss for the non communal forces when Huq himself officially joined the Muslim League. Such a decision was proved to be frustrating for the fate of the non communal forces in Bengal including the KPP. The peasants in general were least bothered about the nature of party manipulations in the top. In a stratified society of rural east Bengal the peasants were more attached with their factional patrons and such ties evolved conflicts in different levels of horizontal or vertical alliances of the agrarian society. In this situation peasant mobilization by

outer forces was not at all easy unless the local patrons develop a kind of understanding with the outer elements on the basis of practical necessity. In several occasions it was noticed that the outsiders successfully made their way into the peasant society with the help of their local allies be it the religious leaders, the rural *ashrafs* or even the immediate patron of a lower peasant.¹⁴⁶ The strong economic bonding between the poor peasants and their immediate patron not only restricted the former to get a clear conception of their position as a class different from the upper peasants in terms of immediate economic interests and distant political objectives. The KPP appealed most to the upper echelon of the peasantry because the idea of doing away with the zamindari system simply mesmerized them. Its revolutionary programmes aroused great amount of expectations among the upper strata of the peasantry specially the tenants or Praja of the revenue collecting zamindars. It was this section which not only weakened the class consciousness of their immediate clients i.e. the lower peasants but also made a common ground of interests with the lower peasants against the Hindu zamindars by simply exploiting religion as an ideology for legitimizing their action. If one could explore the revolutionary character of the lower peasants under organized and independent class action, it would the communists but a great range of misconceptions regarding the socio political atmosphere of rural east Bengal arrested their growth as an independent self sufficient party in mid thirties. The other option left before the lower peasants was the Congress which was failed to devote its fullest strength, as was seen in case of Noakhali, in employing even its own supporters like Ashrafuddin in wide spread economic movements.¹⁴⁷

In the regions where an exploiting Hindu *zamindar* was prominent the peasants could easily be moved on class lines.¹⁴⁸ Here the pro communist and Congresses *Krisak Samitis* came to an understanding with the KPP before election while in some other areas the KPP had to take the support of the Namasudra peasants.¹⁴⁹ KPP's commitment to the abolition of the Permanent Settlement without compensation definitely had some impact in the *zamindari* areas but it could not be said that how far the illiterate poor got impressed. In fact the manifestos were published to impress the educated middle class who had an important role to play for mobilizing popular opinion. For the average masses in east Bengal the election was nothing more than a 'fun show' which might have aroused some excitement against the *zamindari* and *mahajani* exploitations.¹⁵⁰ But such an excitement did not become a motivating spirit for the voters to cast his vote against the *zamindar*. They were greatly moved by the personal charisma of a leader rather than the allegiance to the party politics because none of the parties had a solid organizational base among every section of the populace. It could be seen in case of the schedule caste seats.¹⁵¹ In spite of a strong bonding with the anti *zamindari* stand of the KPP (most of the *zamindars* were caste Hindus), these section more or less remained indifferent to the party because the KPP did not make any methodical attempt to convince the schedule caste voters due to the absence of a grassroots organization and a comprehensive plan. Interestingly the party did not even dare to contest the schedule caste seats while the Congress did not put any candidate in the Muslim constituencies¹⁵². A very interesting picture comes out of these calculations that a secret understanding had already been made between the two on the question of political expediency.¹⁵³ But in case of the commitments made before the election a

clear difference could be noticed in terms of radical land reforms. Due to the interest of the landlords (the main support base of the Congress) the BPCC talked about a general modification of the land tenure system and one can find a similar tone in the ML's Manifesto which promised to make some constitutional measures to eradicate the evils of the Permanent Settlement and ,if possible , to make a proper replacement of the system.¹⁵⁴ None of these major parties were ready to let down its landed aristocrats, however, the suggestions offered by the ML seemed to be more rational than that of the BPCC or the KPP.

It may be mentioned here that question of the depressed class did not get a formal consideration from any of the minor political organization. They were either hesitant or reluctant to tackle the issue separately although the All India Congress Committee tried to incorporate the subject into its official programmes in several occasions. The so called 'depressed class' leaders hardly paid any serious attention to the problems of the under-*raiya*s and *adhiars* after Depression because most of these leaders who were rich peasants themselves found the new constitutional opportunities, according to Rajbanshi leader Upendranath Barman, more lucrative for their own financial benefits.¹⁵⁵ On the other the urban middle class leadership of the 'depressed class' who had hitherto been indifferent to organizational work , became more and more conscious about the peasant electorate on the eve of the election because the new constitutional arrangements promised a numbers of concessions which these leaders were looking for a long period of time. It was the high time for other parties and political organizations too to incorporate the lower caste masses into their fold or at least into the mainstream political arena but not a single party

showed such sense of political benevolence before election. One can find the role of the KPP more astounding than others. In spite of being a party for the peasants irrespective of caste and creed, the KPP did not take the risk of disturbing its actual support base i.e. the rich peasantry at any cost. On the other its open reluctance for contesting the schedule caste seats stipulated its anxiety for keeping up its Muslim support base intact. It seemed that the KPP was bound to contest only the Muslim seats unless it would have been difficult for it to counter the assertion that the interest of the Muslims could only be protected by the ML in Bengal. One can see here a kind of situational adjustment on the part of the KPP what was proved to be unfortunate for the development of quality politics in Bengal.

The Congress Socialist Party (hereafter CSP) or the CPI could have been another alternative for the low caste peasantry. Due to the restrictions on it the communist parties¹⁵⁶ could not move freely among the peasants and they had to take recourse of either one or two of the other existing parties. In the early thirties the Young Comrade League did some serious organizational work among the peasants in Mymansingh, Dhaka, Khulna, Maldah and Rajshahi on communist line¹⁵⁷ and later the *Krisak Samities* organized movements in different areas of east Bengal under strong influence of the communists.¹⁵⁸ Before the assembly election in 1937 the CSP and many communist workers under the banner of the Congress went on door to door campaigning among the lower class peasantry.¹⁵⁹ But it may be noted in this connection that the CPI had never recognized the *praja* movement as original peasant movement rather they branded it as a *jotdar - talukar* movement.¹⁶⁰ they hoped for organizing movements by the peasants themselves not by the vested interests. For this reason the

KPP never welcomed the communists into the rank and file of the party and always took even a deaf ear to the criticisms of its radical section at the time of enjoying the ministerial power.¹⁶¹ The Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha (hereafter BPKS) with a good number of communists and socialists emerged as the most viable alternative to the sectarian politics of the caste associations and the elite oriented movements of the Congress in early 1937.¹⁶² In the Comilla session of the All India *Kisan Sabha* (11th to 14th May 1938) in Bengal only 34,000 representatives came from the province and Kamini Kumar Dutta, a lawyer by profession chaired the Reception Committee.¹⁶³ The most interesting observation which came out of this session was on the issue of the agricultural labourers. Most of them belonged to the lower castes and in Bengal their condition was really serious than the other segments of the peasantry. In his presidential speech Swami Sahajananda stated,

Of late some people have begun a tirade against the Kisan Sabha in the name of the agricultural labourers. According to them *kisans* are exploiters. Their object is not so much to serve them as to flirt with *zamindars* who are common enemy of both *kisans* and *khet mazdoors*.....The attempt to wean away agricultural labourers from the Kisan Sabha is ruinous.....The attitude of the Kisan Sabha towards the *khet mazdoors* has so far been that the *kisans* should count them as their kith and kin, treat them accordingly and give them living wage to the best of their capacity....The Sabha believes that a revolution is accomplished and sustained only by the lower classes of society.¹⁶⁴

A kind of urgency could be traced from the part of the leadership here to convince the agricultural laborers as well as to make the *kisans* aware about the duties towards their class allies. Side by side the *kisans* were asked to be alert about the vested interests that had been instructed to

spoil peasant unity forever. The allegations were appeared to put against the Congress because in Bihar a rival *Khetihar Mazdoor Sangh*¹⁶⁵ had already been organized under the direction of some Congress leaders like Rajendra Prasad. The necessity of providing political agency to the agricultural labourers was heard for the first time from the platform of the Kisan Sabha in 1938 and it exposed the limits of the minor parties which did not show any exigency for redressing this issue. Even the classification of the agricultural labourers as landless peasants and a subtle politicization of the subject completed one very important task up till then been ignored by the others. In addition the Swamiji stated,

The small peasants are the backbone of the *Kisan Sabha*. The *khet mazdoors* are after all landless *kisans*. Those who had lands yesterday have none today and those who have them today will lose tomorrow, and thus, while possessed of lands, they are *kisans*, and deprived of them, we call them *khet mazdoors*.¹⁶⁶

In the election of 1937 the Kisan Sabha contested only in Tippera and Noakhali and in the other districts supported either the Congress or the KPP candidates. It was nothing but an adjustment because none of these parties were compatible with the aims and objective of the Kisan Sabha. The programmes of the KPP definitely attracted the Sabha for the time but a little after it was proved to be a mistake. In Bengal the Sabha always worked as a supportive power of either of the Congress or the Communists. On the one hand it lacked an independent outlook and on the other the organizational weakness messed up its appeal among the vast section of east Bengal peasantry.¹⁶⁷ It was seen that in the initial years with a membership around 50,000 (by 1938-39) the Kisan Sabha movement failed to sustain any deep-rooted impression among the

peasants mainly for its organizational weakness. As far as the east Bengal peasantry was concerned, the *Sabha* did not provide anything unconventional because the demand for *zamindari* abolition, redistribution of land etc had already been raised by other parties. What was really exclusive in their programmes was the observation of memorable 'Days' like 'May Day', 'Debt Cancellation Day', 'Kisan Day', 'Legalization of the Communist Party Day', 'China Day' etc all over the province.¹⁶⁸ Such type of programmes was organized so that the Bengali peasants could identify themselves with the peasant interest all over India and abroad. But it could not be said that to what extent the Bengali peasants were able to identify themselves with the novelty of that subject because the election results clearly reflected that for the Bengali peasants the choice was really very limited. In general it was only the ideology of anti imperialism which could form an agreement between the different strata of the peasantry that was separated otherwise on the basis of additional identities. But unless the notion of Indianans could not be established, such type of agreement could not be at work properly. For the success of this process an overall socio economic change was necessary. It could be asked then how far the supposed 'elite' organizations like the Kisan Sabha was dedicated for this cause. The constraints of situation arrested the growth of this organization to be a platform for transmitting the anti imperialist consciousness, if not national consciousness, among all categories of the peasants. In spite of the high-sounding official speeches delivered before an educated audience by some intellectual speakers, the agricultural labourers remained more or less absent from the rank of the Kisan Sabha throughout the province. It could not be said that they were obsessed with

those peasants with some considerable land rather it could be said that a fear of alienation always enforced the Kisan Sabha leaders to maintain some distance from the so-called 'minorities' of the bulk of the peasantry. It included the poorest section of the peasantry mostly belonging to the lower caste share croppers, agricultural laborers etc – equally exploited by the zaminders; well to do peasants and the middle peasants. In general the communists were more worried with those issues that were of concern to greatest section of the peasantry. The demand for reduction of existing taxes, eradication of illegal ceases, abolition of the zamindari system were among those popular issues which were to fetch benefits to every section of the peasants.

In this connection it must be pointed out that the people who assembled under the auspicious of the Kisan Sabha had little in common in terms of class base of the party. Perhaps one sense of disappointment with the Gandhian policy of agrarian politics always brought them together in spite of ideological or methodical differences.¹⁶⁹ As an example the stands taken by the CSP and the CPI could be pointed out respectively. The later put more emphasis on the political aspects of agrarian economy while the former was more interested in the economic aspects along. Grass root political works were basically done by the CPI because the CSP did not have an organizational strength like the CPI and it had been seen to work from the top.¹⁷⁰ The imperceptible but decipherable presence of Gandhi never made the Kisan Sabha free from ambiguities over communism and its open fascination for the leadership from the well to do peasants fetched little response from the poorer section of the peasants. It was only after 1940 when the CPI established its full control

over the party, the class outlook of the party took a quick shift.¹⁷¹ It was visible in the neo popular trends of agrarian politics in the years before partition. But the ideological confusion of the CPI and the CSP over the questions of defining agrarian social structure and of providing actual agencies to the social classes did not come to an end even in the last few years before the partition of the province.¹⁷²

The 1937 election results brought out a numbers of new features in the political scene of Bengal. The most important was the gradual replacement of the minor political parties by the major ones. The shift of the KPP from being a minor party to a party with ministerial power could be acknowledged as one of the striking developments in late 30s. The detachment of the Congress from active legislative affairs so long had made the minor parties an indispensable element of Bengal politics. As soon as the Congress and the Muslim League i.e. the two major parties stepped into the politics of Bengal, the dominance of the minor parties was on dwindling as a whole. The basic difference between the historians on the actual strength of a party after election indicated the nature of uncertainty and confusion among the parties.¹⁷³ Many candidates did not even disclose their party identity while some others were included into a party after the submission of the nomination papers independently. The results clearly showed that none of the parties would emerge as the sole representative of any of the religious communities in Bengal. It became evident only that the League had greater influence on the urban constituencies while the KPP on the rural seats. It was not certain whether the call for Islamic unity influenced the Muslim voters in the urban areas or any other consideration made them interested for the

League. Apparently it could be said that for the middle class Muslims the election was proved to be the idea option or securing their economic and professional interests against the Hindus and they thought the League to become the most suitable party for that purpose. On the other the non Bengali Muslims were more attracted towards the all India character of the League which had promised for the protection of Muslim interests specially the business interests of the Muslims all over the country. Surprisingly the Congress did not get all Hindu votes rather the Schedule castes formed their own Schedule Caste Party to get into the new ministry. In the general seats the Congress had a comparatively easy fight because the KPP did not contest it and the Congress faced either the Hindu Sabha or some independents as opponents. But such pre poll understanding between the Congress and the KPP brought nothing fruitful for Bengal because they failed to arrive at an agreement on the question of forming a coalition ministry. Here the role of the left wing parties remained crucial. Neither the CSP nor the communists or the Radical Democrats favored the idea of accepting office unless the government would release the political prisoner's unconditionay.¹⁷⁴ Niharendu Dutta Majumar, Krishnbinod Roy and other socialists from Bengal were supported by the all India authority on this issue.¹⁷⁵

A good numbers of reasons were shown for not forming a KPP Congress coalition ministry by the Congress leadership in Bengal. The Congress did not bent a bit on the question of giving priority to the issue of releasing political prisoners before any other programmes while for the KPP the economic emancipation of the peasantry became the first necessity. Apart from these technical reasons some other 'non official'

reasons were present on the background of the whole question. It became more evident from the letters exchanged between Gandhi and Subhas Bose in 1938 on the question of joining the KPP ministry and ousting the League from office. Here Sri Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, a friend of Gandhi and the finance minister of the coalition ministry emerged as one of the mischievous elements. He stick to office at a time when most of the BPCC leaders wanted him to get away from the 'communal'- 'reactionary' ministry. But the decisions on Bengal were taken already by Gandhi and his friend elsewhere before Bose and others could do something. In a reply letter to Gandhi in 21 December, 1938, Bose stated,

I do not know what has happened since I left Wardha to make you alter your view so completely that you now write- 'I am more than ever convinced that we should not aim at ousting the ministry etc.' The papers say that after I left Wardha Sjt N.R. Sarkar, Sjt G.D Birla and Moulana Azad Sahib have seen you. Evidently you have altered your (view?) after talking to them. The position therefore, is that you attach more value and importance to the views of those three gentlemen than to the views of those who are responsible for running the Congress organization in Bengal.¹⁷⁶ He again mentioned that,

As long last early in November Sjt.Nalini Sarkar had been convinced that he should resign from the Haq ministry.....What made him renege from the position within one week, I do not know. Your influence is going to be used not to get him to stick to office at a time when even his closest friends want him to get out of the Haq ministry. It has astonished me that you did not feel it necessary to even consult me before you arrive at a decision on such a serious matter.¹⁷⁷

In spite of his promises to Bose N R Sarkar did not resign from the KPP League ministry and the possibilities of a KPP Congress coalition went into oblivion. It became obvious from the above letter that G D Birla and

Moulaza Azad had something definite role to play into this entire situation. Moulaza Azad had a strong contention that in the Muslim majority provinces, Muslim ministries should be allowed to continue in office while Gandhi himself did not like the idea of forming coalition ministries.¹⁷⁸ But in case of North Western Frontier Province, Sindh and Assam Congress formed coalition ministries and in case of Bengal Subhas Bose arrived talked about a immediate pull down of the ministry.¹⁷⁹ However in case of Bengal the situation was different. The invisible intrigue of Birla and his Marwari friends of Calcutta remained crucial at this juncture of Bengal's history. The business interest of the non Bengali Hindus might have been at risk if a Congress KPP ministry could bet at office on the basis of Hindu Muslim unity.¹⁸⁰ Such a unity had a tremendous influence of the development of the idea of a Bengali nationalism which had nothing in common with the strong Hindu sentiments the non Bengali business communities were more familiar with.¹⁸¹ Without being falling into dilemma of calling Gandhi 'anti Bengal' and 'Hindu communal', one may see here the link between Gandhi and Birla who at any cost wanted to serve the interest of non Bengali capital in the province. His own Gujrati *bania* origin and his 'saintly' style of politics gave Gandhi a special position in the eyes of the pious Hindu and Jain merchants although it raised the risk of alienating the Muslim businessmen in general.¹⁸² The growing involvement of the Congress with the Gujrati and Marwari business interests not only made it a mere 'Hindu Party' but also spoiled the very chance of establishing a 'secular' understanding with the popular parties in Bengal.

Thus the fate of Bengal was left on the hands of some non Bengali elements against the expectations of the most popular leaders in Bengal. Both Bose and Huq remained as a mere witness because everything was arranged a little before they could hope for something different. Hindu Muslim unity on the basis of common Bengali identity had never been appreciated by the leaders from top and in this regard a striking similarity could be seen between the all India leadership of the Congress and the League. Jinnah and his non Bengali Muslim friends from the landed and commercial circle, as it was proved in numerous occasions, had shared little in common with the Bengali Muslims except some superimposed sentiments like 'Islam in Danger' or the Hindus – 'a common enemy'.¹⁸³ It was these major parties like the Congress and the League which won the ultimate game thereby leaving the minor parties like the KPP a little or no scope to explore the language of popular sentiments in an independent fashion. Here one may find the repetition of the events of 1923 when the hopes for a Hindu Muslim understanding on common Bengali identity was crushed first time by the outer pressures for the sake of some 'other' causes. It became obvious within two years that had the coalition been a reality, Bengal politics could have developed through an alternative channel and it might have opened new scopes for keeping communalism in check.

Out of this overall political development after the assembly election of 1935 what was turned out to be a shock was the gradual shift of the KPP into total oblivion. In the coalition with the League and non Congress Hindus, Fazlul Huq had to incorporate considerable numbers of zamindars because in that situation in the words of Partha Chatterjee, 'this

was the only kind of Ministry Fazlul Huq could make'.¹⁸⁴ Soon after the formation of the cabinet by Huq a voice of dissent stirred up within the KPP on the ground that the Krisak-Praja interest was not represented sufficiently in the new ministry. None of the popular KPP leaders was selected in the ministry except Huq himself and Syed Nauser Ali. Shamsuddin Ahmed, the secretary of the party was excluded from the cabinet due to his ultra radical stand on the popular issues. Even the Governor and his European allies did not give their consent in favour of Shamsuddin.¹⁸⁵ The protest of the Shamsuddin faction led to the formation of one Rebel Praja Party against Huq.¹⁸⁶ A helpless and friendless Huq was put 'on one side of the fence' thereby leaving him at the mercy of the League and his propertied allies.¹⁸⁷ It was seemed that **there would be no escape for Huq but to join the League and accordingly** on 15 October, 1937 Huq joined the League with an assurance of unconditional support to Jinnah. He even declared that he would suggest all the members of the coalition to join the League. It was one of the tragedies Bengal had seen after the death of C R Das.

It was the starting point of the decline of KPP's politics in Bengal. It also marked a sudden shift in popular support from KPP to the Muslim League. However it should not be denied that the radical section of the KPP had some secret link with the communists and these people representing the *Jotdar* interests in the assembly, developed a close connection with the '*krisaks*' in the villages. It was a kind of political dualism because they had never paid attention to the interests of the share croppers and agricultural labourers rather took note of the issues directly related to their class interest like the abolition of Permanent Settlement,

included as the first programme into the election manifesto of the KPP. Abul Mansur Ahmed truly pointed out that '.....Many a KPP leader would have sharply drawn back from the Praja movement had the KPP dared to champion the rights of the share-croppers'.¹⁸⁸ It was also one of the major issues on which the Kisan Sabha differed from the KPP.¹⁸⁹ Far from being a practical opposition, the radical rebel leaders endangered the spirit of populism in Bengal. None of them were truly committed to their position rather were more interested in ministerial power. The acceptance of office by Shamsuddin and Tamizuddin Khan proved it a little later.¹⁹⁰ What they had done actually was a final rupture of the KPP and earned the resentment of the Muslims. As soon as the internal feuds of the KPP came up to the Muslim masses, the non communal secular programmes of the party turned into a false cry before them as a natural corollary of the situation. The need for a major Muslim party grew smoothly instead of a minor party like the KPP hesitant to take the Muslim cause openly. The Muslim mass excitement in Calcutta on the eve of the no confidence motion brought by the rebel group under the banner of one Independent Praja Party¹⁹¹ was an example of Muslim public opinion in favour of the League ministry because already the status of Huq had gone astray in the eyes of his Muslim friends. Everywhere in the capital communal forces were getting aggressive against the KPP dissidents and accused them of giving up to the 'Hindu' Congress.¹⁹² But the non communal forces including the leftists could not take advantage of the situation and remained more or less tactical on that subject. Even when Tamizuddin Khan directly charged the ministry for fostering 'a false and insidious cry of religion in danger',¹⁹³ none of the other parties went for his support. The Congress was thinking in

terms of a prospective coalition with the KPP and the others because the leaders like Sarat Bose did not want to loss a charismatic leader like Huq in near future at any cost. The Congress in Bengal thought of a Congress KPP coalition or a KPP ministry with Congress backing either by diplomatic maneuverings or by tactful negotiations with the KPP and its enigmatic leader. They were least concerned with the all India Congress politics, thinking on a totally different line. The all India leadership had a keen desire for getting back the Muslim masses from the yoke of the League and it would not be possible, they counted, unless the Muslim ministers were guaranteed assurance of the Congress that the interest of the Muslims would best be protected by the Congress than by the League or its European allies. Such a policy had never been welcomed by the Bengal Congress, nor had they been interested for making any common ground with the non Bengali Muslim leaders against the British rather they had a mind to utilize the popular image of Huq to get a easy access to the Muslim masses in rural Bengal. They took prior cognizance on the issue of Bengali nationalism with a mutual assent by Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims a long before Jinnah could claim grounds on the Two Nation Theory. Sarat Bose showed great enthusiasm at this point. He reached at some understanding with the Independent Praja Party leader Tamizuddin Khan to unite the radicals.¹⁹⁴ He also pressurized Gandhi to make the Scheduled castes to be in agreement with the Congress against the unpopular measures of the ministry.¹⁹⁵ One Independent Schedule Caste Party was formed in 18th March, 1938 with the backing of the Congress and Jogendranath Mandal, the leader of this party sharply criticized the cabinet as a 'medley of interests, uniting only on the common ground of exploitation of the poor'¹⁹⁶ at the time of the

no confidence debate. However the calculations of the Congress were proved to be wrong because it was already late to take any further decision on the fate of Bengal. The Congress effort to manipulate the KPP members not only embittered the communal situation in and outside the legislature but also transformed the basic character of the coalition ministry. It was left on the mercy of the League which in turn successfully made itself the true representative of the Muslim masses. In its various public statements the League was seen to attract the masses in a way nobody could think it a year before. One such statement clearly brought out the difference between the League and the KPP that,

The Muslim League members of the legislature have remained loyal to the Ministry; they form the majority of the coalition party....with a very few exceptions, they have remained true to their pledge....They have shown that they are the real representatives and the trusted friends of the 'Krisaks' and the 'Prajaks'.¹⁹⁷

Although the Huq ministry scored a great amount of success on the basis the legislative measures, the League within a year had proved itself more competent to make full use of the credit. In fact the twofold identity of Huq both as the president of the Bengal League and the KPP at a time, shattered the least possible image of the later because the very existence of a minor party might have been at risk if it could fail to remain independent out of the control of a major party like the League. In Bengal the All India Muslim League claimed its status as the major Muslim organization at the expense of the KPP. It was the League which urged in January 1937,

'Muslim Voters, Beware! Do you want Congressmen to rule Bengal? If not—Send Fazlul Huq To the Wall: Smash Up the Praja Party.'¹⁹⁸

Just after a year it claimed,

...Now we have decided to work together...Ours a completely common aim and ideal. Mr. Huq is the President of the Krisak Praja Party as well as the League. So , for the greater interest of the community every Muslim should assemble under the banner of the Muslim League.¹⁹⁹

Had Huq not joined the League, the situation might be different in Bengal. But the desertion of most of the KPP members left no choice for Huq but to join the League. Some sources show that the Congress refused Huq for second time when he tried again to come to an agreement with the Congress before joining the League finally.²⁰⁰ The fate of KPP was left at the hands of the two major parties who in time distorted the language of popular politics in Bengal. One must not make Congress solely responsible for such predicaments but they should not even underestimate the political indecisiveness of Huq in this respect. His bewildering statements not only exposed the bankruptcy of his politics but also made the people conscious about his political dualism.²⁰¹ It seemed that he wanted to make KPP a party 'for a purely economic programme' specially when he declared 'A Muslim ,while remaining member of the Praja Party, could well join the League carrying out its political programme'²⁰².But what he did not understand that in new constitutional arrangements it would not be possible for any political party to work only in political or economic grounds. He was not certain that whether in a Muslim majority province like Bengal, the line of difference between the League and the KPP had hardly bear any

justification for a common Muslim either a peasant or a middle class professional. In a province where most of the peasants were Muslim, the issue of their economic emancipation did not go for a clash with the issue of Muslim solidarity and from this point Huq had tried to kill two birds at one stone. He was totally mistaken because in terms of their class composition these two parties could never meet within one historical context. The impending rift between Jinnah and Huq proved it adequately within two years.

The KPP League coalition depended a lot on the support of the Europeans. The later in turn developed a strong bonding with the propertied elites. It was a risky coalition which had paid its greatest concern for arriving at hegemony over the economy and politics in Bengal. As soon as the Hindu *bhadralok* were transformed into a statutory minority in the newly constituted assembly, communal anxieties increased in different fields of professional opportunities. In late 30s popular political dimensions received an immediate impetus when peasant and labour politics arrived in particular historical contexts against the background of a well organized political structure. The KPP emerged as the first political party to grasp the gravity of the situation that its most popular reforms attracted the common masses more than the other minor parties working into the arena of popular politics. The most important popular measures what the new ministry had taken were, the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act (1938), the Agricultural Debtors' Act (1938), the Moneylender' Act (1940) and the Communal Ratio Rules (1939).²⁰³ The first bill was brought on September 1937 but in face of a strong opposition from the zamindars and the Europeans, the bill was kept in

abeyance for a year. The Maharaja of Burdwan collected the signatures of ten thousand zamindars against the proposal²⁰⁴. Even a Muslim zamindar Sir A H Gaznavi openly asked for a joint action by both Hindu and Muslim zamindars against the bill²⁰⁵. Surprisingly the pro Hindu news papers who supported this agitation, took no notice of the issue when the bill was passed finally.²⁰⁶ The Act ensured the abolition of landlord's transfer fee, their right of preemption, the right to release rent by certificate procedure and the realization of all illegal impositions on the tenants.

It was these popular measures of the Huq government which checked all of the dissenting tendencies in and outside the legislature. The 'rebel' KPP members had attempted to forge unity either with the Congress or with the communists but a KPP-CPI-Congress triumvirate had never been a reality in the rural political arena. In some occasions a CPI-KPP joint movement was launched against the exploiters in the areas of Jessore, Khulna, Bakarganj etc²⁰⁷. But such joint movements did not convert into a longstanding political action. Even the rebel KPP leaders failed to provide any original programme before the masses in spite of their open understanding with the Congress and a secret connection with the communists. The Congress hesitation to take up the peasant's cause and its self imposed restrictions on the left wingers did not encourage the KPP dissidents like Shamsuddin or Nausar Ali to opt for an alliance with this party rather they found the Kisan Sabha more enthusiastic on the popular issues.²⁰⁸ The infiltration of some KPP leaders into the pro communist Kisan Sabha in late 30s proved that the KPP had no longer remained as the most trusted organization of all categories of the

peasants and the pro communist Kisan Sabha actively entered into the front of landless peasants and agricultural labourers. Question may be asked that how far this Kisan Sabha was acceptable to the Muslim peasants in general. The election of 1937 brought out the fact that it was not necessary that the Muslim peasant would only support the Muslim League alone but in the early 40s the Muslim League had almost captured the imagination of the Muslim peasants by completely holding back the other political forces. During this period the communists launched various struggles in support of some other parties but the Muslim peasants at large remained more or less indifferent to the call of the communists. Although one veteran communist leader claimed that,

We had taken the initiative to mobilize the Muslim peasants under the banner of the Kisan Sabha. In some cases we did not fail. There were no riots in the countryside ; a substantial section of the Muslim community even rallied under the Red Flag.....But the points to remember is that, if the communal riots had not spread to the countryside in Bengal ,this was largely because of the part played by the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party. One can not ignore this.²⁰⁹

However such an opinion should not be taken for granted in all the occasions. In fact the communists took numbers of years to be a monolithic party due to internal and external pressures. Until the 40s the outlawed communists received a few chances to transform the peasant movements into independent class actions. They had to work from the platform of either one of the non communal parties. A numbers of issues other than the popular one diverted their attention from the very beginning. If they could devote their highest form of energy independently only in the popular front, the fate of Bengal would become

different. The post election political developments in Bengal disappointed the communists because there was little likelihood of wining over any of the parties inside the legislature for the support of an anti imperialist programme. 'The New Age' conveyed that,

.....how is the anti Imperialist Movement going to be organized and strengthened inside the legislature.....The Congress is there, in opposition it is true, but it is controlled by the Right—the Praja Party is there but its leadership is capitulating to Imperialism—a few independents belonging to working class or peasant organizations exist, as detached individuals with not very great weight in any of the larger organizations. Who then will take the initiative in putting forward the minimum anti Imperialist platform? Obviously it would to be the job on the INC but the INC is not popular with the Praja Party and the Independents are afraid of losing their identity if they ally with it entirely.²¹⁰

III

In this situation the idea of one united front between the working class, the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie came out as the most suitable alternative before the communists. They also paid a great deal of attention towards the CSP in Bengal so far had been dismissed as 'an insignificant little group of petty -bourgeois intellectuals led by a disreputable set of people, more rightist than the Right.'²¹¹ The historical necessity of the CSP came to be realized on the occasion of organizing the 'left' or the 'progressive elements' to develop the united front between the masses within and outside the Congress with all other radical anti imperialist organizations.²¹² The proposal of a United Front Parliamentary Committee was endorsed by the proposal of a Peoples United Front Conference where, it was expected, the Congress, the

Labour Party, the Krisak Samity the CSP ,the Trade Union Congress ,the Students Federation and if possible the Praja Party would rally the masses in support of the popular demands.²¹³The initial ebullience of the leaders began to get evanesced because of the absence of one minimum programme supported by both the Congress and the KPP. The fundamental difference between these two parties over the economic issues ²¹⁴ messed up the prospects of a united struggle by all the progressive forces. But the idea of left unity had never lost its significance in politics. Already from 1936 the CSP and CPI agreed to work jointly. Under the guidance of P.C Joshi , the journal National Front brought out the draft thesis on 'The National Congress and Working Class' on April 17,1938.It declared,

It would not be possible for the communists to become a political force in the country unless we make a decisive turn in our whole attitude towards the Indian National Congress,.....unifying the entire Left and its socialist core to implement the policy of building up the United National Front on the basis of the National Congress and of which policy we must forward as the most consistent and sincere champions.²¹⁵

Within six months the paper unequivocally proposed the idea of left consolidation with the Congress socialists, Royists, Congress lefts and others so that the left sectarian mistakes could be corrected. ²¹⁶ But their mutual disparities could not be surmounted overnight and the idea of left unity remained as an experiment suffering from inner contradictions. From a strategical point of view the CSP opposed the CPI basically on the question of a armed struggle in India. CPI unequivocally professed its faith on violent insurrection²¹⁷ while the CSP strongly condemned it. They adopted peaceful means to reach the goal although such a method

differed from the Gandhian concept of non violence .²¹⁸ The CSP did not want be a shadow of Russia –the single socialist state in the world and never allowed its cadres to develop any extra territorial loyalties like the CPI. CSP's prolonged attachment with the Congress led mass movement did not sanction them to get into the creed of Marxism totally while their basic consensus with the Communists over the ideological matters encouraged them to enter into an agreement with the later.²¹⁹ The CSP leadership even thought about a United Socialist Party with all the anti imperial radical forces²²⁰ so that the leftists could get a common platform to cooperate with the nationalist movement in India. For the success of this party the CSP even dared to allow the communists into the party at its own risk ²²¹ and at the Meerut conference of 1936, advocated the necessity of an united front with all the leftists forces working in the arena of popular politics.²²² The Bengal Labour Party and the Bengal branch of CSP and the Anushilan activists of Bengal reached at a point of mutual understanding ²²³ ,however, the dissident communists like the Royists did not come to an agreement with the CSP or the CPI at any cost.²²⁴ Right from its inception M.N Roy advised the CSP to put more emphasis on the anti imperialist programmes on a Congress line rather than on socialist line. However sincere efforts were made by both of these groups to work jointly at least in the field of trade unions ²²⁵ and up to 1936 they maintained more or less a balanced relation in spite of some alleged disruptionist activities from the part of the Royists.²²⁶ But CSP's open adherence to the official CPI at Meerut not only dissatisfied MN Roy and his group but also widened the breach between the CSP and the Royists to an extent that in 1937 the secretary of the Bengal CSP Gunada Majumdar informed the India authority about the objectivity of Royists

from the rank and file of the CSP in Bengal.²²⁷ It had been seen that the CSP largely depended on the Royists in the local levels and the gradual detachment of the Royists from the CSP helped M.N Roy to form the League of Radical Congressmen at the expense of the CSP.²²⁸ At the beginning Roy perhaps tried to pressurize the official communists by accepting individual membership of the CSP, but the Royists did not have the strength to check any further move of the CSP towards the official CPI. They even failed to convince the CSP on the issue of accepting office after the assembly election of 1935.²²⁹

It is to be mentioned in this situation that the CPI CSP understanding did not prove to be a real one. The non communist elements in the Bengal Labour Party were proved to be problematic for the success of a joint operation.²³⁰ **Already the Labour Party communists and the official Communists clashed in a number of occasions.** At the Bengal Provincial Students' Federation at Khulna in 1938 labour leaders Promode Sen, Biswanath Dubey and others differed with the communists like Biswanath Mukherjee, Salil Sengupta, Sushil Dasgupta and others.²³¹ Socialists like Jyotirmoy Sen, Arun Sengupta and Arun Roychudhury etc were also present in the occasion.²³² The Communists who came from the Labour party were of the opinion that the students should be attracted to the Communist Party while the other group believed in organizing a united mass student movement.²³³ On the other side the apparent intimacy of the CSP and the CPI was proved to be a marriage of convenience. The realities of their relationship went open when M. Masani, the CSP leader, published a booklet called 'Communist Plot against the CSP' in 1938 to expose the 'sinister motives' of the CPI

to take a complete hold over the CSP.²³⁴ The basis of such allegation was a CPI circular called, 'Plan of Work—CSP-9.5.38',²³⁵ Labour Party leader Niharendu Dutta Majumdar had differences of opinion with the CPI leader Somanath Lahiri on the issue of CSA-CPI unity. The former expressed his resentment against the CSP in a leaflet called 'Labour Party's Reply to Masani's Communist Plot'²³⁶ while the official CPI emphasized the need of CSP-CPI coalition in a leaflet called 'Unite with the CSP again'.²³⁷ However in Bengal, the official CSP did not found a strong footing independently because of the numerical strength of the CPI members in the provincial executive. The communist intimacy with one of the two groups of the Bengal CSP again infused a great degree of misunderstanding within the party itself especially when Gunada Majumdar tendered his resignation in July 1938 owing to the political manipulations done by the communists in favour of the second group under Dr Suresh Chandra Banerjee and Dr Charu Chandra Banerjee.²³⁸ Such disputes were bound to hit the so called unity of the CPI and the CSP because it seemed almost impossible for the communists to be loyal to two political parties at the same time. Side by side the inclusion of the communists into the CSP challenged the very character of CSP as a political party of its own rather it was left open to work as a joint front with the CPI. Nevertheless, the CSP also suffered from a kind of political dualism like the communists. It was a fact that the party did not make itself free from Congress spheres of influence and its concurrent effort to work on both the socialist and anti imperialist fronts was proved to be a failure.²³⁹ Neither the Royists nor the CPI members were satisfied with this move while the CSP's acceptance of the Marxian line as a Gandhian alternative. It moved this party to a point of uncertainty because they

could not free themselves from the charm of Gandhian ideology and unfeasibly tried to attain the very spell of Gandhian appeal with the help of the neo Marxian interpretations. Their attempts to compromise between the Marxists and non Marxists elements into the party were ended into an unconscious indulgence of other leftists to exploit the CSP for their own advantage.²⁴⁰ It was what exactly happened in Bengal. In fact the idea of left unity was appeared to be a false cry under colonial compulsions. No real unity could have been achieved in absence of a well documented political methodology accepted by all the leftist parties irrespective of their ideological differences.

CSP's open commitment to Marxian socialism in the Faizpur Thesis²⁴¹ (adopted by the party in the Third Annual Conference in 1936) turned up the expectations of other leftist forces so far had been lacking essential resources to work independently. Side by side the basic dilemma of the CSP over the Marxist and non Marxist forces into its composition restricted its development to work as a pure Marxist Leninist Party. In this respect the Faizpur Thesis should be viewed as an intellectual effort to reflect an ideological homogeneity at least in the level of decision making.²⁴² Such a commitment, however, was far from being a consistent one, it was proved to be a matter of attraction for the other leftist forces working as 'non conformist' Marxists –the Anushilan converts²⁴³ and the ex revolutionaries of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (hereafter HSRA).²⁴⁴ In spite of their official affiliation to Marxism –Leninism, these people followed an alternative path outside the organizational mechanism of the Comintern and the CPI from a separate platform of action. They developed their own

understanding of the sudden shift of the CPI from 'left sectarianism' to the policy of 'United Front' in 1935 as a mere surrender to the directives of the Communist International without making any proper judgment on the existing class relations in India. This type unity, the Anushilanites thought, would offer the bourgeoisie specially the rightist bourgeoisies a golden chance to make the leftists submit before their will. ²⁴⁵

The Anushilan Marxists introduced separate trends of Marxist politics in India outside the institutional order of the Comintern and the CPI. At the Ramgarh session on the Congress (1940), this political group styled itself as the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India.²⁴⁶ The thesis adopted by this group in 1938 confirmed their ultimate aim and immediate objectives on the background of a proposed socialist state in India by overthrowing the imperial power and ousting the bourgeoisies under the leadership of the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry. ²⁴⁷ In order to transform the Congress into an anti imperialist front, the party members were asked to work inside the Congress as an independent class organization of the peasantry and the labourers so that the bourgeoisie reformist leadership could be isolated from the rank and file of the Congress.

In 1938 the primary question before the Anushilan Marxists was whether to form a separate party or to work through some other party having close resemblance to their ideas and programmes. In absence of sufficient financial resources, they decided to join the CSP- the only alternative left before them except the CPI and the Royists. In the language of Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, Jaypraksah Narayan, the CSP leader 'appealed to us not to start a separate party but to join hands with them and thus make the CSP a real All India Revolutionary Socialist Party.Then we took our

final decision with this understanding that for a certain period we would keep our existence separate existence and then merge.²⁴⁸ Tridib Kumar Choudhury, the leader of the Anushilan group informed that about one quarter of the membership of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association including Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee joined the CSP along with almost all the Anushilan members irrespective of their difference of thinking on Marxism.²⁴⁹ Unfortunately within a year the Anushilan Marxists working in the CSP got disappointed due to the political inadequacy of this party and to some extent were forced to form a new party on Marxist Leninist line. This new party as mentioned earlier took the name Revolutionary Socialist Party of India with an objective of establishing a new popular political trend against the very 'disappointed' and 'disguised',²⁵⁰ politics of the CSP and the 'illusionary' politics of the official CPI in India.²⁵¹ In the Tripuri session of the Congress in 1939, the CPI was seen to come out with full confidence in Gandhian leadership by simply throwing all their revolutionary slogans to the wind. In search of a unity of all the national forces, the CPI now turned towards the magnetic spell of Gandhian leadership and tried its level best to wean over right wing leaders for the sake of a National Front with all the anti imperialist forces be it a bourgeoisie or a proletariat. This shift in their position could be explained on the background of the mounting danger meeting head-on the Soviet Union. They thought that the communists must do anything to boost up the anti British movement in India so that the enemies of the Socialist fatherland could at least be warned.²⁵² Condemning the stand taken by the CPI, Ajoy Ghosh, the CPI leader asked,

Has not the Tripuri meant the smashing up of the entire Left including the Communists? Were they not obsessed with the ideas of unity and did they not, therefore, try to placate every body and end by placating none? Did they not in their eagerness for unity vacillate at every step, renounce their entire political line and even their fundamental principles? ²⁵³

In late 30s none of the leftist forces were seen to produce a synchronized language of politics because in a numbers of crucial occasions suspicion and mistrust spoiled the very strength of these leftist parties to launch a joint movement. Even though the Congress Socialists, the communists ,the League of Radical Congressmen and the individual leftists cast their vote in favour of Subhas Bose in the post of the Congress President in 1938, the spirit of such unity had lost its significance within a year. ²⁵⁴ In search of a national unity, both the CPI and the CSP shattered the prospects of a united movement 1939 even if the decision was not taken unanimously by all the leftist parties working on the popular front in different provinces. After making a close observation over the leftist parties in Bengal, the Intelligence Branch of Bengal informed in 1939 that, the Bengal Labour Party, the League of Radical Congressmen , the Communist League of Soumen Tagore and the official CPI --the well known communist parties were functioning independently with regular 'quarrels over their respective ideologies and methods of organization' ²⁵⁵ In a special note prepared on the communist movement in Bengal, the Intelligence officials particularly pointed out about the separation of the Bengal Labour Party (referred as an appendage to the communist party for trade union organizations) of Niharendu Dutt Majumdar from the CPI in 1939 due to the repeated clashes between Dutt Mazumdar and Muzaffar Ahmed—the leader of the CPI in Bengal. ²⁵⁶ conflicts were

further aggravated by the anti communist and anti rightist attitude taken up by Dutt Mazumdar in Tripuri. Although the Bengal Labour Party and the CPI had been working as a single party from 1937 in the industrial, agrarian and student front of politics, they in general lacked the essential stamina to take up the growing challenge of communalism in each and every sphere of popular political front.

The same thing was also true for the Royists in Bengal. The followers of M.N Roy in Bengal devoted their almost energy in their efforts to regain a position for Roy in the Bengal Congress. In spite of his being able to gain a few followers in Calcutta, 24 Parganas and an almost insignificant numbers in Dacca, Barisal, Rangpur and Murshidabad,²⁵⁷ M.N Roy did not achieve a strong foothold as a political party in Bengal. Originally the Royists were interested in the idea of forming a revolutionary working class party but their entire attention was turned towards developing a left nationalist front inside the Congress afterwards. It was from this position that he began to criticize the 'sectarian' attitude of the Communist International presented in the Draft thesis of the 6th Congress as a model without the required tactical intelligence.²⁵⁸ In the early 30s Roy put his own understanding on communist political development in India. He thought the Congress itself had the petty bourgeoisie elements under the domination of big bourgeoisie and it would be the task of the communists to liberate the former and make it prepared for revolutionary programmes. But such a task, Roy envisaged, could not be performed by the communists directly due to some official constraints—so one 'transitional' party should be formed under the guidance of the communists for the purpose of entering the Congress and organizing the

leftists and the petty bourgeoisie elements towards revolution.²⁵⁹ But such a model of 'transitional party' was proved to be a confusing one (as in case of the WPP) in terms of its methodological orientations and its organizational relation with the CPI. Since 1935 continuous efforts had been made by the Royists to ally different forces into the platform of the trade unions under the umbrella of the All India Trade Union Congress (hereafter AITUC). In Bengal already a strong centre of the Royists had been formed in early thirties. It was due to the efforts of Tayyab Sheikh and Rajani Mukherjee that in Calcutta the Revolutionary Party of the Indian Working Class (RPIWC) was formed under the influence of Roy's line of thinking.²⁶⁰ During this time Dharitri Ganguli, one of the important student leaders of Calcutta became the principal source of inspiration behind the Royist politics in Bengal²⁶¹ The fundamental ideas of this party were reflected in a local Bengali journal called the '*Juger Dabi*.' One Committee of Action for Independence was established under the purview of the RPIWC where, in the words of Tayyab Sheikh,

more and more (were) being daily recruitedand more than 30.000 leaflets...were published and distributed throughout the city (Calcutta) and suburbs as well as in the districts. We have been able to extent our activities through this literature in Bihar and Orissa.²⁶²

The efforts of the Royists throughout the country found its organizational expression in the League of Radical Congressmen in 1937. Since then one regular office had been maintained by the Royists at 110A, Harrison Road, Calcutta, with Hari Chakraborty as general secretary and Jibanlal Chatterjee as organizing secretary.²⁶³ From 1937, immense trade union activities were carried on by the Royists in Bengal with the other forces

including the CPI, CSP, the Bengal Labour Party, and the Communist League of Soumen Tagore in a close interaction with the AITUC.²⁶⁴

In this period the essential features of labour radicalism took a hasty turn towards communal antagonism. Ideal examples of this development could well be cited from Bengal jute workers' belt. The government sponsored trade unions for Muslim workers played the most crucial role here for institutionalizing the growing communal animosity among the labourers. The entire maneuvering was performed by one mischievous alliance of the propertied interests in Bengal including the British capitalists, Hindu businessmen, Muslim landholders and some Hindu landed aristocrats. The Depression years brought extensive disorder in the agrarian sector of Bengal. The jute production sector suffered a lot because jute was the main cash crop in Bengal and a great amount of British capital was invested in the jute industry of Bengal.²⁶⁵ The general fall in the jute prices all over the world had a direct impact on the over productive tendencies of jute in Bengal. In an atmosphere of world wide slump in jute prices, the manufactures sought the support of the state to restrict the working hours in the mills to make a proper balance between its production and the requirements of a shrinking world market.²⁶⁶ The consequent pressures of the Indian Jute Mills Association on the government to curtail the working hours in the mills did not get any positive response. The government apprehended that such a decision would bring extreme hardship for the depressed peasantry who had already been trapped between the puzzle of increasing debt and declining prices for their production. The restrictions on working hours meant a heavy lose of demand in jute which in turn would become a source of

peasant discontent in east Bengal countryside while in the industrial belt lack of employment opportunities could have been transformed into large scale agitation by the workers. Nevertheless, the crisis in the jute industry put forward one idea that in assistance of a business friendly local government the interests of the British industrialists could be protected successfully by sufficiently representing their interests into the new constitutional set up. Side by side the growing tendencies of labour radicalism precipitated the need for an urgent understanding with the propertied interests in Bengal so that colonial capitalists could become one counter hegemonic force in provincial politics. The non Bengali Muslim businessmen appeared to be a readily available ally of the British business lobby because both of them required each other to safeguard their interests for different reasons.²⁶⁷ In a resolution of 1933, the BPML declared that 'it is incumbent on the Muslims to encourage such traders who are trying to develop the home trade and industry.'²⁶⁸ The success of the League candidates in the urban constituencies also indicated its prospective potentials to carry on the Muslim business community into its side. However for both the groups one pro-Muslim business friendly government became one of the urgent requirements so that legislative measures could be adopted in favour of their respective class interests. It is to be mentioned here that the Congress could no longer be at the confidence of the British business lobby for a numbers of reasons.²⁶⁹ Even a good number of Hindu landed interests were seen to build up strong anti congress views in face of a growing threat from the lefts. The declining status of those Hindu landed aristocrats in face of the changing structure of land relations in the thirties, fostered two fold possibilities among them. On the background of the huge influx of the socialists and

communists into the party, radical tendencies were developed amongst a few of them who had already lost their roots in landed property whereas some others had provoked a language of reactionary conservatism in the political life of Bengal.²⁷⁰ Their growing frustration against the 'radicalized Congress' came to be reflected through the new formed Nationalist Party before the assembly election. Some of them were associated with the Bengal Land Holders' Association and at any cost were eager to protect their own feudal interests. Even the communal sentiments of the Hindu and Muslim landed elites were seemed to get neutralized in response to their class interests. Just like their Hindu counterparts the landed section of the Central National Mohammedan Association of Calcutta also paid their concern on the fate of the Permanent Settlement to the Governor General.²⁷¹

In fact the ministerial structure of the new government of 1937 was turned into a political imbroglio of mutually consenting but individually conflicting forces. Such a combination itself was proved be risky for the fate of Bengal. As the constituencies were divided into communal basis, the European business lobby appeared to be one of the balancing factors of the new coalition government. The survival of the new ministry largely depended on the support of the European business lobby in the assembly. Edward Benthal, the chief of the Bird Hilgers managing Agency House and one of the leading personalities of European business circle, pointed out that , 'What a powerful position we have got with the government if we care to use it constructively in the *right way*.' (Italics mine)²⁷² This *right way* meant nothing more than a manipulation of the politics of the government for the sake of the British capitalist

developments in Bengal. Benthall's intimacy with Nazimuddin, Ispahani and G.D Birla could be cited as an example of capitalist class consciousness against the radical tendencies of the working class in India. But what became too much surprising was the shift of a great numbers of workers from a mere radicalism to communal political action. The vicious coalition of the propertied interests contributed in their way to institutionalize the communalization of labour politics to a considerable extent but no one can overlook the fact that the leftist trade unions were seized to take their hold over the workers who were coming into the grip of a different political paradigm in late thirties.

Under the sinister scheme of building up one reactionary trade union of the Muslim League, labour minister Suhrawardy employed a very interesting mechanism of communalizing the labour issues. He had developed an extensive programme of labour welfare under the guidance of the Bengal National Chamber of Labour. It was promoted and financed by the ministry of labour. This state sanctioned union of the Muslim League developed a network of understanding between the government, the mill owners and the workers.²⁷³ Surprisingly this union (popularly known as the white union) had never take a deaf year to the demands of the Hindu workers rather adopted more or less a totalitarian approach in handling the labour issues. This type of strategy was proved to be a double edged weapon to check the increasing militant trade unionism among the workers. The White unions were intended to impress the workers particularly the Muslims with some non economic 'reforms' including the establishment of some mosques in the Muslim majority belts. Above all their regular attempts of making a peaceful settlement of

labour disputes increased the appeal of these unions among the workers. All of these efforts in general energized the workers with a degree of confidence on the League unions, at a time alienating a majority of the workers from the spell of militant trade union movements. It was a kind of sophisticated maneuverings from the part of a mischievous government to make the workers turned back from the hold of the 'red flag' unions. The over ambitious Suhrawardy did not even take a second thought before asking the British capitalists for financial help to construct a network of state supported trade unionism against the 'red flag' unions.²⁷⁴ The most dangerous part of his scheme included that if required, the government would sponsor communal disturbances into the areas of extensive labour unrest.²⁷⁵ In fact the so called labour welfare programmes were adopted to convince the workers to make a compromise with the government sponsored unions while in certain cases the unions were seen to mobilize the religious sentiments of the Muslim workers so that the growing class consciousness of the Muslim workers could have been crippled forever in favour of their existing community consciousness. The situational unity of the Red trade unions with the All India Trade Union Congress in 1935²⁷⁶ indeed infused a great degree of inspiration among the workers but the real spirit of a militant movement could not be sustained even after the election of some popular left candidates in the assembly election of 1937. However, it would be wrong to victimize only the white unions and the Muslim League for the failure of the left trade unions. The tactical mistakes and circumstantial limitations of the leftist unions, affiliated to different minor parties should be taken into consideration in this regard. One of such mistakes was that most of the strikes organized by them seemed to be generated

from top by the labour leaders of the assembly. One official report informed that,

It seems that these strikes are by no means entirely economic in character, they are undoubtedly being fomented by labour representatives in the Legislative Assembly of whom the most prominent are Suresh and Sibnath Banerjee, N Dutta and A M A Zaman representing territorial labour constituencies of the 24 Pargana, Howrah and Hoogly districts.²⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the expansion of electoral reforms created exclusive possibilities for a certain kinds of politicians to invest in specific identities across class lines. Consciousness based on the loyalty towards religious community emerged as the most effective instrument to mobilize the workers even at the expense of their territorial or linguistic consciousness. All of these contesting identities dissipated the cohesive organism of a class by itself. But it is not necessary to assume that the class consciousness of the workers ceased to exist when their community loyalties were at work either by themselves or by external forces. Both of these identities could have been at place if the colonial state remains at the centre of focus of workers' resistance. The real problem of the left trade unions in the late thirties stayed in the context of identifying the actual enemy of the working class movements.

In spite of a numbers of historic achievements the KPP League ministry failed to satisfy a majority of the population. However the sharpest criticism came from a section of the Hindus especially on the Bengal Secondary Educational Reforms Bill, the Communal Ratio Act and the Calcutta Municipality Amendment Act. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, one of the noted educationist and an influential member of the provincial

legislature (He was elected from the University Constituency) emerged as the strongest critic of the ministry. The last 'Bill had no other aim', according to Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, "but to reduce the Hindus to a position of inferiority in a Corporation which affects a city where, whether one likes it or not, the Hindus predominate." The pity of it is that the bill has not evoked that countrywide protest which it certainly deserves. The Hindus, thanks to the uncertain policy of the Congress, seem to be doomed!"²⁷⁸ The introduction of quota system for the Muslims in the government was another instance of 'injustice' because it would not only deprive the well qualified Hindus from better appointments but also encourage even the non Bengali Muslims to fill the quota if suitable Bengali Muslims would not be available. It was a psychological blow for the educated Hindus slowly jeopardizing their existence 'in the land of their birth.' Interestingly Shyama Prasad Mukherjee unequivocally charged the Congress for betraying the Bengali Hindus and openly condemned its faltering mentality on representing the Hindu electorates at the time of crisis.²⁷⁹ Even that he called it their 'sacred duty' to defend Hindu rights at a time when 'legislative and administrative measures were either adopted or advocate to deliberately to curtail Hindu rights in Bengal.²⁸⁰ Shyama Prasad did not conceal his disappointment on the attitude of the Bengal Congress as well as the very response he got from Sarat Bose and Subhas Bose on the issue of standing by the Hindu cause in Bengal. The reluctance of the Bose brothers precipitated the coming out of a separate political body –the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal. In the words of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee,

'Subhas and I had a talk on one day about the political situation in Bengal. One evening Sarat Bose and we two had a long discussion. I asked them to take up the Hindu cause in Bengal so as to render it unnecessary for us to organize a separate political body. They expressed their inability to do so -first because they thought it might still further rouse Muslims, and secondly, because they themselves being well-known 'Non Communal Congressites' could not openly do what I asked them to do.'

281

One may see here how the necessity of a strong Hindu political organization found its justification into the disapproval of the Congress leaders to project the Hindu cause. The rationale for reorganizing one minor political party came within the constraints of a major party like the Congress. Its failure to form the ministry in 1937 and its sheer negligence to stand by the Hindus offered Savarkar a golden chance to play his card in Bengal. In the words of Mukherjee,

Being then greatly perturbed at the helpless position of Bengal Hindus whom the Congress failed to rouse and protect some of us was drawn to Savarkar's influence and it gradually took root. Nirmal Chatterjee, S.N Banerjee, Asutosh Lahiri and other pressed me to join the Mahasabha.²⁸²

A new language of militant Hinduism was expressed in the all India conference of the Hindu Mahasabha, held at Calcutta in December 1939. It was the high time in Bengal politics. A numbers of new political developments appeared to take a hold of the situation. Such developments were not at all unexpected because already the communal polarization of the province took its final shape and all the new political trends were indicating towards the coming danger in the next decade.

Notes and References

1. The British did not have a belief on the concept of an Indian nation. It was only after the introduction of the mass struggle in India politics that the Indian National Congress had to perform the twin task of confirms the standards of a nation and to remake it according to the requirements of the situation. See, Gynandries Pandey, 'Congress and the Nation; 1917' in Richard Sission and Stanley Wolpart (ed.) *Congress and Indian Nationalism; The Pre Independence Phase*, Barkley, 1988. pp.121-125
2. See, Gynandries Pandey, *Ibid.*
3. Eleanor Zelliott, *Congress and the Untouchables 1917-1950* in Richard Sission and Stanley Wopart, *op.cit.*, pp.182-198.
4. See Bipan Chandra, 'Elements of Continuity and Change in the Early Nationalist Activity', in Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1979,
5. Dhanagare described some general characteristics common to Gandhian peasant protests. They involved single class or class consisting generally the rich peasants. Side by side attempts were made to integrate the poorer sections of the peasantry and landless peasantry by constructive programmes. *D N Dhanagare, Peasant Movement in India, 1920-1950*, New Delhi, 1983, Chapter iv.
6. In this regard Dhanagare has observed that Gandhian Congress peasant protests invoked compromise and included consensus on termination. Congress led peasant movements involved conflict between peasant groups and the British Raj, they did not encourage any conflict within Indian society and between classes or castes. In an analysis on the relationship between the Congress and the peasant movements in Bihar

and UP, Marx Harcourt pointed out that that it was very ambivalent in nature. At the time of agitation or civil disobedience the peasants were proved to be very useful but in times of agitation the party leadership saw them as dangerous allies. see, D N Dhanagare, *op.cit*, pp.5-6; Marx Harcourt' *Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India* ; *The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces*, in D A Low (ed.) *Congress and Raj; Facts of the Indian Struggle, 1917-47*, London, 1977. p, 328. Also see, Gynandries Pandey, ' *Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism; The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-1922* ', in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies I, Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi, 1982, pp.143-197..

7. For details see Gynandries Pandey, *Congress and the Nation, 1917-1947*, in Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpart (ed.), *Congress and Indian Nationalism*, Barkley, 1988, Hitesh Rajan Sanyal, ' *Congress in Southwestern Bengal; The Anti Union Board Movement in Eastern Medinipur, 1921* ', in Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpart (ed.) *op.cit*. pp.352-56.

8. See Rajat Kanta Ray, ' *Masses in Politics, The Non Cooperation Movement in Bengal 1920-1922* ', in, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol, XI, No.4, 1974; J. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power; Indian Politics, 1905-22*, Cambridge, 1972, p.358; Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, ' *The Problem of Middle Class Educated Unemployment in Bengal, 1912-1942* ', in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol XIX, No.1, January-March, 1982.

9. For details on the Praja movement see, Harun-or Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh; Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947*, Dacca, 1987, pp.28-31, Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in*

Bengal, 1937-47, New Delhi, 1976, p.20-21. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchchar Bachar*, Dhaka, 1968, pp.60-61, 151.

10. Harun-or Rashid, *op.cit.* pp.28-31.

11. For a detail of the Swaraj Party see Chapter I of the present study.

12. *Ibid.*

13. For the aims and objectives of the party see Goutam Chattopadhyay, *Communism and Bengal's Freedom Movement*, New Delhi, 1971, Appendix D, pp.177-179.; Muzaffar Ahmed, *Communist Party of India ; Years of Formation 1921-1923*, Calcutta, 1959, p.23.

14. G. Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India, Vol II*, New Delhi, 1978, p.676

15. G. Adhikari *op.cit.* Vol III, B 1979, pp.34-35

16. M N Roy, *A Letter from the Indian Comrades*, Meerut Conspiracy Case, *ibid.*

17. For details see *Genesis of the Workers and Peasants Party of India*, Introduction Adhikari, *op.cit.*, Vol II, p.98 ; G Adhikari, *op.cit.*, vol II, chapter v and vi

18. For the details of M N Roy's Ideas see M N Roy, 'Imperialism and Indian Nationalism', in *Inprecor*, Vol 8, No.1, 5th January, 1928.

19. See G Adhikari, *op.cit.*, Vol II, Chapter VI.

20. G Adhikari, *op.cit.*, Vol III, B, p.118

21. *Ibid.*, Vol II, pp.20-21

22. There is a common assumption that Indian working class did not have class cohesion or even the features of class formation. Within the working class itself there were too many signs of conflict. As far as the working class was concerned, class was not the fundamental unit in India rather the main point was community and Indian working class in a

numbers of occasion had exhibited the traits of community consciousness ageist the expected class consciousness. See, Dipesh Chakrabourty, *Rethinking Working Class History; Bengal,1890-1940*, Princeton, 1988, pp.216-17.. Ranajit Dasgupta on the other hand observed labour politics in late 19th century Bengal in an era of transition from individual protest to class protests. He more or less echoed the classical Marxist understanding of the question of working class formation in colonial India.see,Ranjit Dasgupta, ‘ *Material Condition and Behavioral Aspects of Calcutta Working class, 1875-99*’, Occasional Papers, No.22, Centre for Studies in Social Science, Calcutta, 1979. also see, R S Chandravarkar,’ *Worker’s Politics and the Mill Districts of Bombay Between the Wars*’, in Baker, Johnson and Seal (ed.)*Power, Profit and Politics, Modern Asian Studies*,15(3),1981,pp.603-47.; Subho Basu *Does Class Matter; Colonial Capital and Workers Resistance in Bengal; 1890-1937*,, Delhi, 2004,pp.5-18

23. For details see, Parimal Ghosh, *Colonialism, Class and a History of the Calcutta Jute Millhands,1880-1930*, Hyderabad,2000,pp.1-21.

24.The classical Marxist historians analyzed ‘class’ as a social group with a common relationship to a means of production, common means of surplus product and a common relationship to those who sell their labour to earn their livelihood. However, Marx himself described the class formation in a way that when a class becomes aware of its interests and showed the ability to pursue its interests it becomes a ‘class for itself’. See Marx and Engels, *Selected Works, Vol 3*, Moscow, 1969, p.473

25.Dipesh Chakrabourty,op.cit.pp.216-217;Subho Basu,op.cit.pp.5-18.

26. Ranajit Dasgupta , *op.cit.*No.22

27. The working class in Bengal was characterized by a number of fragmented identities. Besides having a flexible social ties, there had been differences between the workers on the basis of wage pattern, skills, condition of work place, gender, employment provisions etc. All of these aspects along with the influences of nationalist movement helped to shape up the labour politics in colonial Bengal. These issues have been discovered by R S Chandravarkar in *The Origin of Industrial Capitalism in India; Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay 1900-1940*, Cambridge, 1994. Samita Sen has highlighted the gender issues in the Bengal jute industry, See Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in late colonial India; The Bengal Jute Industry*, Cambridge, 1999.

28. *The Karmi*, 1st year, January, 1922, vol 1, No. 5, pp. 63-4

29. G Adhikari, *op.cit*, Vol. III B, 1979, pp. 34-35

30. For a detail of the aims and objectives of this party see the First All India Workers and Peasants Party Report, in G Adhikari, *op.cit*, Vol III, C, p. 740 also see the Political Resolution, *Ibid*, p. 720

31. In 1928 the WPP organized scavengers strike in different places of Bengal. The WPP organized one Scavenger's union with Pravabati Dasgupta as the president and Muzaffar Ahmed as the Vice President. The scavengers went on strike twice in early 1928. After a clash between the police and the strikers the Corporation authority at last consented to meet their demands of the scavengers. It was more or less a successful strike. led by the WPP in Bengal. See Report for the seven days ending the 7th March, G B ,IB, 1928. ; *Ibid*, 11 July, 1928.

32. For details see Panchanan Saha, *History of the Working Class Movement in Bengal*, Delhi, 1978, p. 109.

33. In the Fort Gloster jute mill at Howrah went on strike against the mill management. The WPP supported Bengal Jute Workers Union failed to move the strikers from outside and the workers followed their own course of action. See Subho Basu, *Does Class Matter; Colonial Capital and Workers Resistance in Bengal; 1890-1937*, Delhi, 2004, p.214

34. In Bengal the nationalists and the communists together set their attack on the mill owners and the government. Mostly in the European owned industries labour strikes were undertaken by both of these forces on the basis of a common propaganda. See Home Poll, Letter from Government of Bengal, 19th December, File No.18/xvi/1928; Home Poll, Note on the Communists and the Congress by Home Secretary H G Haig and Home member Cerar, File No.18/xvi/1928

35. Home Poll, File No.18/XVI/1928, Note by the Home Department.

36. *Ibid*, Sir George Rainy to H. G Haig, Secretary Home Department, 12 January, 1929

37. *Ibid*.

38. The strike of the 15,000 workers at the three mills of Bauria lasted three months from 16 July to 16 January, 1929 and it has been described by Muzaffar Ahmed as the 'largest ever strike' of the jute workers of Bengal. The strike emerged on the issue of 60 hour working week adjustment and in a number of mills the workers went on strike for the new working hours. See Muzaffar Ahmed, *Amar Jiban O Bharater Communist Party, 1920-1929*, Vol II, Dhaka, (Incomplete), 1974, p.45.

39. Though the WPP affiliated trade unions successfully controlled the working class movement in Bengal but difference of opinion among the leaders themselves often created unnecessary problems in the party. Side by side legal restrictions often made these leaders alienated from the

workers on strike. Apart from this linguistic problems also limited the possibilities of wide scale mobilization of the workers by the leaders when most of the workers happened to be either illiterate or non Bengali in origin. See, Subho Basu, *op.cit*, p.215

40. For a detail account of the dissolution of the WPP see Joshi, Shashi and Bhagwan Josh, ' *Struggle for Hegemony and Power* ', Vol III, New Delhi, 1994 pp.108-119; Aditya Mukherjee, *op.cit*, pp.1-15

41. See Introduction, Laushey, David M, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left: Aspects of Regional Marxism in India, 1905-1942*, Calcutta, 1973

42. See Aditya Mukherjee, *The Workers' and Peasants' Parties 1926-30: An Aspect of Communism in India*, Studies in History, III, 1&2, 1981. Also reprinted in Bipan Chandra, ed., *The Indian Left: Critical Appraisals*, New Delhi, 1983, pp.1-45.

43 The leaders of the All Bengal Youth Association formed the Young Comrade league in 1928b as the youth wing of the WPP. The name Young Comrade League was given by Philip Spratt. The Bengali name of the party was *Tarun Bandhu Dal*. Dharani Goswami, Abdul Halim and several other communist leaders were associated with this party from the beginning. G Adhikari, *op.cit*, Vol III B, p.116; Dharani Goswami, *Bharater Communist Andolaner Trisher ek Adhyay*, in *Parichay*, September-October, 1973, p.135, cited in Mortuza Khaled, *A Study in the Leadership*,; Muzaffar Ahmed and *The Communist Movement in Bengal*, Calcutta, 2001, p.36.

44. G Adhikari, *op.cit*, Vol III ,C pp,97-98.

45. *Ibid*

46. The Statement of Programme and the policy of the Young Comrade League consisted of six sections. 1. What is the Youth Movement 2. Our Grievances 3. What is the Remedy 4. The Ideas of Today 5. What We Shall Do? 6. Our Programme of Practical Work for the future. *Ibid*, p.96
47. See, Gopen Chakraborty's statement in the Meerut Court, p.147, *Ibid*, pp.95-96
48. See Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar, *Amar Biplab Gignyasha, 1st part, 1927-1945, Calcutta, August, 1973, pp.145-146.; Inprecor, 4th September, 1930*
49. Except Calcutta the League opened its branch in Maymarsingh, Dacca, Khulna, and Rajshahi to mobilize the peasants on class line. In the areas where the zamindar was prominent, anti zamindar and anti moneylender activities became popular among the peasants. See Pramatha Gupta, Je Sangramer Sesh Nai, Calcutta, 1971, pp.38-42; Satyendra Narayan Majumdar, *In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and Revolutionary Programme; A Study in the Transition from National Revolutionary Terrorism To Communism*, New Delhi, December, 1979, p.166
50. Pramatha Gupta, *op.cit*, pp.38-42
51. For the observation on Mymansingh, GB Home Poll, File No.511A/1930
52. GB Home Confidential political Branch, A B Dutta to the Political Secretary, 4th December, File No. 849/31(1-9)
53. GB, Home Confidential Political Branch, File no.849/31(1-9), 4 December 1931
54. Pramatha Gupta, *op.cit*, pp.38-42
55. *Ibid*.

56..GB Home Poll, File No. 511A/ 1930; GB Home Poll, File No. 873/1933

57.For a detail analysis see, Mridula Mukherjee, *Peasants in India's Non Violent Revolution*, Theory and Practice New Delhi,2004,p..

58.In the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymansingh the peasants started an anti mahajan campaign with an attack on the house of a Hindu money lender .Young Comrade League leader Nagen Sarkar and Wali Nawaz led the 'Sangrami Krisak Bahini' mostly with Muslim and tribal peasants.to fight the rural oppressors. But in a spontaneous manner this goon raided the zamindar houses. After an attack on the house of one Hindu moneylender Krishna Chandra Roy the economic character of the protest took a communal coloring and gradually several riots took place in the region of Kishoreganj However, it was a commonly believed version of the incident. There were many other versions of the Kishoreganj incident. See GB Home Poll, File No, 613/1930.; *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 26 August, 1930, p.833

59.Pramatha Gupta,*op.cit*,pp.38-42

60.See Nagen Sarkar, '*Young Comrade League Samparke Sankhipta Biboran*' in Dharani Goswami (ed.), *Parichay*, Year 44, No.4, 1974, Calcutta, pp.445-446

61. G B Home Poll, File No.613/1930

62. Nagen Sarkar,*op.cit* pp.446-447, Tanika Sarkar, Bengal,pp.112-113; *ABP*,16 July,1930.

63. The District Magistrate of Mymansingh reported that the disturbances in Kishoreganj were generally caused by the economic problems of the peasants. The main objective of the peasants was to destroy debt deeds to evade repayment of debts. The poor peasants were also interested in

looting the property of the moneylenders and the Hindu moneylenders were not threatened as Hindus rather many Muslim moneylenders were also threatened or looted by the peasants.GB, Barrow's to Chief Secretary Hopkeyns, 18 July, 1930, File No.613/1930.

64.Sugata Bose, *The Roots of Communal Violence in Rural Bengal; A Study of the Kishoreganj Riots 1930*, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 16,No 3,1982,pp.489-91

65.*Ibid.*

66. After the arrest of the Young Comrade League members, the communal elements took the leadership of the movement. The Khademul Islam, a Muslim voluntary organization came into being into region with a communal overtone. The coming of the communal forces from outside also diverted the movement from its original character .However it was difficult to establish the actual role plied by these communal elements. Most of the local religious leaders were coming from the lower middle class and peasant families and very naturally they enjoyed an upper hand in mobilizing the peasants there. Te peasants in part of Kishoreganj were even motivated by a rumor that the Government had granted them Swaraj and they could do anything to attack the moneylenders. All of these incidents were the part of the same process which destructed the movement from its actual aims and objectives. See Pramatha Gupta, *op.cit*.pp.40-47; GB Home Poll., 613/1930; Dharani Goswami, *Akti Krisak Sangramer Kahini,Parichay*, Autumn (November)1969.

67.*Ibid*

68. Nagen Sarkar, *op.cit*, pp,. 448-449; Satyandra Narayan Majumdar, *op.cit*, p.167

69. The government was supported by a large number of native partners in suppressing the movement in Kishoreganj. The Hindu and Muslim zamindars, the Hindu Mahasabha, a section of the Congress, the native capitalists had arrived in support of the government. The zamindar of Kishoreganj and the Congress MLC of Bengal Satis Chandra Roychoudhury demanded before the government to ban the Young Comrade League as soon as possible. G B Home Poll, File No, 18/III/1930. Fortnightly Report on the Political Situation of Bengal of the second half of February.1930

70. *ABP*, 18 July, Calcutta,1930,p.2; 17 July, p.3

71. G.B Home Poll, File No, 7/20/1934 & K.W, Serial Nos.1-4; Subodh Roy (ed.) *Communism in India; Unpublished Documents, Vol 1,1925-34, Calcutta,1980,pp.421-22 ;*

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*

74. See, *Ganashakti*, Vol I, No.2 October,1934

75. G B Home Poll, File No. 7/20/1934 & K.W, Serial No.1-4, Subodh Roy,(ed.),op.cit,p.422.

76. G B, I B Translation of a Bengali letter dated 12.2.29 to Muzaffar Ahmed by Hemanta Sarkar, Kusthia, Nadia, and File No. 168/22

77. GB,IB,copy of a letter dated 7th February,1929 from Gopal Basak (Dhakeswari Cotton Mill Dhaka) to Muzaffar Ahmed,File No.168/22

78. GB ,I B Translation of a Bengali letter dated 16.2.29 to Muzaffar Ahmed by K Ghosh, File No. 168/22

79. GI.IB DIG report Calcuta, 1929

80. GB, IB, DIG Weekly Confidential Report, 20.2.29, Faridpur, Youth Conference, 16.2.29, and Weekly Confidential Report, Murshidabad, No Date.

81. The Indian Proletarian Revolutionary Party was formed in Hoogly in 1931 with the initiative of Panchugopal Bhaduri, Bijoy Modok and Kali Chandra Ghosh. Saroj Mukherjee, Harekrishna Kongar had a close connection with this party. See Tusshar Chattopadhyay, *Swadhinata Sangrame Hoogly Zela'*, Calcutta, 1983, p.112

82 See, articles, i). Suggestions About a New Path, 1933, (ii.) India On the Path of Revolution., 1933, (iii) Lenin Day, 1934 iv) The Present Programme of Workes, 1934 v) To the Workers, 1934 etc. Home Poll, File No.7/20/1934. Jagannath De, Bijoy Choudhury, Helaram Chatterjee actively worked with this party. Home Poll. File No.7/20/1934; Saroj Mukherjee, *Bharater Communist Party O Amra, (Ourselves and the Communist Party of India), 1st Part (1930-41)*, Calcutta, 1985, pp.46-47.

83. Saroj Mukherjee, *Ibid*, p.74

84. *Ibid*. p.67

85. GB, IB Extract from a letter dated 10th November, 1930, from Abani Balli (Original secret letter no.13/BOI/24). File No.168/22. For special emphasis see the letter from B Mukherjee (ADDL, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta) to Mr. Cowgill, IP, IB, Simla. File No.168/22, no.178b8-c, 16th July, 1932.

86. GB, IB, File No.929/1935

87. Saroj Mukherje, *op.cit*, pp.45-47. The Samyaraj Party specially took the cause of the unorganized workers like the carters, scavengers, coolies, coachwans and factory workers who were the ill affected victims of the society after the Great Depression. GB, IB. File No.1201/33.

.88. In Mymansingh Satya Bagchi, Abdul Jalil, Binoy Base were on the lead of the party and here the party worked in a close connection with the Tarun Bandhu Dal or the Young Comrade League.GB, IB, 1201/33.

89. The All Bengal Students Association was established in 3rd February, 1928 .It was given a final shape in a conference held at the Shradhananda Park, Calcutta in 1928, 22nd-25th September. The president was Jawaharlal Nehru and the chief guest was Subhas Basu. Here Badal Ganguli served his duty as a member of the executive committee. See *ABP*, Sep, 26, 1928.

90. Workers' League was established in 1936 with the initiative of Ajit Dasgupta. Labour leader Nepal Bhattacharya for a time being became the president of the party. It had its influence over the unions of motor workers, pres workers, engineering and metal workers. Saroj Mukherjee,*op.cit*,p.63-65.

91. The Workers Party of Bengal was formed as a part of the Workers' Party of India in 1932. The main task of the party was to politicize the party workers on Soviet line. It was blessed with the support of Third International in India. It was organized mainly by Abdul Halim especially among the unions of transport workers, jute workers, match factory workers and others.GB Home Poll. File no. 7/20/34. The Karkhana Group was formed mainly by Bhabani Sen and Nepal Bhattacharya. Later M A Zaman got associated with this party. They used to publish a paper called 'Karkhana'.Saroj Mukherjee, *op.cit*,p.63.Also see letter from B Mukherjee (ADDL,Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta) to Mr. Cowgill,IP,IB, Simla.File No.168/22, no.178b8-c,16th July,1932.

92. The United Front thesis of George Dimitrov was adopted after long discussions by the Communist International. The 'Dutt Bradley' thesis, prepared by R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley of the Communist Party of Great Britain had explained this new line of action in the 'Inprecor' on the name of 'The Anti Imperialist People's Front'. It suggested the Indian communists to join hands with the left wing leadership of the Congress to transform it a mass platform of anti imperialist national revolutionary movement. See R.P Dutta and Ben Bradey, '*The Anti Imperialist People's Front*', *Inprecor*, 16 (II), 29 Feb, 1936, pp.297-300

93. These 13 organizations were, 1. The Calcutta communist Party 2. The Calcutta Port and Dock Workers' Union 3. The WPP Bengal 4. The Calcutta Committee of the Communist Party 5. Kirti Dal 6. The Workers' Party of India 7. The Indian Proletarian Revolutionary Party 8. The Bengal Jute Workers' Union 9. The Bengal Match Factory Workers' Union 10. The City Motor and Transport Workers' Union 11. The River Steam Navigation and Indian General Navigation and Railway Company Workers' Union 12. The Youth League, Bengal 13. The Chatra Yuva Samsad; GI Home Poll, File No. 18/3/35.

94. GB IB, File No. 364/38(1) (September 1938—June 1939)

95. GI, Home Poll, File No. 7/9/1935—Unpublished Manuscripts, International Press Correspondence, Article—'*Problems of the Anti Imperialist Struggle in India*'. Vol.15, No.10.

96. For details see 'Special Case for Bengal'. Communist Review, (organ of the Bengal committee of the Communist Party), Vol II, No.2, October, 1935. GB Home Poll File No. 7/10/36.

97. See, Jaya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947*, Cambridge, 1994, p.68.

98. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachchar*, Dhaka, 2006, pp.45-47
99. In July 1929 twenty five Muslim members of the Bengal council formed the Bengali Muslim Council Association .Here on the suggestion of Shah Abdul Hamid of Jamalpur and on the motion of Fazlul Haq, the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity was formed.Moulana Akrm Khan was elected its secretary .Maulavi Mujibar Rahman, Moulavi Abdur Rahim, Fazlul Haq, S.H Suhrawardy and Abdul Momin were elected vice presidents while Maulavi Samsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin khan became the joint secretaries of the party. For details see ,Humaira Momen ,*Muslim Politics in Bengal ; A Study of Krisak Praja Party and the Election of 1937*, Dacca,1972,p.76.
100. *ABP*, 14 Sep, 1936.
101. GB Home Poll, No 105/ 1931.
102. The leaders of the Samity were actively involved in anti British violent activities. Mukuleswar Rahman, Abdul Malek, Kamini Kumar Dutta, AbdulMalek were charged with seditious activities. Lal Mia, Boro Mia, Krishna Sundar Bhowmik etc were attached with this Samity. G.B Home Poll 245/1931; Report of the District Magistrate of Tippera dated 23 December1931, GB Home Poll File.No 849/31(1-9).
- 103.Home Poll.No.105/1931
104. The Nikhil Bengal Praja Samity was formed in 1929.Akram Khan and Abdur Rahim became its secretary and president respectively.Fazlul Huq, Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Momin, Shamsuddin Ahmed, and Tamizuddin Khan joined this party. It was the first political party organized by the Bengali Muslims on non communal and economic ground to safeguard the interest of the Bengali Muslims specially masses.

It was the first regional minor party in Bengal, exclusively Bengali in character without any parent organization out side the province. It marked a shift form the previous trend of Muslim politics dominated mostly by the propertied aristocrats of the community without any actual concern for the peasants in general. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit*, pp.45-47

105. The United Muslim Party was formed in 1936 with Nawab Khawaja Habibulah and H. S Suhrawardy as the president and the Secretary respectively. Mostly representing the landed, commercial and business interest, the United Muslim Party appeared as a challenge to the radical peasant leadership of the Nikhil Bengal Krisak Samity. (renamed as the Krisak Praja Party in 1936 t Dacca).It was under the influence of Fazlul Huq , a new charismatic larder from the rural Bengal that the city based leadership of the Samity became insecure and these people including Akram Khan and Abdul Momin joined the new United Muslim Party in 1936. Fazlul Huq charged the party as a 'ministerial party' while the United Muslim Party described the Krisak Praja Party as 'not purely a Muslim organization'. It indicated the sharp division within the Muslim politics in early thirties centering round the city- mussosil, religious-secular, zamindar-peasant dichotomies. For details of the United Muslim Party see *Star of India*, 25 May, 1936,pp.1-5 also see, *Ibid*,18 July,1936,p.3, and *The Statesman*,16 June,1936.

106. The term ' Jotdar' has used to describe a class who owned sizeable portions of village lands as tenants of the revenue collecting zamindars and they cultivated the land with the help of sharecroppers, tenants and hired labourers.They used to enjoy under their possession social authority of the village headship and the economic authority of money lending and

they had immense control over the poor peasant in Bengal. The Hindu zamindar and Muslim Jotdar conflict is a common theme of 20th century Bengal's history. This conflict becomes more crucial when it is viewed with the background of the communal realities of rural Bengal. The conflict between the Hindu zamindar and Muslim Jotdar of east Bengal originated several important developments in late colonial Bengal including the rise of the Krisak Praja Party, the separation of the Muslims from mainstream politics and also to some extent the factors leading to partition. As the head of the rural credit structure and the village landholding, the Jotdar had a definite role to play in the socio economic life of rural Bengal. For details see Rajat and Ratna Ray, *Zamindars and Jotedars ; A Study of Rural Politics in Bengal*, *Modern Asian Studies*,9,1,1975, pp.88-102

107. Sugata Bose,, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics 1919-1947*, New Delhi, 1987,pp.130-145.

108. GB, Report on Administration of Bengal.1934-35.p.xxx.

109. For a detail on the Swarajists policy towards the peasants see, Goutam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle,1862-11947*, *New Delhi,1984*,pp.89-116.

110. GB, Home Poll No.168/1936(1-2)

111. It may be assumed that on the demand of some radical leaders of the Praja party, the term 'krisak' was added before the Praja Party inspite of a strong opposition from the conservatives. For details see Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit*.p.85-86

112. GB, Home Poll, File No.384/1932.

113. For details see Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchhas Bachar, Dacca, 1970*, p.111 ; Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi, 1976., pp.74-79.
114. For the election Manifesto of the KPP see Appendix I.
115. At the 4th Annual conference of him Nikhil Bengal Praja Samity in Dacca, 1936, Samsuddin Ahmed was elected as its secretary. However, the exclusion of Shamsudin from the list of the ministers in the KPP-League coalition ministry became the leader of the rebel KPP group in the assembly. He had radical ideas and he had connecting with the communists also. *Star of India*, 15 July, 1936, *Ibid*, 15 March, 1938. Abdul Karim served as the senior vice President of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity .For his biography see N K Jain, *Muslims in India; A Biographical Dictionary*, Vol I, New Delhi, 1979, pp.14-5.
116. This new party was called the United Muslim Party. It was founded by Nawab Habibullah, Nawab Musharaf Hossain, Khwaja Nazimuddin and others. In 1936 Akram Khan-Abdul Momin faction of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity joined it later. See *The Statesman*, 25 May, 1936; *Star of India*, 25 May, 1936.
117. Akram Khan and his associates made statements before the public to boycott KPP for its open adherence to the Congress and a secret belonging with the communists. See the leaflet distributed with *Dainik Azad* on the eve of the legislative council election in 1937. It was signed by more than 300 workers and leaders of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity. *Dainik Azad*, 27 December, 1936, Calcutta, p.10.
118. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit*, p.166.
119. For details see, *Star of India*, 16 June ,1936, p.5
120. *Star of India*, 24 June, 1936, p.5

121. *The Statesman*, 16 June, 1936.
122. *Star of India*, 25 May, 1935.
123. *Ibid*, 14 August, 1936, *Ibid*, 25 August, 1936, p. 1.
124. *Indian Annual Register*, 1943, vol 1, Calcutta, p. 167.
125. *Ibid*, p. 287.
126. Fazlul Haq, A Momin. Mujibar Rahman simultaneously held the post of vice presidents of the Praja Samity and the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Abdul Karim was the President of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the Vice President of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity. See *Star of India* 22 June, 1936, p. 5.
127. Quaid-i-Azam papers, File-458, pp. 1-2, cited in Harun-or Rashid, *Inside Bengal Politics 1936-1947, Unpublished Correspondence of Partition Leaders*, Dhaka, 2003, p. 57.
128. *Ibid* pp. 9-10
129. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit*, pp. 45-46
130. For the details of Kisan Sabha see, M A Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 3-7.
131. In cases of the districts like Bakharganj, Mymansingh, Faridpur, Khulna and Tippera the Krisak Samity had an understanding with the KPP and here it captured 25 of its total 41 seats. In Noakhali this alliance won only two seats while Noakhali had a legacy of militant peasant movements on class line. It was supposed that the absence of a Hindu zamindar class in this region led to the success of the Muslim League candidates. For detailed analysis see *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 in British Parliamentary Papers, 1937-38*, Cmb. 5589, and Vol. XXI, cited in Harun-or Rashid, *Forshadowing Of Bangladesh, op. cit* ... p. 77

132. Floud Commission Report, VI,p.362.
133. Enayetur Rahim, '*Provincial Autonomy in Bengal, 1937-43*', pp.158-9
134. The victory of the Independent candidates in *zamindar* dominated areas like Rajshahi and the success of some *zamindars* in Bogra, Tangail, and Tippera proved it. In the Tippera region the Krisak Samity did not get the expected success while in Dhaka the *zamindari* link of the ML candidate fetched success for him . In some other areas like Rangpur, the Muslim *jotdars* favored the ML because they did not find the economic theme of KPP too much suitable for mobilizing the Muslim peasants. These trends indicated a multidimensional pattern of politics in east Bengal. For details see *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937*,,Harun-or Rashid,*op.cit*,p.77
135. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal, Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947*, Cambridge, 1986, p.181.
- 136.*Ibid.*
137. GB, Home Poll, File No, 303/1937, Home Minister Nazimuddin to Inspector General of Police, 16 May.1937.
138. GI, Home Poll, File No.18/1/37; Jaya Chatterjee, *op.cit*, p.88
139. GB, Fortnightly Report forms the Commissioner of Chittagong Division for the 1st half of September, 1936, Confidential File No.56/36.
- 140.*Ibid.*
- 141.*ABP*, 1 February, 1937.
142. Sugata Bose,*op.cit*,pp.184-85.
143. For a detail of the no rent mentality of the peasants in the region under pro communist Krisak Samity and communist leaders see GB, Home Poll, and File No.283/38.

144. See *ABP* 17 January, 1938; Sugata Bose, *op.cit*, pp.208-213.; Governor's Fortnightly Report, 2nd half, December, 1937.
145. See, Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit*, pp.135-38
146. Humaira Momen, *op.cit*, pp.60-61.
147. Governor's Fortnightly Report, 1st halves, June-July, 1937; *ABP*, 6 September, 1937.
148. For a detailed analysis see, *Tajul Hashmi, Towards Understanding Peasant Politics in Bangladesh; A Historical Perspective since 1920, Journal of Social Studies, vol. 42, 1988, pp.122.*
149. *Ibid.*
150. *Ibid.*
151. *Indian Annual Registrar, vol. 1, 1937, pp.59-60.*
152. For details see, Enayetur Rahim, *Benglay Swashasan, 1937-1943, Dacca, 2001, pp.96-98.*
153. Humaira Momen, *op.cit*, pp.55-6
154. For details see Appendix I.
155. Upendranath Barman, *Thakur Panchanan Barmar Jibansmriti, Jalpaiguri, 1387 B.S, pp.60-61*
156. Chandi Prasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims, A Study in Their Politicization (1912-1929), Calcutta, 1991, p.68*
157. *Ibid.* p.187
158. Chandi Prasad Sarkar, *op.cit*, p.187
159. See, *Tajjul Hashmi, op.cit.*
160. *Ibid.*
161. *ABP*, 17 October, 1937.

162. For a detailed study on Kisan Sabha movement see N.G Ranga and Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, *History of the Kisan Sabha Movement*, Madras, 1939, pp. 132-138
163. M.A Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 22-23
164. *Ibid*, pp 29-30
165. M A Rasul, *op. cit*, p. 29
166. *Ibid*, p. 29
167. *Ibid*, p. 23
168. *Ibid*
169. For a detail study see Madhu Limaye, *Evolution of Socialist Policy*, Hyderabad, 1952, pp. 1-5.
170. For details see M A Rasul, *op. cit*, p. 294-36 f.
171. *Ibid*
172. *Ibid*.
173. See the *Return Showing Results of Elections in India, 1937, Cmd, 5589, Vol. XXI*, India Office Library Records, cited in, Harun-or Rashid, *op. cit*, p. 77.
174. Congress leader Kiran Sankar Roy informed that ‘.....soon after the general election Mr Fazlul Huq, the then leaders of the Praja Party, met prominent members of the Congress Party and had several talks regarding the formation of a coalition. But these talks were inconclusive and no agreement as to policy and programme was actually arrived at. One of the main points of difference was what the parties should do if the political prisoner of which there was a large number at the time was not released forthwith. The Kisan Praja Party while willing to put pressure for the release of political prisoners did not agree that the Cabinet would

resign if the political prisoners were not released immediately.' *ABP*, July, 1941,p.7.

175. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol 1, 1937, pp.192-93

176. Quoted from unpublished letters in the possession of Nirad C Choudhury-the private secretary of Sarat Bose. For details see Leonard A Gordon; *Bengal- the Nationalist Movement; 1876-1940*, New Delhi, 1979, pp.284-285.

177. *Ibid*.

178. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*,LXVI,,1978-79,p.405

179. See,the latter dated 21 December, 1938 from Subhas Chandra Bose to Mahatma Gandhi, from unpublished letters in the possession of Nirad C Choudhury,cited in Leonard Gordon,*op.cit*,285.

180. Leonard Gordon,*Ibid*.

181. See Claude Markovits,*Congress Policy Towards Business in the pre Independence Era*, Richard Sission and Stanley Wolpart,*op.cit*,pp250-270.

182. *Ibid*.

183. *Indian Annual Register*,*op.cit*.pp.192-93

184. Partha Chatterjee 'Bengal Politics and the Muslim Masses 1920-1947',*The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*,March 1982,vol.xx,No

185. Anderson to Linlithgow ,7 April 1937,Bengal Governor's Report to Viceroy,R/3/2/2/p.3,cited in Haran-or Rashid,*op.cit*.p.232

166. GB Governor's Fortnightly Report, 19 August, 1937

187. *Ibid*

188. Mansur A.M,*op.cit* ,pp.180-181

189. A.Rasul ,*Krisak Sabhar Itihas*, Calcutta ,1969,p.84

190. For details, Md Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal-1757-1947*, Dhaka, 1978, pp.52-57 and Al Sayed ed. *Fazlul Rahman Khan, Anudar Itihaser Ek Dasak 1937-1947*, Dhaka, 1997, pp.79-116
191. *Star of India*, July 30, 1938
192. *Star of India*, May 27, 1938.
193. Governor's Report, Brabourne to Linlithgow, August 6, 1938
194. See Khan, Tamizuddin Khan, *The Test of Time; My Life and Days*, Dhaka, 1989, pp.138-45
195. *Ibid*, April 17, 1938. Sarat Bose alleged that who framed the Tenancy Bill had sided with the vested interests against the peasantry. Also see, R Copland *Indian Politics 1936-1942*, London, 1943, p.28.
196. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 10 August, 1938
197. *Star of India*, 24 August, 1938, p.6
198. *Star of India*, 13 January, p.5
199. Suhrawardy's speech at Mollar Hat, Khulna, 15 January, 1938, *Azad*, 20 January, 1938, p.8
200. It seemed that the Congress high command asked the KPP to join the Congress by totally dissolving its separate identity and Huq did not agree.
- For details see Lal Bahadur, *The Muslim League, It's History---Activities and Achievements*, Agra, 1954, p.238. Copland Reginald, *The Indian Problem*, Part II New York, 1944, p.28.
201. See Harun-or Rashid, *Forshadowing of Bangladesh*, op. cit, pp.54-74.
202. Letter of Fazlul Huq to Jinnah dated Jan 23, 1941, vide *ABP*, dated Jan 29, 1941.

203. See Md Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal, 1757-1947*, Dacca, pp.253-257.
204. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, Vol.LI, no 4, Sep 30 1937, p.2293
205. *Star of India*, May 27 1938
206. Home Fortnightly Report, 1st half May 1937 and 2nd half, June 1938
207. *Ibid.*
208. A Rasul, *op. cit.*, pp.70-71
209. Abani Lahiri, *Post War Revolt of the Rural Poor in Bengal : Memoirs of a Communist Activist*, Interviewed by Ranajit Dasgupta, Calcutta, 1999, p.64
210. 'Taking Stock After the Elections in Bengal', Nityananda Chowdhary, Organizing Secretary, B.P.T.U.C. published in 'The New Age', April, 1937
211. *Ibid.*
212. Abdullah Rasul, *op. cit.* pp.3-40
213. *Ibid.*

The popular demands of the proposed conference were,

1. For Complete Independence.
2. For the rejection of the salve constitution
3. For a constituent assembly freely elected by the Indian people
4. For the immediate release of all political pensioners detunes and interneers
5. for repeal of all anti democratic legislation
6. For freedom of press, meeting and speech
7. For 50% reduction in land rent and revenue
8. For abolition of all feudal dues and labor

9. Cancellation of peasant and working class debts .
10. Land to landless peasant labourers.
11. 8 hour day
12. Freedom to strike and picket
13. Insurance against sickness and old age benefits
14. Free and compulsory primary and secondary education
15. Minimum wage.
214. See the Election Manifesto of the Krisak Praja Party and the Muslim League in Appendix I and Appendix II
215. *National Front* ,April 17,1938
216. *Ibid*, Editorial, October 16,1938
217. See S Rai Choudhry, *Leftist Movements in India*, Calcutta, 1977, pp112-122
218. See the message of Jay Prakash Narayan, the General Secretary of the All India Congress Socialist Party to the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee, cited in Bimal Prasad,*op. cit*,pp.82
219. All India Congress Socialist Party ; *Report of the Second Conference*; see General Secretary's Report,p.40
220. Limaye,*op. cit*,p.6
221. *Ibid*
222. Jayprakash Narayan, *Towards Struggle*,*op. cit*, p.170
223. Cited in Vandita Varma,*op. cit* p.170
224. The Royists objected that there was no necessary for a joint anti imperialist platform. They did not want to strengthen the CSP or the Congress left wing as a whole and at any cost wanted to check the Communists coming in contact with the CSP. Actually he wanted to

strengthen his own group and wanted to establish his views on that of the CSP. See Vandita Varma, *op.cit* pp.172-173

225. Refom of 1935 onwards, the Royists emerged as an important group in the trade union movement. It was the Royists who brought forward a spirit of unity in the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). An agreement was made between the executive council of the CSP and the AITUC that the later would provide scopes for the former to work in the trade unions. As a result the CPI also got a chance of capturing positions in the AITUC. See, V.B Karnik, *Indian Trade Unions—A Survey*, Bombay, 1966,p.88

226. Although the CSP the Royists and the Communists worked jointly within the AITUC in mid thirties, each of them was eager to increase its own influence by using the platform of the AITUC. On the other the Royists like Rajani Mukherjee, Mukundalal Sarkar, Sudhin Pramanik, Jatin Mitra and others had tried to put Roy at the forefront to make their presence felt at the union. Though the Royists wanted to make M.N Roy the president of the Nagpur session of the AITUC, CSP leader Suresh Chandra Banerjee was elected president at the session. Apart from this petty conflict, the CSP and the Royists clashed mainly on the issue of joining the ministry after the election of 1937. The CSP alleged that that Roy himself had opposed office acceptance but voted for it. The Royists even were accused of spreading false rumors against the knowledge of the CSP. Thus in 1937, one communist member of the CSP requested Jayprakash Narayan to take disciplinary action against the Royists for 'disruptionist' activities. See, Letter of V B Karnik to Sudhin Pramanik , 2 August, 1937,GB, I.B File No 248/26, and GI Home Poll, File No. 18/4 /37

227. Vandita Verma, *op.cit.*, p.174
228. *Ibid.*
229. See Goutam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal Electoral Politics, op.cit.*, pp.143-146
230. The Bengal Labour Party merged with the Communist Party in 1937. Since then the latter had been utilizing the platform of the former for trade union organizations in Calcutta and adjoining industrial areas. Signs of disagreement appeared towards the end of September when Muzaffar Ahmed, Somnath Lahiri, Abdul Halim, Soroj Mukherjee and others insisted the liquidation of the Labour Party in the interest of the CPI-CSP unity and the formation of one United Socialist Party. It was against the will of the noncommunist Labour leader Niharendu Dutta Majumdar who wished to extend his party on an all India basis. As a result of this rupture the BLP parted their ways with the Communists. GOB, IB, 'Note on the Development of the Communist Movement in Bengal,' File No.364/ 38(1)/ (Sep 1938-1939)
231. Abani Lahiri, *op.cit.* pp.27-28
232. *Ibid.*
233. GB, I.B, 'Note on the Development of the Communist Movement in Bengal', File No.364/38 (1)/ (Sep 1938-39)
234. *Ibid*; For details see, *Indian Communist Party Documents*, Bombay, 1957, Document No 3, p.36
- 235 GB, IB, Note on the Development of the Communist Movement in Bengal', File No.364/38 (1)/ (Sep 1938-39)
236. *Ibid*
237. It did not materialize due to the neutral stand taken by the All India Congress Socialist Party and the official CSP in Bengal under Gunada

Majumdar over the issue of forming the working committee according to the wishes of Gandhi. *Ibid.*

238.*Ibid.*

239.For detailed study on this issue see Jayprakash Narayan, *Socialist Unity and the Congress Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1942, pp.25-26; Sajjid Zaheer 'Unity is Strength' in the 'Congress Socialist', March 5, 1938,

240.*Ibid.*

241.The Faizpur Thesis was adopted on December 23 & 24 ,1936. General Secretary of the party Minu Masani declared that 'at Meerut in January 1936, (Meerut Thesis) the Party (CSP) took shape as a Marxist Socialist Party . At Faizpur the role of the party would define its tasks in terms of transforming the Congress into a powerful anti imperialist front. Form the Faizpur decisions it was evident that here was a party committed to Marxian Socialism and leading anti imperialist people's movement towards the ultimate goal. Both the ideals of popular struggle and national revolution were incorporated into the new programme of the party.All India Congress Socialist Party Documents, 1937, pp.56-65

242.*Ibid*

243. Staying in various detention camps during 1938-39the Anushilan revolutions came in a close contact with the ideals of Marxism-Leninism. A section of the Anushilan Samity members who were being attracted towards Marxism did not find it possible to come in accord with the left sectarian approach of the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International. They sought to follow an alternative path outside the organizational structure of the COM intern and the Indian official communists. After several scrutiny they came to a conclusion that the CPI's policy of shift from left sectarianism to the united front

policy was directed by its allegiance to the dictates of the Soviet and it had no relation with the existing relation of class forces in India vis-à-vis the forces of imperialism. Ultimately these people opted for a new path of non conformist Marxism and got converted into the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India. For a general analysis see Tridib Choudhury, 'Historical role of Anushilan Samity in the Indian Revolutionary Movement' in 75th Anniversary of Anushilan Samity ,9 a *Souvenir*), Calcutta, 1977, pp.1-69.

244. The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association was formed in 1928 as a revolutionary group. They had studied Marxism-Leninism in the early 1930s when they were in jail, and decided to function independently of the Communist Party and Communist International. Most of the members of this organization later joined the Revolutionary Socialist Party . See V.N Bajpai, *The Extremist Movement in India*, Allahabad, 1974, p.233; Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, *In Search of Freedom*, Calcutta, 1967, pp.206-210

245. *Ibid*

246. In the Anti Compromise conference at Ramgarh Subhas Chandra Bose moved the leftist parties towards an uncompromising struggle against the British. The Anushilan group within the CSP joined in the conference. The Anushilan Marxists did not like the Gandhian mania of the CSP that even after pursuing an anti war policy, they could not move out of its own , independent of Gandhian leadership. Thus the Anushilan Marxists took the final decision in Ramgarh of separating itself from the CSP and formed a new party of the Marxist Leninist revolutionaries named as the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India. Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, *op.cit*, p.533

247. *Ibid.*

248. Jogesh Chatterjee, *op.cit*, pp.513-4

249. David M Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left: Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India 1905-1942*, Calcutta, 1975, p.125

250. Jogesh Chatterjee, *op.cit*, p.533

251. This type of assessment of the CPI has been reflected in the Thesis and Platform of Action of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (RCPI) 5th impression 1946, pp.13-17.

252. See, Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, Bombay, 1960, p.170; *National Front*, April 3, 1938.

253. *National Front*, March 19, 1939, p.101

254. *Ibid.*

255. GB, I.B, 'Note on the Development of the Communist Movement in Bengal', File No.364/38 (1)/ (Sep 1938-39).

256. *Ibid.*

257. *Ibid*

258. For a detail analysis of the politics of M.N Roy see G.P Bhattacharjee, *Evolution of Political Philosophy of M.N Roy*, Calcutta, 1971, p.72; Dipti Kumar Roy, *Leftist Politics in India; M.N Roy and Radical Democratic Party*, Calcutta, 1989, pp.10-11; GB, Home Poll, Notes on the Communist Situation in India, 1935-1936 File no.322/36

259. The importance of 'transitional' party has been described in M.N Roy, *The Future of Indian Politics*, Calcutta, 1971. (Preface)

260. Cited in Dipti Kumar Roy, *Trade Union Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1990, p.36

261. *Ibid*

262. *Ibid*, p.37

263. GB, I.B, 'Note on the Development of the Communist Movement in Bengal', File No.364/38 (1)/ (Sep 1938-39).
- 264.GB, Home Poll, File No,572/39,'Note on the Communist Situation in India',
- 265.Sugata Basu,*op.cit*
- 266.Subho Basu,*op.cit*,pp226-229.
- 267.*Ibid*,pp.233-238.
268. A. M Zaidi,ed,*Evolution of Muslim Political Thought 1857-1947*
Vol. IV p.156
269. For details see, Aditya Mukherjee, *Imperialism, Nationalism and the Making of the Indian Capitalist Class, 1920-1947*, New Delhi,2002,pp.40-74;Sashi Joshi& Bhgagwan Josh,*op.cit*,pp.131-134
- 270.Aditya Mkhherjee,*Ibid*.
- 271.Subho Basu,*op.cit*,pp.226-229
- 272.Subho Basu,*op.cit*,p.237
- 273.GB,Home Poll. File No.326/1937.
- 274.Subho Basu,*op.cit*,p.256
- 275.*Ibid*.
- 276.*Ibid*.
- 277.GB Fortnightly Report on the Political Situation in Bengal for the years 1928-39,(Report on the Political Situation in Bengal for the 1st Month of March,1937)File No.90/1928.
278. Ashim Kumar Dutta ed, *Shyama Prasad Mukherjee; Leaves From A Diary*, New Delhi,1993,p.26
- 279 *Ibid*.,p.28
- 280.*Ibid*
- 281.*Ibid*,pp.33-34
- 282.*Ibid*.p.29

Chapter IV

Minor Political Parties and Bengal Politics: 1939-1947

The final debacle of the leftists in the Tripuri session of the Congress of 1939 was resulted in the formation of a Left Consolidation Committee by Subhas Bose for the purpose of bringing together the quarreling factions of the lefts. The committee set the ground for the unification of the entire radical anti imperialist elements on the basis of a minimum programme. The CSP, the CPI and the Royists apparently showed their eagerness to work with the Left Consolidation Committee but stood against the idea of joining the proposed new party of Subhas Chandra Bose. After his formal resignation from the Congress Presidentship, he declared the formation of Forward Block on 3rd May, 1939 as a left platform within the Congress at a public meeting in Calcutta.¹ Among its three major objectives the idea of consolidating the leftist forces or launching an uncompromising struggle against the British had carried with it a direct appeal to the masses as well as to the other left parties.² But the very objective of winning over the majority section of the Congress indeed opened the scopes for further explanation and confusion. In fact the leftist forces in 1939 had a numbers of reasons to defend their own position and the platform of left consolidation broke up under pressures from different angles. On one point all most all the important forces agreed with the other that in no circumstances they would join the Forward Block and if possible organize their own independent party.³ In case of the CPI, the situation was a bit tricky because of their general sympathy for the line of United Front which did not allow them to take a reactionary stand against

the rightists under Gandhi ⁴. Yet, during the initial years, 1939-40, both the Forward Blok and the CPI in Bengal conducted joint movements for some age old demands like the release of the political prisoners and particularly the Communist led Student Federation in Bengal worked actively with the Forward Block at the time of the removal of the Howell Monument in July 1940.⁵ However, being caught in the dilemma of having to choose between left unity and national unity, the CPI at last took its decision in favour of the National Front strategy.⁶

Other than CSP, the Royists also failed to keep their promises and eventually struck the first blow at the Left Consolidation Committee in 1939 by simply betraying the Leftist cause on an important issue.⁷ M.N Roy transformed his Radical League into a separate party called the **Radical Democratic Party** in 1940. He criticized the Forward Block for not adopting any ideology worth the name and brought allegations against the CSP for its surrendering approach towards Gandhism.⁸ However, in a letter to the editor of the 'Forward Block', a political weekly, one S. Lal, an independent observer, attacked the Bengal League of Radical Congressmen for carrying on 'baseless propaganda' that the Forward Block had no programme different from the Congress group. In his opinion,

The Leaguers in Bengal have been and are playing directly into the hands of the Rightists and the opportunists. I take it that they do not oppose the Forward Block and other Leftists in Bengal simply for the sake of opposition.....because they have said many a time that the opposition should always be prepared to take up the responsibilities of

leadership....they want to replace the present Left leadership of Bengal by an 'Alternative Leadership' consisting of Gandhi-ites and famous opportunists.⁹

In fact these parties were more guided by personal preferences than by solid objectives or programmes. They shifted their stand so rapidly that no one could make a final decision on these parties. Their overall composition remained more or less same. Apart from the revolutionaries, students, mill workers, high caste well educated Hindus were the major recruits of those parties barring a few exceptions. No doubt, a general crisis of ideological ambiguity persisted within the rank and file of these parties and it had a direct impact on the very confidence of the masses aspiring for some revolutionary changes beyond the tedious political discourse of the major political parties.

One can not deny the fact that if the CSP and the CPI could have organized the leftist block after Haripura in 1938, the Forward Bloc would not be a necessity at all.¹⁰ One noted CPI leader Saroj Mukherjee later on accused the Royists for not cooperating with the left consolidation efforts.¹¹ At a time he also charged the CSP for their pro rightist sentiments. Growing suspicion within the CSP against the CPI, according to Mukherjee, not only damaged leftist unity within the Congress but also ruined the image of the CSP before its followers.¹² Nevertheless, why did the leftists ultimately parted their ways, Bose recalled in 1941, 'remains a mystery to me up to the present day'.¹³ Either these parties were getting anxious to lose their individual identities or they were in a dilemma to choose between socialism or anti

imperialism as their primary objective. In Bose's view a 'genuine' leftist should have to fight simultaneously with the imperialists and their Indian allies along with the double faced Congress rightists who were at a secret deal with the British imperialists.¹⁴ 'Those who are prepared to face Imperialism but shrink from a clash leftists' with the Rightists' under a plea of 'unity', were termed as 'pseudo-¹⁵' by Bose and he hoped the Forward Block to become a genuine leftist organization by simply eliminating the pseudo- leftist elements through a natural historical process.¹⁶

Researchers and historians till now have contributed numbers of pages in examining the currents and cross currents of politics on the eve of the Second World War. The emergence of the Forward Block and the subsequent tussle between the Rights and the leftists has been treated as one of the most crucial developments of late colonial politics in India. The primary enthusiasm shown by the minor leftist parties towards the left consolidation programmes and their shifting of position a little after, still engages a researcher into an in-depth study of the events of 1939-1940. But what makes one more curious is the attitude of some Bengali leftists who did not dare to raise a voice of dissent before the decisions taken by the High Command of their respective parties. A good numbers of CSP leaders from Bengal openly asked justification for revising the stand of the party without having any prior consultation with the provincial leadership. One statement by some Suresh Chandra Deb, explained the reasons of his joining the Forward Block in the following way.

I have been an enthusiastic member of the Congress Socialist Party since its inception...But circumstances have forced me to resign from that party...Since the Tripuri Congress we had been expecting a general conference of the Party which would have given the members an opportunity to making their voices heard in the higher circles of the party but in this we have been disappointed. I have been attracted and impressed by the bold dynamic lead given by the 'Forward Block' and I have, therefore, joined it as a member. ...I would not have voluntarily resigned from the Congress Socialist Party and I wish the party had given individual liberty to its members to join the "Forward Block." But I am constrained to resign because until I do so I can not become a member of the "Forward Block".¹⁷

The Forward Block attracted a large number of supporters from the CSP, the Anushilan Communists, official communists, trade unionists and the Kisan Sabhaists. Personalities with strong Congress connection like K.F Nariman, Satya Pal, S. Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Shnkar Lal, Abdul Rahman, Mr Hosmani had worked with the party with some first grade trade union and Kisan leaders like Indu Lal Yagnik , Niharendu Dutta Mazumdar and others.¹⁸ However, the alleged communist control of the CSP, strained relationship of the Congress and the CPI working within it, lack of understanding between the CPI and the other communist parties specially the Anushilan Marxists and the Bengal Labour Party , difference of opinion within the CSP on the issue of maintaining relation with the CPI and the Royists and the growing antagonism of the Congress right against Leftist consolidation -- were some of the problems of leftist movement in Bengal on the eve of the Second World War.¹⁹ Situations became clumsier when one minor party merged with another and the second entered the third one for tactical reasons, even though that the first one had hardly anything common with the last one. In Bengal the

outlawed CPI might have some programme oriented similarity with the Bengal Labour Party and for some practical necessities they preferred a joint movement with the Labour Party at the same time CPI's working with the CSP on the United Front issue might have some tactical grounds,²⁰ but such a combination did not necessarily ensure any advantage for the Labour Party which remained under pressure for a while to get involved with the CSP as part of communist interaction with the socialists.²¹ However, the non communist elements of the Labour Party did not show any interest to the CSP for its alleged fascination for Gandhi and openly criticized the communist idea of National Front a 'theory of class collaboration with the reactionary Gandhian bourgeois leadership of the Congress.'²² In the provincial party conference of the CPI at Chandan Nagar in 1938 the internal squabbles between the CPI and the Labour Party showed that it would not be possible any more to make a eyewash on unity and within a year in Tripuri they finally parted their ways.²³ One should not close his eyes to the fact that the final departure of the Labour Party leaders from the CPI caused a serious uproar in Bengal political arena because on the one hand it ruined the least possible hope for a joint endeavor towards labour liberation and exposed the ideological inconsistency of the both in terms of objective and modalities on the other.²³ During the last two years of the 1930s conflicts between the leftist parties went to the bitter end specially on the response of Niharenu Dutt Mazumdar (Secretary of the Bengal Labour Party) to Mr. Ben Bradley's (communist leader of Great Britain) call for a united front by all colonial people against German fascism.²⁴ To Dutta Mazumdar it was nothing but a call for the Indians to join the war and he unequivocally criticized Bradley for distinguishing between two types of

colonial rule; one of fascism and one under imperialism, retaining bourgeoisie democratic front at home.²⁵ Commenting on Dutta Mazumdar's stand, communist spokesman Bhawani Sen remarked, 'This is nothing but the superb lesson of Economism which treats trade union politics on a par with Socialist politics. Dutta Mazumdar looks upon the world as a genuine trade unionist...to a trade unionist, limiting his vision to the confines of collective bargaining among employers and employees; there is no difference between the politics of disarmament conference and the politics of world war, between fascist military rule in colonies and limited civic rights under bourgeoisie democratic imperialist state.'²⁶ This statement itself spelled out the basic enigma of trade unionism in relation to a movement by the 'genuine' communists.' The Labour Party always stood in favour of a workers and peasant party under the guidance of its most conscious elements instead of a party of petty bourgeoisie lacking a working class leadership like the CPI.²⁷ Right from its inception the Labour Party turned up the language of labour politics by providing sufficient encouragement to the 'conscious' elements of the workers unlike the CPI which had paid a little or no attention to this aspect of labour politics. Actually the existing trade unions be it of the CSP, the WPP or the Labour Party, paid their attention entirely on the subject of class movements without any prior calculations on the very multiplicities of a colonial context where the term 'class' itself was subject to determination. Already the government and its propertied allies had successfully isolated the 'red flag' unions and identified the fundamental mechanism of sustaining its influence over a considerable segment of the workers.²⁸ The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 pointed out the shifting of such mechanism into a new phase of politics when the

spirit of populism lost its essential stimulus into the flimsy ground of political uncertainties and ideological hollowness.

The different stands taken by the minor political parties on the Second World War brought unprecedented changes in Bengal politics. The establishment of a separate party by the ex Anushilanites seemed interesting because they could either join the Forward Block or continue with the CSP.²⁹ But none of this option was taken for granted. In a article, 'An Appeal To Socialists', Niharendu Dutta Mazumdar penned the anxiety of the socialists that 'If the socialists joined the Forward Block today they would be swamped by Left nationalists who would carry the day and drag socialism into its trail'.³⁰ He brilliantly used the argument that since the Forward Block was not a party, but a bloc, so the socialists should not think twice before joining it to fulfill 'the important task of building up a United Mass Proletarian Socialist Party'.³¹ But the Anushilan Marxists had their own understanding of the situation. They definitely supported the Forward Block on the idea of waging an uncompromising anti imperialist struggle but could not find anything convincing in the proposed objectives of the party. As far as the objectives were concerned, the Anushilanites were more interested in a classless society rather than any 'loose path' followed by the Forward Block without any concrete ideology³². On the other the Anushilan Marxists had some reservations about the different 'non Marxist' elements within the Forward Block with which, Tridib Choudhury (noted leader of the Revolutionary Socialist Party) mentioned, 'the RSP (Revolutionary Socialist Party) did not feel it could associate.'³³ The obscure attitude of the Congress on the world war made it almost a

necessity for the minor political parties of Bengal to take its own decision.³⁴ It was one of the crucial moments in late colonial India when the minor parties could have been at work with a minimum programme of action. But in reality the minor parties chose their individual course of action whatever the domestic and international situation had permitted them.

For the imperial state the support of the political parties was a necessity because the war required the state to place extraordinary demands to society and it wanted to check every possible nationalist tendency during the war. The Calcutta War Committee was formed by the government to secure support for the British war efforts. Surprisingly no leader of the minor political parties was included in the list of the committee members except two from the *Hindu Mahasabha*. Apart from the mainstream Muslim League leaders, some industrialists, landed aristocrats and a huge number of journalists were interested to join the committee.³⁵ It indicated that minor parties including the KPP and the leftists parties were not considered to be trust worthy or faithful to the war effort of the government rather the government placed their entire trust on the Muslim League and the traditional support base of the Congress i.e. some landed aristocrats and financial magnets. Including the imperial government was perhaps more anxious on the suspicious nature of the communist leaflets and books published in favour of the socialist ideas. A good number of antiwar seditious left lets by the communists were intercepted in 1939 like ...

1. Bolshevik 2. The Communist 3. *Juddher Bazare Chatkal Shramikder Sangram* (Fight of the Jute Mill workers' during the War)

4. *Samrajyabadi Juddha o Communist Partyr Ghosona* (Imperialist war and the declaration of the Communist Party 5. *Juddher Samaye Swadhinatar Jannye Juddha Karo* (Fight for Independence when the war is waging) 6. *Bangla Desher Pratyek Naranarir Kache Communist Partyr Abedan* (An appeal of the Communist Party to every men and women of Bengal) 7. *Samrajyabadi Juddho Pratirodh Karo* ((Resist the imperialist war) 8. *Comunist Party's call to Students* 9. *Jan Bahan Shramkder Prati Communist Partyr Dak* (Call of the Communist Party to the motor vehicle workers).³⁶ Surprisingly the militant spirit present in the pamphlets and the posters confirmed its leaning towards a socialist struggle in the wake of the war. This type of endeavor, present in the Bengal provincial party unit, was not committed fully to the policy of the all India leadership of the communists which asked its cadres to function from within the Congress. The posters like '*Notun Diner Alo* (Light of New Days), and leaflets like '*Communist Party ka Chatkal Mazdoor Ke Naaam Salam* (The Salute of the Communist Party to the Jute Mill Workers)³⁷ were issued for addressing the jute workers. In different areas of east and west Bengal economic programmes of the communists went hand in hand with their anti war propogandas. One should not forget the fact that despite their being weak in numerical strength and organizational support and working within the Congress, the communists put an effective challenge before the government and the native oppressors. Apart from inculcating a new spirit among the jute workers in urban areas, they led the jute cultivators to ask for protection from a slump in the war time jute prices as well as demanded a war bonus...³⁸ Not only the communists but the CSP should equally be credited for organizing movements among the peasants of Mymonsingh, Comilla,

Tippera, Dinajpur, Rangpur in the last few years of 1930s.³⁹ However the later's gradual detachment from the peasant front of Bengal weakened the movements of the Kisan Sabha and had left a profound impact on the unity of the Kisan Sabha and the Kisan Samity in several regions of east Bengal.⁴⁰ The late thirties exhibited immense potentials for communist movement in Bengal. In almost every district the party committees were formed except Darjeeling and Cooch Behar.⁴¹ In early forties communist activities slowly gathered momentum in these geographically and politically distinct regions.

In this perspective it is to mention that the official call for a 'united front' by the COM intern did not necessarily become inevitable in rural Bengal. Different groups appeared occasionally in sharp contrast with one or the other backed by a political party. One such group called the Kishoreganj Sub divisional Congress Communist Party emerged out of a cleavage between the Congress and the communist workers of Mymonsinh under the leadership of Nagen Sarkar, an ex detenu in 1940.⁴² Apart from delivering revolutionary speeches, the group often shouted the slogans like 'Down With Communist Party' and 'Long Live Revolution'.⁴³ In western Bengal, specially in the region of South 24 Pargana, the Communist League of Soumen Tagore initiated struggle among the peasants independent of the Kisan Sabha. In the estate of Sir Daniel Hamilton at Gosaba, paddy looting, forcible possession of khas lands by the peasant agitators sensationalized the total situation under the influence of the League.⁴⁴ However, in different regions of north Bengal the leftist parties had shown a unique sense of unity at the time of recruiting members from different levels of politics. A considerable

portion of these people later joined the CPI during the post war mass upsurge throughout the country. In Fulbari of Dinajpur one Rup Narayan Roy from an influential jotedar family joined the Krisak Samity after being inspired by the speech of communist leader Bankim Mukherjee in 1938.⁴⁵ many activists were drawn from non agriculturist class or lower middle class. In Dinajpur Kali Sarkar, Krishnadas Mohanta, Ganen Sarkar etc came come form a middle class background.⁴⁶ Rregarding Kali Sarkar one of his former colleague mentioned that '.....Kali Sarkar became so much so much a part of the life of the peasants that it did not seem that he belonged to a different class. I was surprised to see him wearing anklets of bells and dancing along with the peasants, singing songs of the Tebhaga struggle composed by him'.⁴⁷

Under the leadership of Khemeshranjan Chattopadhyay, Nripen Roy, Tarapada Dhar and Amar Raha, the **Communist League of Soumen Tagore** also opened its branch in Dinajpur in late thirties.⁴⁸ In this period ex Anushilan and Jugantar members also attempted to carry on the popular struggle towards a meaningful destination. The increasing influence of the Revolutionary Socialist Party in Dinajpur was an example of such endeavor.⁴⁹ It was these parties and organizations which contributed a lot in organizing the famous sharecroppers' agitations in the frontier regions of north Bengal in late 30s specially in the areas of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri.⁵⁰ However, the communists did not like to recognize the fact that other than the CPI any other party could have done anything for the peasants in these regions. Bibhuti Guha, one of the noted peasant leader of that region himself accepted that he had been earlier drawn towards the Royists or Soumen Tagore but in the

version of a veteran communist no one in Dinajpur belonged to Roy's party except a few among the middle class.⁵¹ Soumen Tagore, according to his version might have some contact with Gangarampur. The basic problem of the leftists in this region was that the leadership of none of the parties--- be it the Revolutionary Socialist Party or the Revolutionary Communist Party lived among the peasants in the villages. None can deny the fact that unlike the non communist parties the communist activists lived among the peasants, observed their problems closely and the middle class activists gradually changed their lifestyle.⁵²

This present discussions does not provide enough scopes to make a review of the movement, however, a special reference should be made on this first class based challenge to the jotedars' power in north Bengal. From 1938 onwards in Jalpaiguri the CSP and its peasant wing tried to cover the distance between the cities based middle class and the peasants.⁵³ CSP first emphasized the need to popularize leftist movements among the peasants and the labourers and in 1938 one non Congress Krisak Samity came into being. Chunilal Basu, Madhab Dutta, Gurudas Roy and Sachin Dasgupta were the leading figures of the Samity. In the Moidandigi conference of 1939, demands were raised for a separate peasant organization by the peasants themselves so that the peasants could make their voice heard without the interference of upper classes.⁵⁴ This type of effort undoubtedly set the trend for future course of peasant movement in this region. From this conference the CPI officially constituted its district committee with those leaders and workers who had already shown their commitment for the cause of the peasants. Md.Khijimuddin, Radha Raman Barman, Dinanath Barman,

Umesh Barman were a few peasant workers present in the executive committee of the Samiti. ⁵⁵ Just like Jalpaiguri the minor parties worked hand in hand at least for a time, in several other areas before and after the war. But no sense of unity could have been shown at the time of the war when at least one common programme and principle was necessary to check the imperial motives. One, who could make headway of the situation, was the Congress---but it failed totally in its bid for gaining some advantages for India and her people from the British government. This major party was left with hardly any alternative but to wage an individual Satyagraha in October, 1940.

The Radical Democratic Party was the first minor party which pleaded for support to the British government in its anti Fascist war against its previous pro Congress position continued up to the summer of 1940.⁵⁶ One official source informed that M N Roy perhaps was intended to increase 'his influence in Bengal and may emerge as the leader of the terrorist parties which aim at dominating the Congress in that province'.⁵⁷ In this respect it may be pointed out that the stands taken by M N Roy in 1939-41 were full of contradistinctions and it was nothing but an expression of political opportunism that he had shown to break his political isolation. Unlike other leftist parties, Roy concluded that the war as a war of accident and a clash between revolutionary and counter revolutionary forces, not of democracy and fascism. Thus the war, he maintained, would lead to the victory of revolutionary forces that is the defeat of fascism and India's interest would best be served by taking a part in British war efforts.⁵⁸ The Revolutionary Socialist Party, unlike the CPI, continued to follow its anti war stand even after the German

onslaught on Soviet Union ⁵⁹. During the Quit India movement of 1942, this party enthusiastically contributed in it. This party was in a strong opposition to the CPI and the Radical Democratic Party who meant that anti fascists had to support the war efforts of the allied powers.⁶⁰ During the 'Quit India' phase one group within the Revolutionary Socialist Party opted for underground terrorist activities and the other preferred a direct involbment with the peasants and the workers. From the very beginning the Revolutionary Socialist leaders were in favour of an understanding with the other leftists in Bengal. On 3rd September, 1942 they took a joint resolution on the future course of the August movement with the Forward Block.⁶¹ .Sibdas Ghosh, Amar Mukherjee and leader other Revolutionary Socialist leaders were present in this conference along with the Forward Block leader Panchanan Singh.⁶² But the internal divisions of the Revolutionary Socialist leaders specially that of Anil Ghosh, Sibdas Ghosh and Manmothnath Ganguli blocked the very prospects of an united venture in Bengal.⁶³ In Bengal the Forward Block and the pro Block organizations like the Youth League, Sri Sangha and the Bengal Volunteers had done extensive work in favour of a joint anti war forum with the other leftist parties. Throughout 1943 Pramatha Banerjee, Santosh Basu Hemprabha Majumdar and other Forward Block leaders were seen to maintain friendly relations with the Revolutionary Socialists and the Congress Socialists in Bengal.⁶⁴ Anil Roy and his wife Lila Roy were at the forefront of various popular movements under Forward Block. It is to be noted that from outside Subhas Chandra Bose tried to make connections with Hemanta Basu, Purnachandra Das, Atindranath Basu, Satyaranjan Bakshi, Satrya Gupta Nalini Guha, Bijoy

Dutta and others. They stayed as the most trustworthy lieutenants of Subhaschanda in Bengal. Organisations.⁶⁵

Another minor party, organized by Soumen Tagore in 1934 went for something different than the policies espoused by the others. Right from its inception the Communist League neither liked the ultra leftist sectarian approach of the official communists nor did it shown any interest in the tactics of united front.⁶⁶ This party denounced both the Congress and the CSP as not being capable of achieving a proletarian revolution in India because of their reactionary bourgeoisie character.⁶⁷ In Bengal Kamelesh Banerjee, Indra Sen, P K Roy, Karuna Roy were among its principal figures.⁶⁸ In order to justify the objectives of establishing a revolutionary government and a republic of the proletariats, the Communist League changed its name as Revolutionary Communist Party of India at the third party conference in 1938. However, some other sources inform that the party of Soumen Tagore changed its name as Revolutionary Communist Party of India in March 1943 to make its stand clear from that of the CPI on the Quit India issue.⁶⁹ Soumen Tagore and those who followed him in the Revolutionary Communist Party had a strong belief on the theory of a Permanent Revolution where in the first place bourgeoisie democratic revolution would be passed into the phase of a socialist revolution and in the next step it would lead to a revolution all over the world.⁷⁰ The outbreak of the Second World War, thus, emerged as a chance of overthrowing the imperial rule and setting up of a revolutionary government at the end of the democratic revolution. Denouncing the war as 'an imperialist predatory war for redistribution of the colonial world',

the party called on the impoverished nations not to help the 'warmongers'.⁷¹ This party was keen to turn the Quit India movement into a revolutionary one rather than falling into the line of passive resistance even though a large number of leaders including Soumen Tagore were jailed soon after the war began and remained imprisoned until the end of the war.⁷² From within the jail (April 1943-October 1945) Soumendranath sent some very important articles and instructions for his followers. Revolutionary Communist Party was one man party and the instructions sent by Soumendranath were followed to carry on the struggle outside. 'Revolution and Quit India' (published in the 'Red Front' in October 1942)⁷³, 'Onward From 1942' (published in the 'Red Front' March 1943)⁷⁴ and 'Quit India in Retrospect' ('Red Front', August 1945)⁷⁵ were the three most important documents of the party written by Soumendranath. In these documents Soumendranath sharply criticized Congress and the other left parties. He concluded that the Congress only wanted to take over the state power from the British; it had no revolutionary motive at all. The Congress infect betrayed the people and sabotaged the Quit India movement by leaving them totally on their fate. The people were left for sacrifice--- either 'Do' or 'Die' but, Soumendranath asked, what to do and why to die for? The Congress leaders were not there to answer this question.⁷⁶ (Almost all the top ranking Congress leaders including Gandhi went to jail or kept interned during the movement).The 'Historical Development of Communist Movement in India', ⁷⁷edited and published by the central politburo of the party, was proved to be a valuable analysis of the party on the nature and attitude of the other left parties active during the Quit India phase. On the position of this party one government source informed,

This party did not spare any one of the minor left parties. The CSP, the Forward Block, and the Revolutionary Socialist Party were equally charged of being a mere appendage of the bourgeoisie Congress and were condemned as 'fake leftists' having practically no contribution into the Quit India movement. However, the Revolutionary Communists went to the point of extreme when the CPI and Royists were at the target.⁷⁹ With a limited organizational strength the Revolutionary Communists took part in the Quit India Movement in some areas of 24 Pargana, Nadia, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Calcuta.⁸⁰ Leaders like Pannalal Dasgupta, Arun Banerjee, Sanat Roychudhury etc had participated in various forms of popular protest including that of a strike or sabotaging British war efforts.⁸¹ But in the final evaluation its ultra leftist sectarian approach might have emerged as one of the basic reasons of it not being a mainstream political party apart from its organizational weakness.

It was during this phase when most of the Revolutionary communist leaders were going underground; some existing workers of the party became part of the pro Trotsky Bolshevik Leninist Party. This party, established before the launch of the Quit India movement, had a firm belief on the theory of Permanent Revolution like the Revolutionary communists and put greater emphasis on the leadership of the working class for such a revolution in India with the support of the poor peasants and agricultural proletariats.⁸² They simply attacked Gandhi as 'counter revolutionary' and discarded the Stalinist notion of transforming the imperialist war into a 'people's war'.⁸³ Although this party supported the Quit India cause, they did not find anything convincing in the

mechanism of civil disobedience . They went for a transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war and had attempted to convert the August movement into a revolutionary one involving the workers and the rural proletariats.⁸⁴ In 5th September 1942 Revolutionary Socialist Party leader Rabindra Sen and Trilokya Chakrabourty had directed from jail that The Revolutionary Socialist Party would launch a joint movement with the Bolshevik Leninist Party although this proposed movement did not become a success due to increasing police repression against those parties.⁸⁵ Kamalesh Banerjee, Indra Sen, Dhruvajyoti Majumdar, Karuna Kanta Roy, was a few among the founding figures of Bolshevik Leninist Party in India.⁸⁶

Most of the recruits of these parties were the converted terrorists drawn from a small section of the *bhadralok* class which it self represented a minute fraction of the total population in Bengal. It is difficult to make a proper calculation of the numerical strength of these parties because of their interactive structure of membership. In a period of government repression and political uncertainties, member of a party often shifted his position for either tactical maneuverings or situational necessities. The establishment of the Bolshevik Party in 1939 by some of the leaders of the former Labour Party in Bengal indicated the overall crisis of the leftist movement in India. Whether these leaders were expelled from the CPI or they themselves left it was not clear. Contradictory versions form both of the sides added an extra confusion into the matter. However, these parties misused a great amount of energies over their confrontations on the issue of leftist unity or national unity. Out of the total scenario what makes one perplexed was the dramatic change in the line of

thinking of the CPI after Nazi Germany's attack on Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. CPI's decision on 13 December, 1941 to revise its 'anti imperialist' war stance to a 'People's War' stance mechanically encumbered the party with extra responsibilities.⁸⁷ It required a total reversal of its political mission in India as well. Logically this decision meant the calling off all mass struggles of all classes within India and making India available on the side of the allies with her all resources. Already in the party had criticized the CSP's line as one of 'mutual adjustments' between the Socialists and the Gandhites, Subhas Bose was accused of 'disrupting national unity'.⁸⁸ After June 1941 it was CPI's turn to make every possible effort to convince the others. From an open confrontation with the government to the affable collaboration with it, the **CPI's stance ran counter to the anticipations of the others. One official source mentioned,**

In July 1942, the government of India decided to raise the eight years old ban on the Communist Party to enable it to come out into the open and demonstrate its pro war professions in a practical way. This experiment, which was not without an element of risk proved to be justified. Apart from conducting pro war propaganda, the communists did not participate in the Congress inspired disorder which broke out in 1942 (they were, indeed to weak to do otherwise).....The party has nothing like the mass following of Congress or the Muslim League but relies for support on the allegiance of three sections of the public, namely the industrial workers, the poorer class of the peasantry and the student community .Of these the most politically are the trade unionists who number about 2,50,000. ⁸⁹ (Italics mine)

Although the lifting of ban from the communists might have done as an experiment, it was provided with an opportunity to test the political

competency of the communists on its individual capacity. Out of the total scenario what emerged were the contradictions between the common communist workers and their leaders on the issue of 'people's war' stance.⁹⁰ In Bengal the grass root cadres rightly realized that they could not make themselves detached from the popular forms of struggle in the remotest corners of the province. It was evident from the participation of the communist cadres into various forms of protest during the Quit India movement in Bengal... Explaining the stance of the communists in the Quit India movement communist leader Jyoti Basu wrote that for the sake of democratic and economic rights of the masses, the communist cadres continued to organize popular movements during the struggle.⁹¹ One contemporary student worker Societal Roychudhury tried to convince his mother in an intercepted letter that 'We will stop the Japanese at any cost. It does not mean that the government has become our friend. We do not want a change of our master, so we will stop the Japanese. It will bring our self independence and then it will be easy to fight the British imperialists'.⁹² these type of commentaries were of prime significance for understanding the communist response during the early forties. But where the communists had done a mistake was in their overall party mechanism. They did not make any safeguards for their measures. There should have at least a way and means from the part of the communists to make their efforts justifiable before the people specially the middle class *bhadralok* in Bengal. Whatever little influence the party had wielded over this section of society went into complete jeopardy on account of the communist somersault. As the anti fascist 'people's war' stance logically meant the breaking off of every forms of class struggles in India--- be it of the peasants or the workers, the anti

communist parties did not left a single scope to make the CPI responsible for withdrawing labour strikes and peasant movements in Bengal.⁹³ In this perspective it should be mentioned that some of the leftists had themselves withdrawn from the popular front of struggle and devoted their whole energy into the struggle for independence. The CSP as an example had their thought of suspending the class struggle for the time being so that the opportunity of an imperial war could at best be utilized for the sake of national independence. One such very interesting venture of the socialists was to establish contact with the army. Some letters (one of it was written on August 24, 1943 by some Ratnamoye Devi, an inmate of Mahila Ashram Wardha, to her fellow classmates of the Presidency College) and a few leaflets seized on August 31, 1942 from the Congress office Calcutta were in the form of an appeal addressed to the American and British soldiers stationed in India. Two such alleged leaflet was in cyclostyled Hindi—'Sipahio Ab Hamare Bhai Ho', another one was 'Shahbash Hindustan Police Ke Sipahi'.⁹⁴ However, the police report informed that until March 23 1943, the All India Socialist Party had not taken any final decision regarding the future policy of involving the army.

In the Calcutta -Howrah industrial belt the CSP workers like Sibnath Banerjee, Abanishwar Mishra, Sudhanshu Mishra, Baidyanath Ganguli, Debendranath Roychudhury, Atul Basu and other got involved into sabotage activities and called strikes in the arm factories.⁹⁵ Nihar Mukherjee of RSP, Niharendu Duuta Majumdar of Bengal Labour Party and Sibdas Banerjee of CSP were active at the striking areas of Bengal Chemical works and strikes at Kashipur factories.⁹⁶ In this region the

various forms of anti British struggle emerged as part of their long drawn resistance movement in the industrial belt. However, it was equally pertinent to raise the expectations of the popular forces for class demands at a time of nationalist struggle so that the popular forces could make an easy identification with the parties.

The task of convincing the masses against the fascist powers was not an easy one. The policy of building an anti Fascist front together with the jotedars and the landlords, the communist leadership had later admitted was a as an error'.⁹⁷ Simultaneously they defended their policy on the ground that that the peasants did never join hands with their immediate exploiters and continued to move against the exploitations of those rural elite. To some extent the peasants themselves saved the communist leaders from embarrassment in the rural areas. But the continuing conflict between the 'people's war' programme and the ground realities of peasant consciousness in the villages opened up several controversies within the policy making process itself. As far as the common Bengalis were concerned the communist call for anti Japanese resistant slogans were full of political expectations especially when the whole of Bengal was threatened by a possible Japanese attract at any moment. It could be one of the excellent opportunities for rallying the masses in large scale anti fascist movements. However, the communists totally missed the chance. In a colonial situation where the native exploiters were acting as a support base of the foreign exploiters, anti fascist or any immediate anti Japanese sentiments could not be materialized without addressing the issues the exploited masses were more accustomed to. The communist effort of bringing the masses into world political front was bound to take

an image of 'unpatriotic treachery' because they had already withdrawn from the long drawn class movements without making any prior settlement of those issues of class interests. For a political party which emerged as a revolutionary force of the neglected poor— it was really unexpected. In the party there were tendencies of asking for an indirect support from the masses in favour of their traditional class enemies—the native exploiters including the feudal lords, the industrialists or the business magnets because in the anti fascist world war, the British government in India, the communists concluded, might not be at any difficulty or risk from the domestic popular forces, politically volatile as well.⁹⁸ However, one thing became too much clear that a sheer despondency had immediately captured the public imagination on the very objectives and programmes of the CPI. Even though the CPI demanded the immediate release of the Congress leaders who were arrested during the Quit India movement including Gandhi, it continued to stick to the pro war policy and desperately dismissed the popular movements as a senseless act of the 'fifth columnist'.⁹⁹ It had failed to convince most of the Indians specially the common Bengalis most of whom at that time were getting impatient for immediate freedom—a long awaited vision they had discovered already in the uncompromising struggle of Subhas Chandra or even in the slogans like '*Do or Die*'. The communist effort to balance its attack on the bourgeoisie nationalist leadership by criticizing bureaucratic oppressions failed to cut the ice because the demands like lifting of ban from the Congress or the release of the Congress leaders were neither backed by any widespread mass action nor these were made out of a change of their new policy of

'people's war'. The party itself had admitted it.¹⁰⁰ One of the official sources confirmed that,

latterly, however, pro war propaganda (of the communists) has been allowed to fade out of the picture almost completely because of the situations and troubles in the realm of peasants and labourers outside the legislative political twist.¹⁰¹

In Bengal the CPI could make an impact at least on an objective reality that here the Gandhian method of non violence had never been welcomed wholeheartedly and in the wake of a probable Japanese attack large scale anti fascist mobilization of the people could have been done only by coalescing their regular class confrontations with the struggle against fascism by simply making them aware of the hazardous situation ahead if they could not do so. Even if the communists were too much worried about the fascist aggression all over the world, they lacked the very understanding of the domestic dangers coming out of a sheer wave of communalism within and outside the constitutional political arena. The other minor political parties hardly took any risk to expose themselves before the challenges of a preconceived language of politics because a considerable portion of their energies were lost either in getting away from bureaucratic repression or in making the most suitable efforts for an immediate shutdown of the Raj. Surprisingly a good number of high caste Bengali *bhadraloks* even went to the extent of getting enthusiastic about a supposed connection between the Nazi claim of pure Aryan blood¹⁰² and their self proclaimed legacy of the same. For them Hitler was the savior, a hero who would destroy the citadel of imperialism all over the world.¹⁰³ These sense of racial superiority, even if less

documented, fitted well with the growing annoyance over casteist and religious issues throughout the province. In this circumstance any sluggish type of politics was not to appeal much in Bengal. The leftist parties even if aroused the people in a numbers of occasions, in the whole lacked the essential charisma to win public imagination at the end. One party which could make an exception was Forward Block. This party was alleged to make secret connection with Germany by the government¹⁰⁴ although the allegations had left practically no negative impression on the image of this party or its leaders. In Bengal it was Subhas Bose who over the years characterized the example of an undaunted struggle against the British and their junior native partners. He remained even intolerant of the camouflaged nationalists lacking a true militant spirit. The image of Basu as a true patriot stayed at high forever in Bengal. The communists failed to realize this truth, as if they did not want to realize it. They categorically pointed out Subhas Bose as 'fifth columnist' and his path nothing more than a 'national disruption'.¹⁰⁵ In this period the charges and counter charges of 'treachery' and 'fifth columnist' stalled the relation between the socialists and the followers of Bose on one side and the communists on the other. Leaders like Manikuntala Sen later repented that, the "frequent use of the term 'fifth columnist' indeed became ridiculous. Those who did not follow communist line were tagged as a 'fifth columnist. It was a complete blunder."¹⁰⁶ Later, in the 'Report on Reformist Deviation' of the Second Congress (1948) of the party, it was admitted that,

.....Due to our misconception over imperialism we made objectionable comments on the CSP, the Forward Block and the other leftist parties. We called them 'fifth

columnist' although imperialism itself appeared as the 'fifth columnist' at that moment. In doing this we lost the support of a many. It was one of the reasons that in the post war period the leftist supporters took part in anti communist propagandas in a huge number." ¹⁰⁷

The self criticism of the CPI continued even a decade after partition "....the communists called Netaji Fascist agent, a traitor. We are sorry for that. We were right in our analysis that the policy of Netaji was wrong. But it was our fault that we called him a traitor. He was a patriot and he fought for India's independence". ¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately these explanations were a quite late affair. The psychological distance between the CPI and the other leftist parties could not be surmounted even at the time of the ultimate catastrophe in 1947.

II

The leftist parties mainly were evolved around one particular personality or a fixed ideology, the fundamental focus of the party cadres changed according to the political necessities. This feature at the same time could become one of a strength and weakness of the respective parties. It was found that as long as these parties could have acknowledged the primacy of the Congress, the task of taking decision on the political future of the country stayed more or less on the hands of the later. But when this major political party seemed to get ineffective due to a special political circumstance the minor parties were to face the criticalities of the moment. Side by side it should be remembered that one undercurrent of challenging the notion of a 'necessary' Congress leadership was active always inside the party organizations of some of the minor parties and

they used to generate this spirit into a new trend of mass politics if situation permitted. But in absence of a viable alternative of a national force like the Congress, communal forces began to sweep Bengal's social landscape from 1943 onwards. This communalism was a bit different from the previous trends. It had now emerged as a political project implicated equally by the colonial state, the Muslim League and the *Hindu Mahasabha*... However, no one can deny the fact that in Bengal already the forces of communalism had replaced the spirits of nationalism and it had become too much evident from the helplessness of the Congress in face of a growing communal frenzy. In fact the Congress brand of nationalism did not fit well with the judicious version of 'Hindu nationalism' promoted by Gandhi ¹⁰⁹ and the juxtaposition of the communal variant of Hindu nationalism with that one espoused by Gandhi put the secular brand of Congress nationalism in severe crisis. It was even misconceived and misinterpreted. Here actually the problem began. Although the concept of communalism do constitutes a threat to the idea of Indian nationalism in general (the overarching concept of Indian nationalism encompassed the universal nationalist spirit of the freedom movement with a concept of nation state), the term Hindu nationalism has always been equated with the idea of communalism.

¹¹⁰Further more 'Hindu nationalism' often becomes 'Hindu Communalism' by simply nullifying the fact that 'communalism' and 'nationalism' are not comparable at all because communalism does not necessarily produce its own ideology rather it is more likely to appropriates other ideological forces towards their respective objectives while nationalism itself is an ideology not a mere historical condition.¹¹¹

Hindu nationalism got benefited from the Congress brand of nationalism

because the latter's challenge to state hegemony indirectly encouraged the development of one alternative to the Congress (an self sufficient representative of the Hindus) by the colonial state. But when these ideologies of Hindu nationalism and Congress brand of Indian nationalism went on to be a sole claimant of the vast Hindu community it put the later into another terrain of political oscillation. On one hand the Congress brand of nationalism had to combat the colonial compulsions and on the other it had to assimilate the class interest of the peasants and workers into a 'bourgeoisie hegemony'. This dilemma of the Congressite nationalism went up to the independence and it was due to this dilemma that it failed to tackle the issue of Hindu nationalism and the forces like the Hindu Sabha or the *Hindu Mahasabha* took the total advantage of the situation. **Minor political parties especially that of the leftists never took this point seriously.** It was because of the fact that almost all the leftist parties in Bengal did not make a close analysis of the real spirit of Indian nationalism. They devoted their full attention towards a violent overthrow of the British rule to make it a Russian dreamland and totally neglected the real strength of India nationalism which had developed its cherished tradition of liberal ideas and democratic endeavors. Their uncompromising militancy and an oscillating political chemistry with the major political parties did not cater the very urgencies of Bengal politics in 1940s and they more or less remained helpless in face of a growing communal frenzy all over the province. The Forward Block at least made an effort to neutralize the communal tendencies by diplomatic maneuverings but it was not at all enough for the precarious situation ahead.

The unexplored episode of *Hindu Mahasabha*- Forward Block negotiations in early forties unfolded the inner anxieties of situational political adjustments especially when these two parties had engrossed into bitter quarrels over some sensitive issues. It was one of the unhealthy developments in Bengal where Subhas Chandra Bose and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had to face an open fight in the Calcutta Corporation election of 1940.¹¹² If the duo could make a joint front against the Muslim League, the situations could have been a bit different. Shyamaprasad directly condemned Subhas for the failure of the Forward Block -Mahasabha understanding in spite of some initial efforts of agreement from both of the sides.¹¹³ The joint board of the two parties (consisting Subhas Bose, Sarat Bose, Rajendra Chandra Dev, S.N Banerjee, Sanat Kr Roychoudhury and Shyamaprasad Mukherjee) came to an end soon due to 'Subhas's attitude'---- Mukherjee recalled in his diary.¹¹⁴ In his view Subhas was 'adamant' to have his candidates of choice in the election and 'one night after a long and hated discussion Sarat Bose broke the joint front'.¹¹⁵ It was nothing new in constitutional politics that pre election understanding of the political parties had broken down due to mutual dissensions over the candidature issue but what was new here a further political mileage gained by the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the Muslim League out of the situation. The overall satisfactory performance of the Hindu Sabha in the Calcutta Corporation election marked the beginning of a new era in Bengal politics and this victory of the Sabha ¹¹⁶(won fifty percent of the seats) indicated the defeat of Subhas Bose whom, Shyamaprasad Mukherjee wrote, 'Gandhi's followers in Bengal feared to challenge'.¹¹⁷ For the Hindu Sabha it was a gain of two ends. It had shown its credibility to become the sole

mouthpiece of the Hindus in Bengal whom the Congress had failed to take into confidence. It was more or less clear now that in any future political developments the Hindu Sabha would no longer be in the second row rather it might become instrumental at the time of taking any important political decision. The essential episodes of the pre partition politics in Bengal later proved the viability of such postulation. However, Subhas Bose's entering into an understanding with the Muslim League in April 1940 over the election of Aldermen and the Mayor of the Calcutta Corporation further complicated its relationship with the Hindu Sabha and the later had left no chance of making advantage from the situation.¹¹⁸ The Muslim League -Forward Block understanding could be marked as one of the striking developments in the last decade of partition and it was during this time that the Forward Block had made itself too much exposed to public criticism.¹¹⁹ The official Congress and the *Hindu Mahasabha* brought the common charges that Subhas Bose 'had sold the interests of the Hindus' or the League Forward Block understanding had turned Subhas 'into a pliant tool in the hands of the Muslim League'.¹²⁰ Almost all the leading news paper condemned Subhas Bose for betraying the Hindus.¹²¹ Thus the Hindu Sabha did not face any problem to convince a large section of the Hindus that whatever Subhas Bose had done, it was only to have the Corporation under his control. A few lines from Shyamaprasad would be enough to make the point clear.....

The great liberator and leftist who regarded Gandhi , Jawaharlal and the rest as moderators, and branded them as 'compromise-Walla has' was not hesitant to install a League Mayor and placate the League for his own purposes.¹²²

But surprisingly Shyamaprasad did not mention anywhere what this 'purpose' of Subhas Chandra was other than to control the corporation single-handedly.¹²³ Subhas Bose, once the great supporter of CR Das, strongly stated that,

We.....do not regard the communal organization as untouchable....During the last three years, repeated attempts have been made to bring about a rapprochement between the Congress and the Muslim league....Those who had not objected to that attempt which had failed ultimately, now strongly object to the present attempt, because it succeeded. We regard the present agreement with the Muslim League as a great achievement not in its actuality, but in its potentiality.¹²⁴

The Hindu Sabha itself was not free of its own purposes. The **attack on Subhas Bose and Forward Block** was proved to be instrumental in drawing indirect support of the official Congress group which could make at least a point of agreement with the *Hindu Mahasabha* on this particular issue. In the last few years before partition the unofficial relationship shared by these two parties set a new trend of political opportunism in Bengal politics. The colonial state side by side encouraged the *Hindu Mahasabha* in order to put a check on the radical section of the Congress while the KPP and the CPI remained at the border line of the entire decision making process before the years of partition. No one can deny the fact that in Bengal the *Hindu Mahasabha* emerged not as a necessity but as a priority of a section of Hindus who had lost their confidence on the Congress for a while.. However, it was only in the wake of the Second World War in 1939 when Vinyak Damodar Savarkar came to Bengal, the two Hindu *Sabhas* in Bengal

reached an agreement on how to strengthen the Hindu cause in face of a continuous communal aggression.¹²⁵ From this time the *Mahasabha* successfully motivated the traditional support base of Congress specially that of the zamindars and rich businessmen who had already been upset by radical tendencies shown by the Bose brothers in and outside the constitutional political arena. The non Bengali business community, who had been an important financial base of the Congress in the past, emerged as the chief financial patron of the *Hindu Mahasabha* in the 40s. Once who had helped to raise funds for Subhas Bose's Congress like the Birlas or the Khaitans now went on to finance the 21st session of the All India *Hindu Mahasabha* in Calcutta in December, 1939.¹²⁶ But the task of the *Mahasabha* was not a easy one. But it did not mean that the Bengal Congress was totally lost in face of the challenges from *Hindu Mahasabha* rather after the throwing out of the Bose brothers from the party it was seen that the Bengal Congress openly stood for the Hindu interests and regained its previous confidence a lot. The throwing out of the Subhas Bose and his groups in the early forties from the official Congress concluded the chapter of the radical and secular forces in this organization and from this time the party became too much exposed to the spirit of communalism. For a minor party like the *Hindu Mahasabha* the basic problem remained at its organizational spheres once its monetary requirements had been solved in an extent. Thus it was seemed not very surprising that during the Dacca riot in 1941 the *Mahasabha* worked hand in hand with the Congress for the support of the affected Hindus there.¹²⁷ While the excellent organizational network of the Congress worked in favour of the *Mahasabha*, the former might get some financial relieves on account of its connection with the later.¹²⁸

It is to be noted here that the commercial interest of the Marwari businessmen of Calcutta got a further boost during the Second World War and the war time politics of the *Mahasabha* fitted well with the economic interests of their new friends. ¹²⁹ The *Mahasabha's* policy was in full agreement with the policy of utilizing the British war efforts in so far as it helped in militarizing and industrializing India. ¹³⁰ It was very much interesting that *Hindu Mahasabha* had taken a completely different stand on the war as far as the other minor parties were concerned. Surprisingly the Congress did not make objection on the pro war policy of the *Hindu Mahasabha* at a time when it was launching frontal attack on the other minor parties specially the leftists which took part in the British war efforts against the national interest. The *Hindu Mahasabha* asked the Hindu youth to make use of the technical military training offered by the British government and to take lessons for the production of war materials. ¹³¹ Such type of training was necessary, according to the *Mahasabha* for a whole scale militarization and industrialization of the country. One can see here how the very stand of the *Mahasabha* on the Second World War maintained a wonderful accord with the very objectives and requirements of the party that their agenda of demanding the recruitment of Bengali Hindu youths into the Indian army finally received a kind of official stamp at the time of the Second World War. ¹³² In fact the *Hindu Mahasabha* had an intention to radicalize the notion of a powerful Hindu race with professional military training by simply participating in British war efforts although it was evident that the *Mahasabha* secretly tried to make connection with the Axis powers. It has been known that one speech of Savarkar was published in various

news papers in Germany and one press note on this particular speech was sent to Rashbihari Basu in Japan.¹³³ Some sources inform that both of these leaders had exchanged letters on the issue of opening a branch of Hindu Mahasabha in Japan.¹³⁴ However this dual policy of the *Mahasabha* during the war did not earn anything important rather the different approaches of the Congress and the *Mahasabha* on the war indirectly offered the new Governor John Herbert a chance to provoke the one against the other.¹³⁵ For the British the *Mahasabha* was more preferable than an ambivalent Congress which banned participation in the war efforts after December 1939 unlike the *Mahasabha* which had granted individual participation of its members in the war committees.¹³⁶ A more tactful government here rightly realized that if the *Hindu Mahasabha* could gain some extra strength, the Congress could easily be kept at bay and it would happen only if the communal cards were played properly. Being continuously threatened by the growing communal frenzy in the province the caste Hindus would rally to the *Mahasabha* and the Congress would be segregated totally from the political scene—such type of hypothesis from the part of the government was occupied with some further connotations and it seemed too much obvious that the other forces would definitely make their individual calculations on that subject. However, these two parties seem to have never fought each other on an open front rather the indefinite chemistry between these two camps puzzled the political observers in a numbers of crucial occasions prior to the partition of the province.¹³⁷

When the *Mahasabha* started its real journey as an important political force in Bengal, a few obstacles appeared there to make it a bit tricky to

tackle the situation. Apart from the British and the Muslim League the Hindu community itself had some resentful elements which could raise problems before any project of Hindu consolidation by the *Hindu Mahasabha* in Bengal. Although the Bose Congress, mentioned as the first element in Shyamaprasad's diary,¹³⁸ might be kept under check, the *Mahasabha* had to meet resistance from the second and third element i.e. the Communists and a section of the Scheduled Castes respectively.¹³⁹ Whereas the long drawn demand of a separate anti Hindu political identity was very much common with the Schedule Castes in Bengal, a comparatively new but dangerous problem came from the Communists. For the *Hindu Mahasabha* it was really very difficult to tackle the communists who had extended their support to the Pakistan demand of the Muslim League but at the time condemned the Hindu Sabha as 'communal and reactionary'.¹⁴⁰ The CPI's resolution adopted in its central committee meeting in September 1942 suggested that "Every section of the Indian people which has its contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological make-up, and common economic life would be recognized as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian Union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire".¹⁴¹ CPI's intellectual support to the Pakistan resolution stirred up controversies at different levels. However, when the 'Imperialist War' had given way to the 'People's War', the CPI could hardly ignore the Muslim League as a mere political body because its willing cooperation with the government had strengthened the hands of the anti Fascist powers indirectly. Remarkably CPI's newly assumed perception of communalism as a problem of growing nationalities did not

take any serious notice of the Hindu nationalistic ideas within the Congress rather continued to refer the Muslims a separate 'nation' demanding only the right to self determination .¹⁴² For the CPI the Pakistan demand was 'unreal in religious sense' but valid in economic and political sense. Such a stand of the CPI identified Congress a mere representative of 'one dominant nationality' which was in a position to throttle the voice of the less developed nationalities in an independent India and this stand of the CPI remained too much conflicting to cater the ideas of National Front or National Unity at the time of crisis.¹⁴³ During the Quit India movement-a 'national crisis', to use the CPI parlance, the Muslim League and the *Hindu Mahasabha* appeared to be the political forces with which the communists could join hands for the sake of national defense and national government since both of this parties did not join the Quit movement for different reasons. But in an atmosphere of rising indecisiveness no logical calculation was possible at all.¹⁴⁴

Apart from these interesting developments *Hindu Mahasabha* joining hands with Fazlul Huq , (a person who himself had moved the Pakistan Resolution 23 March 1940, on Jinnah's request just a year before) roused severe controversies in Bengal.¹⁴⁵ Huq's approach on the ongoing war differed vehemently from the other parties including the Muslim League itself. Governor Herbert noticed that Fazlul Huq continued to support the British war efforts in defiance of Jinnah because he thought that it would likely to establish the safeguards the Muslims were searching for long in Bengal.¹⁴⁶ Indeed Huq's pro war approach was a bargaining counter to take full opportunity for the Muslims in Bengal. It had another dangerous side, the Governor predicted, any split between the Bengal League and

any problem threatening the KPP League understanding might be turned into an attempt to bring into office the 'most undesirable elements of the Congress Party i.e. the Bose faction.'¹⁴⁷ What Governor Herbert had predicted in 1940, became too much obvious within a year. It was normal that after being expelled from the Muslim League Fazlul Huq had no other alternative but to seek for new partners since the Krisak Praja Party was not able to form a ministry on its individual capacity. If he did not join with others specially that of the *Hindu Mahasabha*, he might have the opportunity of building a separate political force along with his own KPP in a manner similar to that of Subhas Bose after the Tripuri episode. In a letter to Jinnah, dated 10th June 1941, Khwaja Nazimuddin, one of the loyal lieutenants of Jinnah from Bengal, apprehended that, ...at the present time, it will be fatal to give Mr Fazlul Huq an opportunity to raise the standard of revolt. There are many cries that may be raised in his favour and although he may not have a very following but still it can be sufficient to divide the Muslims in Bengal and do a lot of harm.¹⁴⁸

However, his assumptions were not proved to be tenable on the ground of an unconvincing number of the KPP followers in Bengal. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee who had once ridiculed Subhas Bose as 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'¹⁴⁹ now looked for support from the Bose Congress to form the Progressive Coalition ministry in Bengal. He rightly realized that without the support of the Bose Congress the proposed ministry could not remain in office for a day and it was of his credit that one atypical coalition ministry was formed in December 1941 under the premiership of Fazlul Huq.¹⁵⁰ As soon as the Governor Sir John Herbert accepted the resignation of Huq League coalition ministry the Progressive Coalition

Party emerged on the scene.¹⁵¹ The total strength of the new party was 119 including Forward Block led Congress, Huq's personal followers, the Samsuddin faction of the KPP, defector members of the Muslim League, Independent Schedule Castes, Nationalists, Anglo Indians and Labour group.¹⁵² The new ministry involved heterogeneous groups and the colonial authority itself was conscious that 'it would be a quite considerable thing if it held together for nine or twelve months'.¹⁵³ It was the first ministry in Bengal which was composed and controlled mainly by the minor political parties although the ministry was assured the support of the official Congress group under Kiran Shankar Roy and others. It was the moment from where the minor parties could arrive at a position of taking Bengal into the desired course of politics without being threatened or jeopardized by any anti Bengal or intense communal design. But it did not happen. In the Sirajganj conference of the Muslim League Jinnah criticized the Governor for the establishment of the new ministry.¹⁵³ The Suhrawardy Nazimuddin group of the League put every effort to demoralize the new ministry and tried to convince the Governor that this ministry was misusing the Defense of India Rules against the legitimate activities of the Muslim League but also was trying to break Muslim solidarity in Bengal.¹⁵⁴ As soon as the League ministers were thrown out of power their anguish and frustration took recourse to exacerbating communal frenzy all over the province. Their secular mask had been dropped out. Intense mass contact programme were made on behalf of the League to hackle Fazlul Huq before the community specially in the rural areas of east Bengal—the actual ground of his popularity.¹⁵⁵ Situation was changing very rapidly, everything was going out of control and the pro nationalist secular forces were either getting

subverted or a bit apprehensive to take any timely decision. In this regard one may put questions that why the Muslim League leaders were going unchallenged against Fazlul Huq and his new formed ministry. They were propagating against a person who had enjoyed immense popularity once in the Muslim majority areas of remote east Bengal. The initial success of the League's mass contact campaign particularly against Huq revealed the fact that in an era of constitutional party politics no leader could stay at high for long only on the basis of his personal popularity rather the support base of his party must be kept intact to remain in public imagination for ever. The KPP under Huq had been reduced to a party of the *Jotdars* in the last few years and it lost its essential character of being the most trusted mass party of that time. The KPP led by Samsuddin Ahmed (the rebel KPP faction emerged during the KPP League coalition ministry) was no where to wage a mass movement but to pressurize Huq on certain popular issues ¹⁵⁶. In a letter dated 3rd June 1941, Raghbir Ahsan, Secretary of the Calcutta District Muslim League and a member of the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League wrote Jinnah,

Now the present position is that Mr Huq is losing the confidence of the League minded Muslims as well as sane people. Mr Huq's Praja Party exists only on paper with no office, no organization, no branch and no party fund and no paper. The Krisak Praja Party which exists is a different body and is in the hands of K. B Abdul Momin and Mr Shamsuddin Ahmed both of whom are opposed to Mr Huq. The League defeated it in all elections to the local bodies and District Boards. It has no power to stand against the League provided the League stand solid and firm and work hard for the people. ¹⁵⁷

In this condition Fazlul Huq took the most risky decision on his part by joining Shyamaprasad Mukherjee. By including Shyamaprasad Mukherjee into the new ministry Fazlul Huq himself provided his opponents the much awaited chance of stimulating the communal consciousness among the Muslims. From the first month of 1942 the opponents of Huq from the Muslim League side arrived on the scene with a pre planned design of humiliating the new ministry before public. The press controlled by the League was tuned up with such campaigns and they made it their vow to deliberately identify Huq 'a traitor' who had betrayed his Muslim brothers.¹⁵⁸ Sinister intentions of the anti Huq circle were quite evident from calling the new ministry the 'Shyama- Huq' ministry or one of a '*Mahasabha Raj*',¹⁵⁹ however, Shyama Prasad was the only representative of the *Hindu Mahasabha* in that ministry. In fact Fazlul Huq was made guilty of breaking Muslim solidarity in India by raising the Bengali and non Bengali question in relation to all India politics.¹⁶⁰ However, within a few years the question of Bengali Muslim interests vis -a-vis Non Bengali Muslim interests became one of the germane themes of partition politics in Bengal.

It was almost certain that in a faction ridden political situation it was not possible for any minor party to sustain its spirit without taking recourse to a major party full of financial resource and a solid support base in any form. As far as the leftist parties were concerned, official restraints often restricted their growth to become a moving political force like the others. In this situation the only way out for the minor parties remained in their capacity of building democratic organizational base in the interior of the province so that one consistent net work of workers could be employed

for the sustenance and development of the party. For electoral success ideological commitment was necessary but the extent of practicing that ideology depended largely on the organizational base of the party unless and otherwise no popular leader could claim agency for ever in the realm of organized politics. In absence of a solid organizational base and dedicated workers the individual existence of the minor parties might be at risk. In some occasions especially when these parties were appeared to be regional in character, their separate identity might have been eclipsed under the overarching authority of an all India party. In case of the KPP the matter was the same. This party had to bank mainly on the personal charisma of its leader who did not have the scope or time to build a base for his party in every nook and corner of the province rather a typical east Bengali sentiment always distanced the party from the urban areas of west Bengal. The organizations of the party were more or less confined within the Muslim majority areas of rural east Bengal while the urban centric Muslim intelligentsia or the business group found nothing appealing in the pro peasant character of this party. This party had to suffer mainly on two grounds. One was the rural urban dichotomy and another was the Bengali-non Bengali conflict. In between these dialectics there was the problem of situating Muslim consciousness especially at a time when non communal mass movements were launched by different communist and leftist parties from the later half of 1930s. Until the formation of the Progressive Coalition Ministry in December 1941 Fazlul Huq had been the President of both KPP and the Bengal Muslim League without having a solid organization for his own party. The signs of dismantling of his party were evident from a few days after the KPP-League coalition ministry was installed in the province. For the Muslim

League the task was a bit easy to declare that there was practically no difference between the KPP and the Muslim League. '.....ours is a completely common aim and ideal. Mr Huq is the President of the Krisak Praja Party as well as the League. So, for the greater interest of the community every Muslim should assemble under the banner of the Muslim League', ¹⁶¹--- commented Suhrawardy at a public meeting. The political dualism of Huq even encouraged the Congress to join hands with the anti League faction of the KPP but it was in vein because the political reputation of the Congress was not very much steady among the Muslims of rural Bengal. In this regard it must be mentioned that the KPP did not get the financial backing of the non Bengali Muslim business group specially that of the house of Ispahanis instead a staunch opposition from it.¹⁶² The non Bengali Muslim industrialist and business classes like the Ispahanis, Habibs, Memons, Khojas, Bhras, Adamjees and others had remain the supporter of the Muslim League and they formed the backbone of Pakistan movement.¹⁶³ Star of India --the mouthpiece of Muslim interests in Bengal was backed by a Calcutta merchant Haji Dawood Adamjee .¹⁶⁴ The Muslim industrial and business class easily understood the economic opportunities offered by the Pakistan proposal to their class interests. Jinnah himself belonged to a Khoja business family¹⁶⁵ and he could value the importance of the Muslim industrial and business class for the success of his ultimate mission. The KPP in this regard stayed far behind the Muslim League in Bengal. Neither it became a communal Muslim party nor did it stay as a popular party with solid organization and definite socio economic backings. Another minor party the *Hindu Mahasabha* was proved be more tactical in that perspective. While the Muslim League expanded its power in Bengal at the expense

of the KPP, the *Hindu Mahasabha* emerged at the expense of the Congress in Bengal. Right from its inception it had the backing of the Hindu landed aristocracy and the non Bengali Hindu businessmen and unlike the KPP it successfully increased its numerical strength and organizational base in Bengal irrespective of any rural or urban or Bengali non Bengali priorities. From any side it had nothing to loose. As soon as the Progressive Coalition ministry was formed in 1941, the Muslim League had intensified their cry for Muslim right for self determination because the issue of betraying their community interest now had taken a concrete shape in the anti Huq propaganda meetings.¹⁶⁶ In this situation the every single effort of Huq for Hindu Muslim unity seemed quite innovative. In a sharp contrast of the 'Two Nation' theory he highlighted the idea of 'common nationalism' at a meeting in the Town Hall at Calcutta on 20 June 1942¹⁶⁷ in the presence of the Congress, the *Hindu Mahasabha*, and the KPP, Liberal Federation and Progressive Muslim League members. It would not be unnecessary here to make a briefing of Fazlul Huq's own contentions on the Pakistan Resolution of 1940. Not in the name of Islam rather in the interests of the Bengali Muslims he wrote that,

We have to remember that the 3 Provinces geographically adjacent to Bengal are Assam, Bihar and Orissa. In Assam, the Muslims are only 35%; in Bihar 10%; and in Orissa barely 4%. It is therefore evident that Bengal, as constituted, can not form autonomous states with the geographically autonomous provinces. If, however, Bengal has got to be divided into two the result will be that the Eastern zone which will be a predominantly Muslim area will be surrounded by 4 provinces in which Hindus will be in a majority. It is, therefore no use hoodwinking the Muslims of Bengal that the formula which may hold good in the Punjab will also hold good in Bengal. At the same time Bengal Muslims realize that they have got to fall in line

with the rest of India. We depend upon the Quid -i-Azam to modify the Pakistan idea so as to enable the Muslims of Bengal also to assert their self determination along with the Muslims of other Provinces and also members of other communities in all the provinces. ¹⁶⁸

In no case Fazlul Huq was ready to compromise with the interest of the Bengali Muslims but not at the cost of the rights of other communities. It was not at all surprising, the Star on India reported, that Huq was thinking in terms of a separate state for Bengal. In this scheme of Bangistan movement the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal would be placed under to autonomous units comprising the territories of Western and Eastern Bengal respectively. ¹⁶⁹ On the light of the above report no one can say that Fazlul Huq was opposed to the idea of Pakistan rather it was one of the modified version of the Pakistan proposal Huq himself had moved in Lahore. ¹⁷⁰ This type of scheme had nothing to do with the 'Akhand Hindustan' or 'Anti Pakistan' ¹⁷¹ idea of the *Hindu Mahasabha* and for the Bengal premier no midway tactics was viable enough to tackle the opposing sentiments. The political dualism he had espoused during his first premiership was of no value at this juncture of history instead the policy of making a bit unconventional coalition mainly on the basis of his personal popularity became one of the unfortunate mistakes ever done by him. The political career of KPP now went into a state of oblivion, every where in the province the Pakistan scheme of Jinnah earned ground level popularity among the Muslims masses within next few years and the anti feudal sentiments of the Muslim peasants had been channeled towards a different direction. It was indeed a matter of credit that within last five years the Muslim League had innovated one

communicative ideology for the Muslim elites and the masses as well so that the fundamental ideals of the League could have sanctioned by the majority of the Muslim masses of Bengal. Inherent weakness as well the external pressures from a more powerful political force, if not an enemy, left no other alternative for KPP but to make an unconscious capitulation before the communal forces specially after the decline of the Progressive Coalition ministry which failed to have a 'legitimacy' for itself from either the Muslim *ashrfs* or the bulk of the Muslim peasantry. However, the justifications for the failure of the ministry should not be sought out only from the political tussles between Huq and his Muslim League opponents. It was far trickier than the actual scene. The Forward Block was proved to be a headache for the government ever since Subhas Bose had left India in search of new friends against the British on the wake of the war. The British government was quite sure that in no situation the anti British Forward Block would not be in a position to get any extra mileage from the Progressive Coalition ministry. Already Sarat Bose was arrested in 1941 for security reasons ¹⁷² and the members of the Forward Block and those in the Bose family were interrogated. The government had admitted that '..... it goes without saying....that it would be impossible to contemplate Sprat Chandra Bose as a Minister' and 'his contacts with the Japanese were an additional reason for exercising the greatest care in his case'. ¹⁷³ The approach of the Muslim League was not so very different from the government on this matter.

The Fifth Column Activities are growing in Bengal. The Fifth Column Bengal ministry is encouraging them...At present, Bengal is like a big magazine of Gun-powder ready to explode at any moment.....thanks to the Muslim Quislings who have

surrendered Muslim Bengal to the Mahasabha just as Mir Jafar surrendered Bengal to Clive....¹⁷⁴

The usage of the term 'Fifth Columnist' indicated how imitative the politics had become in this time. The League leaders were using the same phrases frequently referred by the communists while in the eyes of the former communism, the totalitarian creed, was the 'greatest danger facing Islam in the present world'.¹⁷⁵ Even though the Forward Block had two members there in the ministry, Santosh Kumar Basu and Pramathanath Bandhopadhyay,¹⁷⁶ the party had make no serious attempt to transform this prospect into legislative opportunity. The lack of confidence shown on the part of the Forward Block was mainly caused by organizational weakness and absence of proper leadership after Subhas Bose. This party was left on its own fate especially after the arrest of Sarat Bose. As far as the communal sentiments were concerned the arrest of Sarat Bose ended the least possible hopes for Hindu Muslim amity in Bengal. Neither Shyama Prasad Mukherjee nor Fazlul Huq was fit for replacing Sarat Bose in Bengal legislature because none of this leaders were equally acceptable to the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal. It could not be denied that at a certain level of politics it was really very difficult to make a distinction between Forward Block and the Congress and a separate entity of the Forward Block was yet to mature. For the Muslim masses the Forward Block did not make any difference with the Congress and such sentiments remained unchallenged more or less until the partition. Surprisingly the Congress connection of the *Hindu Mahasabha* did not make anything negative for the later instead a continuous showing down of the secular image of the Congress itself. In case of the

KPP the matter was totally different as far as its relation with the Muslim League was concerned. In fact the major political parties from the early forties appeared to take a binary position in Bengal politics, however, their basic attitude to the socio political questions differed vehemently. From late 30s the Congress was seen to demarcate between political struggle for independence from other kind of socio economic struggles because the former question, they concluded, required immediate attention and the other issue would be resolved automatically with the coming of political independence.¹⁷⁷ The most interesting feature of this argument was that same sort of conclusion was drawn in favour of the communal question that it was not a religious but a political and economic problem, generated by the 'political reactionaries' for their own class interests and these issues would come to an end with the attainment of political independence.

The first question which should be in every Indian's heart at present is the question of the independence of the country. Pakistan and such other questions can only be decided after independence is achieved and the government restored to the people of the country.¹⁷⁸ This sort of arguments ran on the Nehruvian line of scientific politics where communalism was to be treated as a political problem and a matter to be settled with political discussions from top. It was the observation of Nehru that the communal propagandas did not affect the reputation of the Congress as a party fighting solely for political independence rather it provoked the middle class Hindus against the Congress for not taking the Hindu cause openly against the Muslim League.¹⁷⁹ It was not the case that the *Hindu Mahasabha* was provided with the agency of taking the

Hindu cause against the Muslim League rather it was evident that Congress policy on the communal issues now took a turn towards a more restricted and well defined course of action committed to electoral success and systematic mobilization of the masses from the top. During the election campaign in 1946 nationalist Muslims and number of *Khaksar* volunteers from outside Bengal were employed in support of the Muslim Congress candidates against the League.¹⁸⁰ The election results also indicated how the Congress politics had been changed from the election of 1937 to 1946. If these changes could be seen as signs of maturity then it must be said that it provided the party some better knowledge to tackle the counter nationalist forces than earlier. The minor political parties except the *Hindu Mahasabha* fell short in this respect. The older ones were seen to move between the same circle of mutual allegations and factional squabble; the relatively new parties got engaged into wider problems less attached with the local political affairs.

At a time when economic emergencies like food crisis, black marketing, hoarding and other problems were to leave a evil shadow over Bengal, the Progressive Coalition ministry did not take or failed to take any radical socio economic programme for the masses. The Premier had to make it sure that no anti Hindu (particularly the Hindu *bhadraloks*) legislative measures would be entertained by the ministry because the support of the Hindu *Magadha* was vital for its survival. But he simply overlooked the fact that no upliftment of the masses could have been done unless the privilege and priorities of a section was challenged. As a natural corollary he lost the game on two sides. In spite of the *Hindu Mahasabha's* presence in the coalition ministry the Hindu *bhadralok* had

never been relieved from the panic and fear of getting jeopardized by the Muslims of Bengal. Not *Hindu Mahasabha* but the Forward Block could have been the first choice of the Hindus but it did not happen. On the other Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had little to offer the majority of the Bengali Muslims. There was no scope for a radical agrarian programme for the Muslim peasants into his scheme for Bengal.¹⁸¹ He was more concerned about the interests of the middle class Hindu *bhadraloks*---the section he himself belonged to. As a result during the Quit India movement the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the Forward Block were seen to get completely isolated from the Muslim masses. In the east Bengal countryside it was visible that the Muslim masses remained totally indifferent to the posters of the Forward Block that the Indian National Army of Subhas Bose was waiting at the border to free India.¹⁸² The *Star of India* had warned them to keep distance from the 'sharks and shoals' that in no condition the fortune seekers could deceive the common Muslim masses.¹⁸³ No wonder that the frequent use of the terms 'quisling' or 'Fifth columnist' by the CPI and some leftists further strengthened the hands of the so-called well-wishers of the Muslim masses in Bengal. However, towards the end of December, 1945 when the prospects of a general election was going high, the communists shifted their stand not too much different from the popular feeling. The post war upsurge in Calcutta was carried in a way of emotional built up over Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army (hereafter INA). Although the Kohima campaign of the INA (March- June 1944) ended in a failure and many of the INA soldiers were taken prisoners back to India, However, people did not believe in the report of his death.¹⁸⁴ the legend of Bose and his army were bound to create

crescendos of protest in Bengal following a popular outburst over the issue of 'the immediate and unconditional release' of all the INA prisoners. Now the CPI, to quote from the memoirs of H.A. Barari, "gave a call for the observance of INA Defense Day in December 1945, saying that though the INA had chosen a wrong path, yet its members were 'misguided patriots' and that the British government had no right to try them. As a matter of fact, such quibbling cut no ice with the ordinary people, who saw through the smoke-screen of their opportunistic jugglery with words."¹⁸⁵ What was the position of the Forward Block at that time? Did they fully utilize the opportunities in favour of their party programmes? It was a pertinent question. One must not close his eyes from the fact that the 'Great Escape' of Subhas Chandra Bose, from India affected the development of the Forward Block in different ways. Apart from creating a vacuum in the level of leadership the departure of Bose and his subsequent interactions with the Fascist powers brought this party under sharp torture and suspicion from the British police and its intelligence. A formal ban was imposed on the party on 23 June 1942 after which many party workers went underground to continue their struggle. On the basis of an alleged connection between the Forward Block leaders and Subhas Bose outside India, a huge number of Forward Block leaders were put beyond the bar including Sardu Singh Kavishee, the acting President of the party.¹⁸⁶ Even though Sarat Chandra Bose was not the acting member of the party, he was taken behind the bar under the Defense of India Rules on 11 December, 1941. The government was even worried about his place of detention. One official source stated that, There is much to be said against keeping him in Bengal; for it will be impossible to prevent communication between him in any jail and his follower outside. Thus it

would be possible for him in a Bengal jail to continue the plotting which it is the aim of the arrest to stop.¹⁸⁷

The government was anxious for two reasons. They did not want Sarat Bose to be taken away by the Japanese from the jail and be a source of help to them and a danger to themselves. Side by side they wanted to make it sure that under no circumstances the followers of Bose including that of the Forward Block could establish a connection with Sarat Bose. This matter was clear from another statement of the Intelligence Branch. In response to a appeal from Bivabhati Devi to transfer Sarat Bose from Coonoor to Calcutta in 1944, it was apprehended that,

Sarat Chandra Bose's return to Bengal at this juncture, even in custody, would undoubtedly create enthualsam in *these groups*, which know very well that when Subhas, went from the country he left his Indian interests in his brother's hands. *They would look to Sarat Chandra Bose for leadership, for guidance and advice* (Italics mine) and the circumstances resulting in his return would make it very nearly impossible for preventive action to stop danger, because association with his family would be inevitable and there is no doubt that some of his family members are involved in what is going on now and are ready to aid Subhas Bose in such ways as they can.....If Sarat Bose contrived to get away and worked 'underground' in Bengal, he wood be a very great danger in present circumstance....¹⁸⁸

Here the words 'these groups' definitely includes the Forward Blok which was left in a state of disorder after the departure of Subhas Bose and arrest of Sarat Chandra Bose. If Sarat Bose could get at least a chance to guide these people even in underground, this party might take the advantage of the existing situation in the province. But the most

interesting part of this story was the re-joining of Sarat Bose into the Congress on Gandhi's request. Amiyanath Bose, one of the close observers from the Bose family, regretted that, "it was a great political blunder on the part of Sarat Bose... Sarat Bose, by rejoining the Congress, deprived himself of an opportunity of becoming the rallying point of an armed revolution, for which India became ripe in November, 1945."¹⁸⁹

The countrywide popular upsurge especially on the issue of the INA trial in 1945 indeed infused some extra vigor and dynamism into the rank of the Forward Block workers that Ramesewar Banerjee and Abdus Salim were killed in police firing at a protest rally on 21 November, 1945.¹⁹⁰ Interestingly the country's political leaders even though voiced the unanimous demand for the immediate release of the INA prisoners without trial, they had failed to get away from old political conflicts and mutual condemnations. At a public meeting organized in support of the INA prisoners at Calcutta it became quite apparent. To quote from Barari,

At this meeting I saw how strained the relationship between the leaders of the Congress and the INA on the one hand and the communists on the other. The Congress leaders came out openly to give vent to their displeasure over the latter's collaboration with the British and the Allied Powers during the country's freedom struggle.¹⁹¹

Politically these leaders had missed the point that the resumption of nationalist and popular forces after the war could be hampered if no united action was taken against the imperialists. The Congress policy of

opposing militant popular confrontation at this stage had strengthened the hands of the Raj including a regrouping of communal and feudal forces. At a time when the general election was round the corner, the Congress seemed to take no risk but to return to its traditional support base more vigorously than before. It was the time for new adjustments. Already the *Hindu Mahasabha* expressed its desire of setting a national coalition party with the Congress,¹⁹² and by late 1945 the Congress workers who had taken legal cover in *Hindu Mahasabha* now returned home with an essential Hindu colourings.¹⁹³ It could not be denied that the minor leftist parties and the communists made an successful attempt to channlise the popular upsurges with various protest rallies and student strikes.¹⁹⁴ CSP-RSP led student organizations, procommunist student orignations were joined by the Muslim League students and the striking labourers from the industrial areas. One official source pointed out,

Students are playing a prominent part in the demonstrations and a general trend of determined lawlessness is noticeable among the younger elements. Some Muslim students have joined in the demonstrations and there is now a move to get the Muslim community as a whole to join in. Communists have joined in the demonstrations, which are being supported by large sections of labour.¹⁹⁵

The real importance of these popular movements laid not in the united action of the Hindus and the Muslims but in the formation of a left alternative arising out of the so called left critique of 'bourgeoisie betrayal'. But the leftist parties did not show any unity in themselves that they could make a total assessment of the Congress policy. If the communists could take the leadership of the left parties during the post war popular movements, the left alternative as a whole might become

more sensible to understand the situation. The left parties fell short to realize that Congress sympathy to the INA prisoners and the revolutionary speeches by the Congress leaders were nothing but election propagandas accommodating the popular sentiments indirectly. The Congress did not dare to make its capitalist friends nervous and remained restricted on the issues of popular confrontation in view of the forthcoming election in 1946. A confident Birla conveyed that, "There is no political leader including Jawaharlal Nehru who wants to see any crisis or violence... Popular impatience and the prevalent atmosphere are responsible for these strong speeches".¹⁹⁶ The communist call for a Congress, League and Communist unity¹⁹⁷ was of no value in a situation when pragmatic political issues were seemed to be more important than anything else. The Congress was to keep its business support intact and the League was to convince the Muslims on the economic usefulness of Pakistan. In this perspective what was needed a wide spread political consciousness of the masses under the communists so that the popular movements could get into the nationalist movement out of its own political consciousness. The post war peasant and labour movements more or less remained as parallel but partial movements against exploitation ---they did not evolve as anti imperialist power struggle connecting all democratic elements of the society.¹⁹⁸ However, it was not so easy for the communists and the leftists having practically no powerful financial resource or large scale organization in Bengal. However, the post war unity shown on the part of the RSP, CSP and the CPI on popular issues¹⁹⁹ failed to get a reflection in the election result of 1946. Out of the eight labour seats the communists got only two while the Congress managed to get five.²⁰⁰ The party's explanation went on the line that

either the Congress manipulation of INA issues had swept the workers or the workers specially those from Non Bengali Hindu origin considered Congress more fit for protecting Hindu interests than the communists while a large section of the non Bengali Muslim workers rallied behind the Muslim League.²⁰¹ The Forward Block was still under ban, however, it seemed that the resolutions and programmes²⁰² taken by this party in February 1946 were not enough to combat the mounting spirit of communalism. It was too late to make the people convinced again on the very essence of class struggle or a classless society. However, the party's stand on uncompromising anti imperialist struggle remained intact.²⁰³

The election of 1946 was fought tactfully by the two major political parties-the Congress and the Muslim League. Contrary to its previous success, the Hindu Mahasabha managed to sustain the only seat of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee while the Congress obtained eighty six seats in general constituencies.²⁰⁴ However, the electoral weakness of the Hindu Mahasabha did not make an impact over its growing preponderance in national matters. Politically and economically the Hindu Mahasabha was more stable than the other minor parties. Unlike the CPI it had never been on attack from the Congress even though some of its leaders had been in ministries in August 1942.²⁰⁵ The period prior the election was proved to be a time of test and self realization for the Mahasabha. Since 1941 a large section of the Schedule castes were getting closed to the Mahasabha and their contribution was no less important in the Mahasabha's project of articulating a political language of extended Hindu community in Bengal. The alignment of a section of the Schedule castes with the League ministry(Jogendranath Mandal,

Pulin Bihari Mullick from the Namasudra community and Premhari Barman from the Rajbanshi community)²⁰⁶ definitely put a pressure on the Mahasabha. This current study does not provide scopes for evaluating the course of schedule caste politics in Bengal. However, it must be mentioned in this regard that Mahasabha's intense campaigning among a large section of the lower castes throughout the early forties brought several changes into the identity formation of the marginal Hindus and in a numbers occasions, these people now began to confront their Muslim opponents not simply as a caste community but as a representative of the entire Hindu community.²⁰⁷ This shift was one of the particular features of their movement in the forties. If a section of the lowers castes were employed by the Mahasabha in the Hinduization programmes, the similar section was found to get involved into class oriented programmes... It was the efforts of the communists and partly the socialists that after the formation of the Kisan Sabha and different pro communist Krisak Samities and the Scheduled castes hailing form the peasant background received the most desirable impetus in fighting the age old exploiters. It seemed quite interesting that different minor parties had tried their luck among the Scheduled caste constituencies but it was the Communist Party which emerged separately from the others. It is to be mentioned here that in spite of the intensive communist activities among a segment of the peasants during the war and the famine, growth of communal politics did not face a retreat among the peasants in general. It was particularly due to the cause that the leftist forces during the war could not move on a similar line in the peasant front. Jay Prakash Narayan in a special notice instructed the CSP workers not to cooperate with the CPI in widespread peasant movements.²⁰⁸ In spite of an increase in

membership during 1942-45 in the Kisan Sabha, the organizational dynamism of the party got missing.²⁰⁹ The gradual departure of the Forward Block and the CSP from the Kisan Sabha platform weakened the solidarity of the Sabha to a great extent and for the Muslim League it was an excellent opportunity of testing its power among the bulk of the Muslim peasantry in Bengal. As far as the lower caste Hindu peasantry was concerned, their allegiance to caste, class or religious identity remained juxtaposed during this time. One may ask that why the CPI could not check the wave of communalization in the areas of its influence as in case of the northern districts of Bengal. One of the main reasons behind it was the opposition of the party to the Muslim *jotdars* and the propertied peasants equally with the Hindu zamindars and the Marwari traders.²¹⁰ Had the protest of the CPI been restricted in character the consolidation of the Muslim propertied class under the League would have been delayed. The CPI failed to put an alternative programme of the League before the election of 1946 and the new league secretary Abul Hashim even successfully endorsed the teachings of Islam under the garb of radical land reform programme—mostly borrowed from the slogans of the Kisan Sabha in Bengal.²¹¹ The ideal of Pakistan put forward by this new section of the League leadership was quite different from that of the Lahore Resolution. It was more economic in nature and more sympathetic to the priorities of the Bengali Muslim in particular.²¹² Throughout the last few years before partition a long series of controversies appeared inside the Bengal Muslim League on the question of balancing Bengali identity with that of the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims.

The famine condition opened a chance for the Hindu Mahasabha to penetrate into the lower caste Hindu peasants also. They took more or less a sectarian approach in conducting relief activities. One of the chief exponents of the Mahasabha's relief works —the Bengal Relief Committee even assured to provide special assistance to the Hindus where they were numerically and economically weak.²¹³ The Social implication of these programmes was very much important for the Mahasabha. The famine works of the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the CSP did not get much attention in this condition.²¹⁴ *Mahasabha's* programmes swiftly extended its middle class and upper caste Hindu social base among the lower caste masses of famine ridden areas. However, one official source informed,

In an attempt to regain the prestige a committee to be known as 'National Relief Committee', which was to include all parties except the *Hindu Mahasabha*... was formed on 17 September, bewitch a framework of Forward Block leaders.²¹⁵

It was the efforts of the communists and partly the socialists that after the formation of the Kisan Sabha and different pro communist Kisan Samities the Scheduled castes hailing from the peasant background received the most desirable impetus in fighting the age old exploiters. It seemed quite interesting that different minor parties had tried their luck among the Scheduled caste constituencies with an objective to full fill their political mission in different ways; it was the Communist Party which emerged separately from the others. It is to be mentioned here that in spite of the intensive communist activities among a segment of the peasants during the war and the famine, growth of communal politics did not face a retreat among the peasants in general. Apart from the other

reasons it was particularly due to the cause that the leftist faces during the war could not move on a similar accord in the peasant front also. Side by side the Radical Democratic Party also went on opposing the CPI for its pro British policy but at the same time it joined in similar accord with the CPI on the Pakistan demand of the Muslim League.²¹⁶

The CPI was standing at the most vulnerable stage of its history at this time. It was to recover its war time image. The government was well aware of the dangers of communist influence among the masses; it offered the party a kind of political discount in organising the peasantry for the support of the anti Fascist front. Thus from 1942-1945 the CPI collected as many as fifty thousand recruits for the Kisan Sabha and infused a new language of consciousness among the victims of the famine comprising mainly the agricultural laborers, sharecroppers, poor peasants and a section of the middle peasants. Interestingly the *Hindu Mahasabha* pointed out that the communist relief works were supported by the League ministry and the communists kept themselves out of the relief works organized by non official organizations.²¹⁷ However, such contentions were left unnoticed because almost all the parties were seen to utilize this disaster for their political ends. The party paid attention on the paddy huskers, artisans and the village manual workers and especially on the destitute women. One may ask that why the CPI could not check the wave of communalization in the areas of its influence especially in the northern districts of Bengal despite its support for the Pakistan demand. One of the main reasons behind it was the mobilization of the poor peasants and the *bargadars* against the Muslim jotdars and the propertied peasants equally with the Hindu zamindars and the Marwari

traders during the famine.²¹⁸ Had the protest of the CPI been restricted in character the consolidation of the Muslim propertied class under the League would have been delayed.

The result of the 1946 election was proved to be the milestone in the history of the second partition in Bengal. Almost all the political parties had to take some lesions from the result. One of the most striking features of the result sheet was the total shut down of KPP from its position a decade before. The Bengal Provincial Muslim League secured the highest number of votes by completely subduing the others Muslim groups. The Congress virtually swept the polls in general seats and its prime opponent the CPI entered the assembly with three seats. The Hindu Mahasabha lost five seats to the Congress except the seat of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee however the contest of these two parties went of without existment.²¹⁹ The Bengali Hindus preferred to vote for Congress which was to take care of their interests more effectively than the *Mahasabha*. The Congress *Mahasabha* fight on the polls seemed to have been an eye wash for numbers of reasons but it was not the truth that the Congress replaced the *Mahasabha* as the sole representative of the Hindus. A considerable numbers of people form different levels of the society were still under the spell of the *Mahasabha* and there were some tasks other than the electoral politics, to be played by the *Mahasabha* in the immediate years before partition. From now it became more or less obvious that in the future course of politics the minor leftist parties would have to very cautious. Except the communist success in three seats, the other left parties were no where after the election. The Radical Democratic Party failed to capture any seat while the other parties even failed to place their

candidature in the election. It was proved that the Royists in Bengal were more isolated than the communists. The India workers especially those belonging to the India Federation of Labour²²⁰ were ready to cast their vote in favour of the Radical Democratic Party, still this party was miserably defected in the election. It was perhaps due to the reason that the Radical Democratic Party leaders were so deeply preoccupied with the political developments of the country that its trade union activities were largely neglected and whatever work they had done in the labour field was under continuous pressure from the communists. After his entry in the jute worker's belt in Barrackpore in 1945, Gour Kishore Ghosh, one young worker of the Radical Democratic Party was severely beaten by the communists there for speaking out against their platform and against their candidates.²²¹ The success of the trade union movements largely depended on the political set up of the country and the disaster of the Radical Democratic Party in the election put the future of its policy of political trade unionism in question.²²² The defeat of the leading communist labour leaders Bankim Mukherjee, Somnath Lahiri and Md Ismail indicated that the communists were yet to get lessons of constitutional politics and electoral tactics.²²³ In almost all the labour seats around Calcutta and Howrah the communist lost the fight including a few seats in Noakhali and Mymansingh. Besides this the CPI had to choose one less famed Jyoti Basu (he was elected from the seat reserved for the railway workers and was supported by the leftist wing of the Muslim League) as the new leader of the elected communists in the legislature because the other two selected leaders did not know English well.²²⁴ Interestingly this communist group inside the assembly had tried to become a third alternative while outside the legislature they took more

or less a balanced attitude to the Congress and the League and the League Communist understanding did not survive for long. Not only the communists but the leftists in 1946-47 were nowhere to take hold of the situation. A detailed analysis of the communist defeat was published by the party after the election.²²⁵ During the communal carnage of Calcutta on 16th August 1946 the party leaders made a futile attempt to channelise communal sentiments of the people into anti British spirit of popular movements. In a statement published in the Communist mouthpiece *Swadhinata*, Somnath Lahiri appealed the Hindus to be restraint and accommodative during the riots and requested the Muslims not to join in anti Congress propagandas of the Muslim League and to focus only on the actual objective.²²⁶ Although on the date of the Direct Action Day²²⁷ the Muslim workers saved the Hindu workers from the rioters in different places, on the whole they did not get remarkable success in preventing non Bengali Muslim workers from joining the League meeting and strike programmes. The call for Direct Action on 16th August 1946, by the League following the crucial episodes of Cabinet Mission Plan and the withdrawal of the League from the interim government²²⁸ signaled the departure of League from constitutional path of action although the Muslim League leaders were not very sure on the nature of this proposed 'Direct Action'.²²⁹ Side by side the degree of Premier Suhrawardy's involvement in the Great Calcutta Killing and the actual statistics of the victims from both of the communities has also remained uncertain ever since and perhaps will remain so always. Nevertheless, in a letter to Sardar Patel, G L Mehta pointed out that KPP leader Fazlul Huq and ex speaker of Bengal legislature Nauser Ali were forced physically to accept the policy of the League and most of the

nationalist Muslims in Bengal were threatened to take up the cause of the Muslim League directly.²³⁰ In his reply, however, Sardar Patel did not take any interest on these so called 'nationalist' Muslims who had been staying outside the League or the Congress in Bengal.²³¹ It was not the Congress but the Hindu Mahasabha who urged the anti League Muslims and the Hindus not to observe *hartal* on 16th August, 1946 because the proposed *hartal* would help the League in securing their demand, i.e. the Pakistan.²³²

The recrudescence of communal riots in the Muslim majority areas of Noakhali Tippera one month after the August violence created an phobic condition in Bengal when Hindus and Muslims started seeing each other as enemy.²³³ The lose of property, insecurity of trade and commerce and the failure of the government to save the lives once again set the partition issue on fire. Now it was the turn of the *Hindu Mahasabha*. In December, 1946 they formed the Bengal Partition League²³⁴ with an idea of partitioning their province into Hindu and Muslim majority areas. It found readily available supporters among Hindu zamindars, businessmen, industrialists and a few Bengali intellectuals. They unequivocally stated:

If 23 percent of Muslim minority in India can demand self determination and autonomy to the extent of absolute right to of separation from future Hindustan, than the 45 percent of Hindu majority in Bengal (a west Bengal including Darjeeling, Dinajpur excluding some thanas, Malda, four thanas of Rajshahi Burdwan Divisions having 69 percent of Hindu majority) can demand the same rights and privileges from future Pakistan.²³⁵

This proposal of the *Hindu Mahasabha* was in sharp contrast of the proposals put by the Bengal League. The Bengal League leaders had viewed the Pakistan scheme of the Lahore Resolution in terms of *two* independent states of the Muslim majority areas ²³⁶ and they envisaged different shapes for the Eastern zone of the proposed Pakistan.²³⁷ However, the non circulation of this distinct ideal of Pakistan during the election of 1946 and Jinnah's deliberate attempt to refrain from any concrete ideal of the scheme up to 1946 indicated that the Muslim leadership were not at all ready to sacrifice the electoral battle for any untimely controversies over the actual character of Pakistan.²³⁸ Once the goal was achieved the central leadership of the League took its stand on clear cut basis. In order to avoid any further dispute on the issue of Pakistan from Bengal Suhrawardy was chosen to move the official resolution on the issue in the open session of the Muslim League Legislator's Convention in April, 1946.²³⁹ What Jinnah had done with Fazlul Huq in 1940, the same type of politics had been played once again in 1946 with Suhrawardy. However, it was this Suhrawardy who proposed for a united sovereign Bengal along with Abul Hashim and some Hindu politicians a few months later. Although in January 1947 these leaders were taking in terms of a united sovereign Bengal, it was only after the *Hindu Mahasabha's* move for the partition of Bengal in early 1947 that the common Bengali nationalism of Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim went on high especially when the hopes for a free state of Eastern Pakistan were lost. The proposed idea of a united independent sovereign Bengal had its own socio economic grounds of practical appeal, however, ²⁴⁰ it remained as a romantic but suicidal move for the Muslim League leaders in general. It seemed that this proposal gained

some currency basically on the assumption that if there had to be any partition of India then Calcutta might have allotted to west Bengal of being a Hindu majority area. In fact Governor Burrows had something in his Partition Scheme although at the same time he put reasons behind making Calcutta a free city.²⁴¹ It was perhaps for these reason that Jinnah expressed his anxieties on a 'truncated Pakistan' and put his tacit approval behind the united sovereign Bengal.²⁴² It would be, he thought 'a sot of subsidiary Pakistan'²⁴³ and with Muslims in major would not remain long outside the West Pakistan. Unfortunately unlike Suhrawardy, Sarat Bose and Kiran Shankar Roy, two other exponents of the proposed united Bengal scheme failed to convince the Congress High Command on the issue. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in a series of letters informed Sardar Patel about Sarat Bose's 'enormous mischief'²⁴⁴ and Patel asked Bose to take a 'united stand' with the Bengal Congress²⁴⁵ or to be precise the *Hindu Mahasabha*. In great despair Sarat Bose warned that the 'future generation will, I am afraid, condemn us for conceding division of India and supporting partition of Bengal and Punjab...'²⁴⁶

One may see here the rapport of the *Hindu Mahasabha* with the Congress in the final hours of partition. The other minor parties were seen to get more or less perplexed on how to express their disapproval and to what extent. Interestingly the Forward Block at a meeting in Calcutta in March, 1947 denounced the transfer of power hastily, its Bengal cadres sent a memorandum to the All India Forward Bloch high command to reconsider its policy of opposing the Bengal partition plan otherwise it would be difficult for the Bengal Forward Block to survive in an atmosphere of growing support for the partition movement.²⁴⁷ But it was

not known that to what extent partition was recommended by the people and what percentage of popular opinion was involved in support of partition. Opposing the plan of united independent Bengal, the KPP asked for a referendum on the question of united Bengal in a united India or partitioned Bengal in a partitioned India. Humayun Kabir requested Suhrawardy to justify his recent professions of 'racial unity of all Bengalis' by passing a bill or at least a joint resolution accepting joint electorate for the province and inviting the Congress in the Bengal legislature to join his cabinet on the basis of joint responsibility.²⁴⁸ The Communists stood for a united and free Bengal in a free India in accordance with the policy of exercising the right to self determination by both the communities in their homeland. They apprehended that in the proposed independent Bengal Anglo American capital (86% of the total investment at that time) would get an easy entrance and it would have a monopoly even over the non Bengali capital. (14% of the total investment at that time). Bhabani Sen, the CPI secretary of Bengal asked for a coalition government in Bengal with the consent of adult voting, joint electorate, equal representation, nationalisation of foreign capital and abolition of zamindari.²⁴⁹ However, Abul Hasim did not come in any understanding with the communists who had already distorted the united Bengal scheme as one of greater Bengal (Hashim and Suhrawardy tried to eradicate the misgivings of the Hindus by including the districts of Manbhum, Singhbhum, Purnia from Bihar, and the Surma Valley of Assam) where the Muslims, they envisaged, would be in minority.²⁵⁰ Gandhi to some extent was convinced and agreed on leaving the fate of Bengal on the will of the Bengalis at that time but the Nehru -Patel group successfully convinced him about the trick of this proposal for dividing

the Hindus and the Schedule caste leaders.²⁵¹ The series of letters exchanged between the leaders like Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Sardar Patel, Sarat Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi in the months before partition²⁵² focused on the vulnerability of common Indian nationalism at this stage in Bengal and the age old practice of managing important political issues at the elite level without the sanction of the masses again put Bengal into dangerous consequences. It is to be noted in this respect that the germ of Bengal partition could be found not in Bengal but in the organized world of elite politics designed by the all India leaders of major political parties and the British government equally. Nehru had serious objections on Mountbatten's proposal of 1st May, 1947, (here Bengal and Punjab would have had the independent position) which would encourage, Nehru thought Balkanization of India along with many 'ulcers in India'.²⁵³ Later on this so called 'Plan Balkan' got converted into 'Plan Partition' which sealed the fate of united independent Bengal forever. After long debated discussions on transfer of power Mountbatten came with a final plan in 3rd June, 1947 which was approved by both the major parties—the Congress and the Muslim League.²⁵⁴ Surprisingly, no single representative from Bengal was present in the 2nd June meeting on the subject. None of the major parties of Bengal could emerge greater than the will and authority of the leaders from others parts of India. As this study do not provide scopes for investigating the details of pre partition political development in India, it is not possible here to make a vivid examination of the events leading to partition. Still it must be pointed out that none of the minor political parties except the *Hindu Mahasabha* had their voice in the end game of empire.²⁵⁵ Not only this, the entire voting episode of 20th June in both the houses of Bengal

legislature was proved to be a show because the decision of partition had already been taken elsewhere and the legislatures in no sense had given the mandate of the people to take the final decision on their future. What remained of the whole drama was the vote of the communists in favour of partition. The other minor parties were nowhere to utter a single word on this ultimate disaster of 1947 even though all of these parties condemned partition in a sharp critical manner. Unlike the Radical Democratic Party who accepted the Mountbatten plan as a fait accompli, the Revolutionary Socialist Party declared that both the transfer of power and the partition of the country was nothing but a 'backdoor deal between the treacherous bourgeoisie leadership of the Congress and imperialism'²⁵⁶; the Revolutionary Communist Party characterized it as the 'result of a political conspiracy hatched by British imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie'²⁵⁷. For the CSP it was an act of 'surrender'²⁵⁸ while the Forward Block declared it in terms of a partnership of the bourgeoisie with British imperialism.²⁵⁹ The Bolshevik Party also condemned partition and independence as an act of 'betrayal'.²⁶⁰ All of the existing minor parties did not pay any interest in scrutinizing the causes that why they had failed to mobilize the people against the so called betrayers whereas their attachment with the people had been more profound than the others. They happened to be the real actors of unorganized politics in Bengal, but ultimately the major parties took an easy hold of that realm of politics by simply leaving the minor parties in state of non existence and sheer silence. The historical puzzle of party politics got dissolved with the disappearance of undivided Bengal in 1947. Only the Bay of Bengal remained as mute witnesses. It becomes true that the political leadership of the minor political parties were left with no choice but to

surrender before the political cross currents what swiftly rebalanced their Bengali priorities with that of a all India demand for separate homeland of the Muslims.

Notes and References

1. For a detailed account of the origin of Forward Block see Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle, 1935-42*, Calcutta, 1952, and *Crossroad*, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 174-75. Also see *Forward Block Er Panchas Bacharer Sangram, Rajnaitik Dalil*, Calcutta, 1990, pp. 10-13
2. Ashok Ghosh and Dr Rathin Chakrabarty (ed.), *A Short History of the All India Forward Block*, Calcutta, 2001, pp. 27-28.
3. Although the CPI stood by Subhas Chandra Bose in all his fight against the Congress fight but they did not join the Forward Block because they thought that it would lead to a cleavage in the Congress and would hamper the anti imperialist movement in India.. At the time of the first conference of the forward Block in 1939, the so-called leftist consolidation broke up and the Royists, the CSP and the CPI withdrew from the Left Consolidation Committee on the . Most of the parties specially the CSP insisted that national unity was the primary requirement of the time and without Gandhi's association in it, it would not be a success. See the *National Front*, Vol II, no 19, 18 June, 1939, p. 309; Nipendranath Mitra, (ed) , *The Indian Annual Registrar*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 360-2
4. For a detail accounted the CPI's stand on this issue see Overstreet, Gene D and Windmiller, Marshall, *Communism In India*, Bombay, 1960, p. 168; *National Front*, Vol II no 6, 19 March, 1939, p. 96
5. See Goutam Chattopahyay, *Subhas Chandra Bose, The Indian Leftists and Communists*, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 26-27
6. See *New Age*, Vol 5, May 1939, p. 501; Overstreet and Windmiller, *op.cit*, p. 170

7. Goutam Chattopadhyay, *op.cit*, p.81
8. For details see *Indian Annual Registrar*, Calcutta, 1940, p.344
9. See S Lal, In a Letter to the Editor, *League of Radical Congressmen; Its Propaganda Role Examined, Forward Block*, Saturday October, 28, p.9, cited in *Forward Block Collected Volume I*, Calcutta, 2008
10. In the thesis called 'Forward Block-Its Justification' Subhs Bose conveyed that upto 1937 the leftists grew within the Congress in influence and numbers. After 1938 the process suffered a check. "After Haripura. Leftists belonging to different parties began to put their heads together with a view to devising ways and means for Leftist strength....The proposal then was to form a Left Bloc ...both the CSP and the National Front at first took the idea of the Left Bloc with great enthusiasm, but they ultimately gave it up....there is no doubt that if the Left Bloc had been launched in time, it would have taken the place of the Forward Block." Cited in Goutam Chattopadhyay, *op.cit*, p.84-85
11. Saroj Mukherjee, *Bharater Communist Party O Amra Calcutta, 1985*, p.131
12. *Ibid.*
13. Goutam Chttopadhyay. *op.cit*, p.85
14. Goutam Chattopadhyay, *op.cit*, p.86
15. *Ibid.*
16. For the objective and programmes of the Forward Block in detail see Appendix III
17. See the news tiles, Sj Suresh Chandra Deb explains the reasons of his joining the Forward Block, *Forward Block*, Saturday October, 28, p.9, cited in *Forward Block Collected Volume I*, Calcutta, 2008

18. Asoke Ghosh & Rathin Chakrabourty *op.cit.* pp.27-28
19. GB, I.B, Note on the Communist Movement in Bengal, 364/38(1),
September 1838-39
20. The CPI had merged with the Bengal Labour Party in 1936 for sake of one communist party in India specially under the influence of the National Front theory. It was deiced that the labour party would be the legal cover of the illegal CPI . the labour leaders did not like the idea of Socialist unity because they believed in the two fold character of the national movement. One against the reactionary nationalist bourgeoisies and the other against British imperialism.. The Labour Party communists strongly opposed the idea of a CSP- CPI understanding because. They thought , it would destroy the real character of a communist unity India as well as destruct the objective and character of the national movement
GB, I.B, Political Circulars Issued by the Secret Section of the Bengal Labour Party, (On Communist Unity' by J/K) File. No.726/39; Bhabani Sen, *Rajnitik Sanghathanik Report*, Calcutta, 1943,p.23-24
21. GB, IB, Political Circulars issued by the Secret section of the Bengal Labour Party, see the article 'Question of United Front and Nature of the Struggle', File. No. 726/ 39
22. *Indian Politics; 1941-44*, Draft Political Report of the Politburo of the Bolshevik Party of India, published by the Politburo of the Bolshevik Party of India, Calcutta, June, 1944, p.1
23. Bhabani Sen, *op.cit.*, pp.15-16
24. For details see, Somnath Lahiri, *Somnath Lahiri Rachanabali*, 1931-1945, Calcutta, 1985, pp.174-175

- 25 See Bhabani Sen, *'The Vision of Economism; , Forward Block, Saturday October,28,p.9,cited in Forward Block Collected Volume I,Calcutta,2008.*
- 26.*Ibid.*
27. See Political Circulars, *'The Role of the Indian Bourgeoisie and Our Task'* ; Bhabani Sen,*op.cit* pp.4-5
28. See Subho Basu, *Does Class Matter, Colonial Capital and Workers Resistance in Bengal; 1890-1937., Delhi, 2004,pp.256-262.*
29. Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, *In Search of Freedom,Calcutta,1967,p.533*
- 30.*Forward Block,op.cit.*pp.9-18
- 31.*Ibid.*
- 32 Jogesh Chandra Chaterjee,*op.cit.*,p.531
33. David. M Laushey,*Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left; Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India 1904-1942, Calutta,1975,p.130*
34. The Congress adopted the policy of individual satyagraha campaign to protest the war peacefully.. A large number of Bengal Congress workers did not pay any serious attention to it rather they became impatient to launch more active programmes without any restriction from the High Command. For a detailed analysis see GB, Home Poll, and Confid.s-24/40 (41) .
- 35.*ABP*, 21 June,1940
36. GB, I.B, 'Note on the development of the Communist Movement in Bengal', File No.364/38 (1)/ (Sep 1938-39).; Home Poll,Confid. W-60/41,1941
- 37.Home Poll,Confid 37/25/1940,
- 38.*ABP*, 2nd March, 1940

39. Satyen Sen, *Gram Banglar Pathe Pathe*, Dhaka, 1970, pp.98-109
40. On the eve of the Second World War in 1939 the Congress Socialist Party took a turn from the peasant front of Bengal got engaged more on other affairs. It was a set back for the peasant movement all over the province and the pro government Muslim peasant organization appeared on the scene. Abdullah Rasul, *Krisak Sabhar Itihas*, Calcutta, 1969, p.92
41. For a detail see Saroj Mukhopadhyay, *op.cit* , pp.155-58.
42. GB, Home Poll, File No. W-184/1940
43. *Ibid.*
44. G.B, Note On the Development of Communist Movement in Bengal, File No.364/38(1), September, 1938-1039)
45. Satyen Sen, *op.cit*, pp.82-83. For details on the peasant movement in Dinajpur in late 30s see Malay Shankar Bhattacharjee, '*The Voice of Timing; Agrarian Unrest in North Bengal*' in *Studies in Micro history in Some Parts of India and Bangladesh 1857-1947*, Calcutta 1987, p.166; Sushnata Das, *Purba Banglar Kayekti Zelar Communist Andolon; Akti Ruprekha 1937-1947* in Abdul Wahad (ed.), *Itihas Anusandhan*, 8, 1993, p.494' Ajit Roy, '*Smritite Dinajpur Zelar Krisak Sangram*', Dhananjay Roy (ed.) *Tebhaga Andolon*, Calcutta, 2000, p.33, Kamal Siddiqui, '*Tebhaga Andolone Krisak Pratiridh Charitra*', Syed Anwar Hosen Muntasir Mamun (ed.) *Bangladeshe Pratirodh Andolon*, p.379
46. Abani Lahiri, *Post War Revolt of the Rural Poor in Bengal : Memoirs of a Communist Activist*, Interviewed by Ranajit Dasgupta, Calcutta, 1999, pp.47-48
47. *Ibid.*

48. Biswanath Chakrabarty, *Dinajpur Jelar Rajnaitik*

tihās, Raiganj, 1392, pp. 57-72 Abani Lahiri---Tiris Challiser Banglai;

Rajniti o Andoloner Avignyata Prasange, Calcutta, 2006, p. 78

49. Ajit Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 33

50. For Jaipaiguri see Paritish Dutta, (ed.), *Karotoya Theke*

Tista, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 45-55

51. Abani Lahiri, *Post War Revolt...*, *op. cit.*, p. 42

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-44

53. Paritosh Dutta, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-55

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. M N Roy proposed for a conference in Calcutta to support the British war efforts. He was the first to support the Government in its anti Fascist war against the Congress policy of 'conditional support. The government was not much convinced of his stand because they thought that he had separated himself from the Congress in expectation that the Congress would be declared illegal soon. The British government in fact was not impressed with his shifting positions in the last few years before the outbreak of the war. See *Resolution of the League of Radical Congressmen*, Meerut, October, 1940, cited in V.B Karnik, *M.N Roy*, *Political Bioliography*, Bombay, 1978, pp. 457-458; M N Roy papers, NMML.

57. GB, Home Poll, Confid. 452/40 1940

58. For a detail of the Radical Democratic Party's policy towards the war see, *India and War, 1942*,. It was widely believed during this time that M N Roy received an amount from the Government as reward for his support to the war. L.P Sinha, *Left Wing in India*, Muzaffarpur, 1954, p. 523

59. See *Thesis of the RSP on the Russo- German war- Intensify National Struggle 'On to the Defense of USSR*, Calcutta, 1941, pp.15-18

60. The government assumed that the RSP, the Forward Block and the Congress might have an agreement to hamper the war effort of the government. GB 102/42 1942, See *On National Struggle of August, 1942*, Calcutta 1942

61. GB IB, Confidential, File No. 704/41.

62. *Ibid*

63. *Ibid*.

64. GB, Special Branch, File No. SN 653/43 II.

65. Ashoke Ghosh and Rathin Chakrabourty (ed.), *op. cit*, p.36

66. For the approach of Soumen Tagore to the CSP and the CPI see *Congress Socialism ?*, Calcutta 1930

67. *Ibid*, For details see Soumen Tagore, *Bourgeoisie Democratic Revolution in India*, Calcutta 1939,

68. Robert J Alexander, *International Trotskyism, ; Trotskyism in India*, *Revolutionary History*, Vol I, NO.4, Winter, 1988-89; To know about Trotskyite movement see *The Times*, March 1924. P.C. Joshi in *National Front*, 19 March 1939, p.96.; Partha Sarathi Gupta, *British Labour and the Indian Left* in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Socialism in India*, New York, 1972.; Bankey Bihari Misra, *The Indian Political Parties: An Historical Analysis of Political Behavior up to 1947* Delhi, 1976

69. See Gour Pal: "*Indian Trotskyism and the Revolutionary Communist Party*," (typed Memo), 1983, page B/I, ; *Historical Development of Communist Movement in India* , Revolutionary Communist Party of India, Calcutta, December, 1944 pp.449

70. See Soumen Tagore, *Permanent Revolution*, Calcutta, 1944,

71. Gour Pal, *op. cit.*, p.D/25

72. See *Against the Stream, An Anthology of Writings of Soumendranath Tagore*, 'Introduction', Ahmedabad, 1984, p.XIV; GB IB, File No, 1045/1940.

73. 'Revolution and Quit India' in *Against the Stream*, vol III ,pp.108-24

74. 'Onward From 1942', *Ibid*,pp.125-33

75. *Quit India in Retrospect*, *Ibid*,pp.159-69

76. For details see Amitava Chanda, 'Communist League Theke RCPI; Samantaral Communist Sanghathaner Bikasher Bibhinna Parjyay.', Abdul Wahab, *op. cit.* ,1995

77. *Against the Strem*, *op. cit.*,pp.159-67

78. Amitabha Chanda, *op. cit.*,pp.334

79. Home Poll. File No.29/10/1942

80. *Ibid.*

81. For the party's policy see *Indian Politics*, 1941-44, Calcutta 1944, published by the Bolshevik Party of India,

82. The Bolshevik party noted the conflict between the imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie, the two partners of the bourgeois exploitative system in India, but it was clear to them that the national bourgeoisie were incapable of playing any revolutionary role, being themselves closely tied to feudalists as well as imperialists. They held that the working class in India was strong enough to play an independent role, and win leadership of the revolution by winning the poor peasants and agricultural proletariat to its side *Ibid.*

83.GB, Special Branch, File No,S.R 508/1942; *Indian Politics, op.cit,p.67*; *Imperialism, Indian Fascism, and the people*, Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party of India, Calcutta,1948,pp.28-38;L.P Sinha,*op.cit,pp.525-527*

84.Home Poll confined. File No,S.R 704/1941

85.Gour Pal.*op.cit p.D/25*

86.On 15th December 1941 almost six months after the Soviet Union entry into the war following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the CPI made a fundamental change in its attitude to the war. The war now ceased to be the Imperial War', and became the People's War 'for CPI.Now CPI offered its support to the 'people's war' in order to ensure the defeat of the Fascist powers. Politburo Resolution; *People's War Against Fascism, December,15,1941, Home Poll, File No,44/32/1942.*

87 See *Communist*,Vol 2.No.8, April 1940, cited in D. N Gupta, *Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1939-45*,New Delhi,2008,p.128

88.See Goutam Chattopadhyay,*op.cit.pp.84-85*

89. Amalendu Sengupta , *Uttal Challish,Asamapta Biplab*, Calcutta, 1989,p.5. For the *adhiar* movement going at this time in North Bengal see, Ranajit Dasgupta, *Economy, Society, and Politics in Bengal; Jalpaiguri,1869-1947*,p.194; Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal,'*The Quit India Movement in Medinipur District*', in Gyanendra Pandey (ed) *Indian Nation in 1942*,Calcutta,1988,p.44

90.Jyoti Basu,*Fire Dekha Swadhinata, Swadhinata Sangrame Communistder Bhumika*,p.15 cited in,Kamal Choudhury (ed) *Banglai Gana Andolanar Chai Dasak*,Vol. I, Calcutta,2009,pp.57-58

103. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 25 March, 1933
104. G B Home Poll, Report of the DIG/ I B ,19 August, File No.222/41/1941
105. For details follow the opinion of veteran CPI leader Ajay Ghosh delivered at a public meeting in Calcutta, on 25 January, 1957 see *Yugantar*, 26.12.57, cited in Amalendu Sengupta, *op.cit*, pp.32-33
106. Manikuntala Sen, *Sediner Katha*, Calcutta, 1982, p.61
107. 'Report on Reformist Deviation' of the Second Congress of the CPP, 1948, pp.129-33, see B T Ranadive, *op.cit*.
108. Amalendu Sengupta, *op.cit*, p.6
109. For a detail analysis see John Zavos, *The emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, Delhi, 2000, pp.3-17; Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition; The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, New Delhi, 2000. *Introduction*.
110. *Ibid*.
- 111 See the Introduction, Rakesh, Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal; From Famine to noakhali, 1943-47*, New Delhi, 2005
112. Before the Calcutta corporation election of 1940 both Subhas Bose and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee came closer in working out an electoral understanding. They could not arrive at any agreed decision about the candidates to be set up for two particular constituencies. The pre election days were marked by serious clashes between the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the Forward Block. It was alleged that the first election meeting of the *Hindu Mahasabha* was disturbed by 'organized hooliganism' of the supporters of Subhas Bose., Ashim Kumar Dutta (ed.), *Leaves from a Diary : Shyama Prasad Mukherjee*, New Delhi, 2000, p.33; Subhas Bose Records, File No.PH501/41II, p.27

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid*

115. *Ibid*

116. Out of a total of about 51000 Hindu votes in the general constituency , the Bose supporters and the Hindu *Mahasabha* poled together about 41000 votes and the Bose group alone 21000 votes. The *Mahasabha* got the support of 20000 votes. Pranab Kumar Chatterjee, *Struggle and Stiff in Urban Bengal 1937-47*, Calcutta,1991,pp.88-89

117. Ashim Kumar Dutta, *op.cit*,pp.33-34

118. Official sources referred to a secret pact between the Subhas Chandra Bose and the Muslim League. GI,John Herbert to Linlithgow,21 December, 1940,Kinlithgow collection, GI, 4.; Advance 19 April,1940

119.The Bose League agreement was the most dramatic event of the time in the government cycle. For the details see, Bengal Report for the second half of April 1940,GI Home Poll, confide. File No. 18/4/40.(I)

120. *Hindustan Standard*,19 April,1940; Forward 20 April,1940,

121. See *Forward*, Vol III No.13, 27 April, 1940; *Advance* 19 April,1940, ; *The Modern Review*, May 1940, .*The Tribune* of Lahore even criticize the pact as one of the most amazing things and charged Subhas Bose for a 'gravoious mistake'. *The Tribune*, Lahore 16 April, 1940 (editorial).

122. Ashim Kumar Dutta,*op.cit*,p.34

123. *Ibid*,p.33

124. See Subhas Chandra Bose, *Crossroads*, Calcutta,1981, pp.310-311.

125. See, Prasanta Kumar Chatterjee, *Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Indian Politics*, New Delhi, 2010,pp.76-78

126. For a detail of the relationship between the Congress and the Birla's see G D Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma, A Personal*

Memoirs, Calcutta, 1953; GB ,SB, Memo dated 3 December, File No.501/39 (iii); GOI Home Poll, File No.4/14-A 40.

127. See Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-47*, New Delhi, 1991, Ch 5

128. GI, Home Poll, File No.9//44

129. In 1939n Shyama Prasad Mukherjee demanded the recruitment of Hindu youths of Bengal into the Army as an expression of their loyalty. The *Hindu Mahasabha* hoped that if they supported the British in their war efforts , the youth would receive military training and would be able to carry arms. See the Resolution passed by the *All India Hindu Mahasabha* , Calcutta, December 29, 1939. *Akhil Bhrtiya Hindu Mahasabha Papers*, NMML

130. Hindu Mahasabha leader Savarkar believed in a nationalistic economy. According to him all strikes and lockout tend to undermine and cripple industry and production. They weakened the economic strength of the nation. . Thus in the Calcutta Session of the Sabha in 1939 he urged the Hindus to utilize the opportunities afforded by the war to the militarization and industrialization of the community. He suggested o participate in the war efforts as they helped in bringing about industrialization and militarization of the Indians. See Savarakar's Presidential Address, *All India Hindu Mahasabha*, Madras December 28, 1940. *Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha Papers*, and NMML.

131. *Ibid*

132. *Ibid*

133. For Savarkar- Rashbihari Basu Correspondence see Savarkar Papers, letter dated May 23, 1938, from the secretary *Hindu Mahasabha* ,Bombay office to Rashbihari Basu, NMML, microfilm, rn23.

134. See Savarkar Papers, no 23,,letter from the Secretary of the *Hindu Mahasabha* Rashbihari Basu, 4 November,1938.
135. John Herbert to Linlithgow,6th January,1940, Linlithgow Collection National Archive of India,,4.
- 136.*Ibid*
137. For a reference see *Report of the commissioner Dacca Division, November, 1945,GB,File No.37/45.. The Congress during the election of 1946 did not make a serious move against the Mahasabha rather appreciated the Mahasabha's call for Hindu unity.*
138. Ashim Kumar Dutta,*op,cit*,p.32
- 139.*Ibid.*
140. For a detail see Shri Prakash, *CPI and the Pakistan Movement* , in Bipan Chandra (ed.), *Studies in history*, Vol III, no.1-2, Delhi, 1981, pp.215-258.
141. G Adhikari, *Pakistan and National Unity*, Bombay,1942, cited in, D. N Gupta, *op.cit*,240-241; P. C Joshi,' *Reject the British Plan,-- Communist Approval to the AICC* ', in *People's Age*, July 7, 1946.; *People's Age*, August 4, 1946
142. Shri Prakash,*op.cit*,pp.215-258
- 143.*Ibid.*
- 144.For a detailed account of the CPI's line on various issues including the 'Quit India' movement or the policies of People's War see, Unity in Action; For National Defense and National government, Resolution passed unanimously by the First Congress of the CPI, 1943, pp22 in T G Jacob (ed), *National Question in India, CPI Documents,; 1942-47*, New Delhi,1988, pp.80-104.; Arun Bose and Khoka Roy, *Inside Bengal,1941-*

44. *Forward Block and its Allies versus Communist Party*, Bombay, 1945, p.65,
145. See, Amalendu De, *Fazlul Huq and His Reaction to the Two Nation Theory, 1940-1947*, in *Bengal Past and Present*, January-April, 1974, pp.26-27.
146. See GI Herbert to Linlithgow, Government Fortnightly Report/P & J/5/146.; Choudhury Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Lahore, 1961, p.248
147. GI, Hertbert to Linlithgow, 8 October 1940, Government Fortnightly Report/p& J/5/147.
148. Latter dt. 10th June, 1941, From Khwaja Nazimuddin to Jinnah, in Harun -or Rashid, *Inside Bengal Politics, 1936-1947*, Dacca, 2003, p.101
149. Ashim Kumar Dutta, *op. cit*, p.34
150. G B Fortnightly Report of the Government of Bengal, 1st Half of December, 1941, Hoe Poll, File No. w/102/42.
151. *ABP*, December 2, 1941
152. *Hindustan Standard*, December 4, 1941
153. Extract from private and personal letter from Linlithgow to Amrey, 27 December 1941, Formation of New Government, p.280, Cited in Harun-Or Rashid, *Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, *op. cit*, p.131, (n. 279)
154. M .H Ispahani, *Quid-I Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him*, Karachi, 1966, p.52
155. Suhrawardy's Report to the Sirajganj Conference of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, published in the *Azad*, 14 February, 1942
156. Harun or Rashid, *op. cit*, pp.129-133
157. See letter dated 3rd June, 1941, Raghieb Ahsan to Jinnah, Harun-Or Rashid, *Inside Bengal Politics*, *op. cit*, pp.130-31

158. Government Fortnightly Report, Herbert to Linlithgow, 11 February, 1942, L/P & J/5/149.
159. *Star of India*, 26 January, 1942, p.2
160. See the statement issued by the Muslim League ministers on 5th December, 1941 in *Star of India*, 5 December, 1941.
161. See the translated speech of Suhrawardy at Khulna on 15^v January, 1938, Azad, 20 January, 1938, p.8, cited in Harun-or-Rasid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh, op.cit*, p.105.
162. In Bengal M A H Ispahani, Abdur Rahman Sidiqi and some other non Bengali businessmen acted as the most trusted followers of Jinnah and the All India Muslim League. In 1937 six non Bengali Muslim businessmen were included into the organization committee of the Muslim League in Bengal. These non Bengali Muslim community had little knowledge about Bengal rather they were more interested to make a place for themselves in the city centric polices so that the economic interests of their community could be protected as well. In fostering the non Bengali Muslim sentiments these people had played an important role and the Bengali Muslim interests had to face a stiff opposition from this group in each and every political occasions. Surprisingly Ispahai happened to be the first choice of Jinnah not Suhrawardy in the working committee of the All India Muslim League from Bengal. Ispahani was preferred in view of the need to augment League funds. See *Star of India*, 26 October, 1937, p.5, *Ibid*, p.9; *Jinnah to Ispahani*, 13 December, 1941 in Z H Zaidi, *Jinnah Ispahani Correspondance, 1936-1948, Karachi, 1976, p.255.*

163. See Jamiluddin Ahmed, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, Lahore, Vol II, 1968,p.597

164. Z H Zaidi,*op. cit*,pp.274-275.

165.For details of M A Jinnah's family background see Stanley Wolpart, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, New York, 1984,pp.4-5.

166.After the passing of the Lahore Resolution the All India Muslim League decided to observe 19th April, 1940 as Muslim Independence Day and in support of the issue they organized several meeting in different parts of the province confirming the proposal as Muslim right to self determination. This type of moves on the part of the Muslim League had a backing from the growing cry of Fazlul Huq's betrayal of Muslim interests in Bengal. Opposition to the new Huq ministry infact helped to publicize the Pakistan proposal in Bengal. *Star of India*, 24 April, 1940,pp.3-7.

167. See Amalendu De, *Fazlul Huq and His Reaction to the Two Nation Theory (1940-47)*, in *Bengal Past and Present*, January-April,1974,p.31

168. Letter of A K Fazlul Huq, 2 February, 1943, *The Statesman*, 3 February, 1943 cited in Amalendu De, *Ibid*, pp.30-31.

169.*Star of India*, 11 June, 1942,p.1.

170.The most famous third paragraph of the first resolution of Lahore stated that, 'it is the considered view of the Session of the All India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles viz. that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted , with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North Western and

Eastern zones of India , should be grouped to constitute Independent States in which the constituent unites shall be autonomous and sovereign.’. However in this scheme no attention had been paid on the percentage of the Muslims in the geographically adjacent areas of Bengal where the Hindus were majority in number. See, Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan; All India Muslim League Documents*, Vol II, Karachi, 1969, p.341 also see, Shyamali Ghosh, ‘*Fazlul Huq and Muslim Politics in Pre Partition Bengal*’, in *International Studies* July December, 1974, Vol 13, No.3, pp.456-457.

171. For the political ideals of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee see A C Banerjee, *A Phase in the Life of Dr Shyamaprasad Mukherjee* , 1937-1946, Calcuta, 2000, pp.71-72.

172. *ABP*, 11 December, 1941.

173. GI, Home Poll, File No, 94/26/41 and GI Extract from private and personal letter from Lord Linlithgow to Mr. Amrey, File No. P&J/7542/1945, December 30, 1941.

174. Letter dated 27 March, 1942 from Raghieb Ahsan to M A Jinnah, see, Harun-or- Rashid, *Inside Bengal Politics, op. cit*, p.136.

175. Letter dated 28 August 1944 , from Raghieb Ahsan to Liaquat Ali Khan, see, Harun-or-Rashid, *Ibid*, p.141.

176. *ABP*, 12 December, 1941

177. See Gyanendra Pandey, ‘*Congress and the Nation, 1917-1947*’, in Richard Sission and Stanley Wolpart (ed.), *Congress and Indian Nationalism*, Bark;ey, 1988, pp.129-130..

178. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 14, 219, New Delhi, 1981, pp.221-222.

179. See Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel Correspondance, 1945-50*, Ahmedabad, 3; 168, cited in Gyanendra Pandey, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

180. Governor's Fortnightly Report, L/P&J/5/152, p. 33; *ibid.*, 1st half, February 1946.

181. In its 21st annual session in Calcutta 1939, the *Hindu Mahasabha* resolved to launch a campaign against the communal policy of the Huq League ministry but did not refer to the measures taken in favour of the agricultural masses. They put an attack on the legislative enactments which deliberately curbed, they thought, the rights of the Bengali Hindus (middle class specially) and crippled their economic strength. See S A I Tirmizi (ed.), *The Paradoxes of Partition 1937-1947*, Vol I (1937-1939), New Delhi, 1998, p. 967.

182. In the name of a non-existent organization called the Revolutionary Subhas Party Forward Block distributed anti-war leaflets. It urged the people to take instructions from the Free Hindustan broadcast. Already in a broadcast Japanese Premier Tajo declared, 'Now is a golden opportunity for the Indian people to exert their utmost efforts for the establishment of their desire 'India for the Indians' ...the British influence in India is going to be exterminated'. The leaflets issued by the Forward Block actually asked the Indian masses to bring nearer the excellent opportunity for India. See Fortnightly Report for Bengal, First half of April, 1941; Home Poll, (Intelligence) File No. 110/42, 1942; Home Poll, (Confidential), File No. 37/6 1942.

183. *Star of India*, 19 August, 1942.

184. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 23 August, 1945.

185. H A Barari, *Kolkata To be Young Was Paradise*, New Delhi, 2006, p. 123.
186. Asoke Ghosh & Rathin Chakrabourty (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 35.
187. GI, Home Poll, File No. 94/26/11, Arrest of Sarat Chandra Bose 1941.
188. GI, Home Poll, (I) Sec, (I.B), File No, 44/1/44Poll(1).
189. See, Amiyanath Bose, *Bose Brothers and the Indian Struggle*, in Dibyajyoti Majumdar (ed.) *Netaji Subhas Chandra Basu; Janmashata Barshiki Smarak Grantha*, Government of West Bengal, 1997, p. 229
190. Rameshwar Banerjee, a college student refused to throw away the national flag that he had been carrying when asked by the police. He was murdered by the police. See letter of Rameswar's father dated 24 November, 1945, *ABP*, 29 November, 1945. and Asoke Ghosh & Rathin Chakraourty (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 40.
191. H. A Barari, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
192. On the supposed collaboration between the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha see GI, Fortnightly Report, 2nd half of January, 1944, Home Poll, File No. 18/1/44 and also see Jaya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 144.
193. GB, Fortnightly Report, 1st half of November 1945, Home Poll, (Confidential), File No. 37/45.
194. A numbers of historical writing and research works have dealt with the post war popular upsurges. Special mention may be made of Sumit Sarkar, *Popular Movements, National Leadership and the Coming of Freedom with Partition, 1945-47*, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, April, 1982; Goutam Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution' in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar*, New Delhi, 1976, Amalendu Sengupta, *Uttal Challis, op. cit.* Sucheta Mahajan,

Independence and Partition; The Erosion of Colonial Power in India, New Delhi, 2000; Goutam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt Against the Raj, 1945-46', in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality; The Struggle for Freedom in India, 1945-47*, New Delhi, 1987.

195. GI, Home Poll, File No. 21/18/45-Poll(I).

196. G D Birla to Henderson, 6th December, 1945 in N Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer of Power*, Vol VI, London, various dates, p. 438.

197. For details see, Goutam Chattopadhyay, *The Almost Revolution*, *op. cit*, p. 445. in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar*, New Delhi, 1976

198. See the arguments of the CPI leaders like Bhabani Sen., Moni Singh, Krishna Binod Roy on the limitations of the Tebhaga struggle in Tebhaga Sangram, Rajat Jayanti Smarak Grantha, published by the Communist Party of India, Calcutta, 1973, p. 51.; also see Narahari Kabiraj, *Tebhaga Andolon*, in Narahari Kabiraj (ed.), *Asamapta Biplab O Asampurna Akangkha; Bharater Swadhinata Sangramer Itihas*, Calcutta, 1997, pp. 192-197.

199. At a public meeting held in Calcutta in 1945, Gandhian leader Satis Dasgupta, RSP leader Nani Bhattacharya, CSP leader Gunada Mazumdar, CPI leader Somnath Lahiri, Muslim student leader Moazzem Husain addressed the gathering. It was presided by Muslim League leader Suhrawardy. See Goutam Chattopadhyay, *op. cit*, p. 162.

200. *The Statesman*, 2 April, 1946.

201. See the opinion of trade unionist communist leaders in Pranab Kumar Chatterjee, *Struggle and Strife in Urban Bengal, 1937-47*, Calcutta, 1991, p. 172.

202. For a details of the party programmes and resolutions of the Jabbalpur session, 1946, see, Asoke Ghosh & Rathin Chakrabourty, *op. cit.*, pp.40-41.

203. *Ibid.*

204 *The Statesman*, 2 April, 1946

205. In this regard the opinion of V D Savarkar was- in a Hindu minority province where a League ministry was inevitable, Hindu Sabhas should join, and not boycott the ministry and convert it into a coalition one so that the Hindu ministers could protest any resolution supporting Pakistan or provincial self determination. Chances were high that a League-Mahasabha ministry could have been formed in Bengal including six Muslims, three caste Hindus and three Scheduled Caste ministers. However, it did not materialize because the Hindu Mahasabha was not prepared to enter into a coalition with the League unless the Pakistan Resolution was put on ice. See Savarkar's presidential address, Madras, December 28, 1940 in Subhog Mthur(ed.) *Hindu Revivalism and the Indian National Movement; Documentary Study of the Ideas and Policies of the Hindu Mahasabha, 1939-45*, Jodhpur, 1996, pp16-17;

206. See Sekhar Bandhyapadhyay, *Development, Differentiation and Caste; The Namsudra Movement in Bengal, 1872-1947*, in Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay, Abhijit Dasgupta and Willem Van Schendel (ed.), *Bengal; Communities, Development and State*, New Delhi, 1994, p.108.

207. Throughout the period Paundra Kshatriya leader Patiram Ray in western Bengal served as a link between the Hindu Mahasabha and the local Scheduled Caste people while in eastern Bengal Upendranath Edbar received regular funds from the Mahasabha for organizing the Scheduled caste people of the region. See, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Papers, II-IV,

- Installment, Subject File No. 90, Nehru Memorial Museum Library (NIML hereafter). The efforts of these people and the influence of the *Mahasabha* definitely helped to articulate one Hindu identity among the Scheduled Castes and in most of the communal clashes, these people began to confront the Muslims as Hindus, not simply as lower castes. For a detail of the situation see Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay, *Caste, Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*, New Delhi, 2004, 208. See *The Times*, 17th Oct, 1941.
209. See Abdullah Rasul, *op.cit.*, p. 118
210. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op.cit.*, pp. 200-17.
211. See Ramakrishna Mukherjee, *Social Indicators*, Delhi, 1975, p. 62; Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine*, Delhi, 2009, p. 145.
212. See Abul Hasim, *In Retrospect*, Dhaka, 1974, p. 23.
213. Report of Relief Work by Bengal Provincial *Hindu Mahasabha*, 1944, p. 20
214. Home Department, Fortnightly Report, 1st half, June, 1943.
215. Cited in Rakesh Batyabal, *Communaism in Bengal; From Famine to Noakhali 1943-47*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 120
216. Overstreet and Winmiller, *op.cit.*, pp. 200-217.
217. Report of Relief Work by Bengal Provincial *Hindu Mahasabha*, 1944, pp. 18-20
218. Home Department, Fortnightly Report, 1st half March, 1943,
219. GI, Home Poll, File No. 79/46 Vol. III, PIB Morgue and Reference Series.
220. *Bulletin of the Indian Federation of Labour*, March-April, 1945, p. 45, cited in Dipti Kumar Roy, *op.cit.* pp. 103-104

221. See the biography of Gourishore Ghosh.<http://www.rmaf.org.ph/Awardees/Biography/BiographyGhoshGou.htm>,24.12.2010..
- 222.Dipti Kumar Roy,*op.cit*,pp.103-104
- 223.Sankar Ghosh, *Hastantar*, Vol.I,Calcutta, 2001,pp.72-78.
- 224.*Ibid*,p.72; also see the statement of Abul Hashim, the secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, *In Retrospect*,pp.101-102, cited in Amalendu Sengupta,p.148.
225. See the *Swadhinata*, 23 March, 1946, cited in Amalendu Sengupta, *op.cit*, pp.150-162.
226. *Swadhinatar Sampadakiya Nibandha*, 'Aaj Soloi August' by Somnath Lahiri, see, editorial, *Swadhinata*, 16 August, cited in Amalendu Sengupta,*op.cit*,p.180.
- 227.On July 19,1946 the Council of the All India Muslim league in Bombay adopted a resolution on Direct Action against the British government for the achievement of Pakistan. The working Committee of the League declared August 16 as Direct Action Day. It instructed the Muslims to suspend all business on the day and observe complete *hartal* and directed provincial and district League to hold public meetings throughout the country to explain the resolution. See, *Star of India*,31 July,1946,p.1
- 228.Sayed Abul Maksud, *Gandhi, Nehru and Noakhali*, Dhaka,2008,pp.14-23.
- 229.Sailesh Kumar Bandopadhyay,*Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Creation of Pakistan*, New Delhi,1991,pp.279-281.
- 230.*Sankar Ghosh,op.cit*,p.109.
- 231.*Ibid*.

232. *Star of India*, 21 September, 1946, pp. 3-4.

233. Foa detailed account sees Rakesh Batabyal, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-365.

234. GB Special Branch, Police File, Memo NO. 286/87/SB on the Bengal Partition League GBSB, PM Series, File No. 822/46II

235. See *The Modern Review*, 'Notes', February, 1947, pp. 86-90; also see Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's address at a public meeting, *Star of India*, 29 January, 1945, p. 2

236. Sarat Chandra Bose, *Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta, 1982, pp. 60-61.; Abul Hashim's Draft Manifesto of the Bengal League, *Star of India*, 1945, p. 3.

237. Though M.A. Jinnah avoided defining Pakistan in concrete terms until 1946, the Muslim League leaders in Bengal had already developed the idea of Eastern Pakistan consisting of Bengal, Assam and a portion of Bihar as a sovereign state. IN 1944 Raghīb Ashan's plan of Confederacy of East Pakistan and Adibasistan (a confederation between Bangassam and the autonomous homeland of Adibasistan to be created for the tribes of certain adjoining districts of Bihar) gained currency among the majority of Bengal Muslim League leaders while the another minor section advocated a more homogeneous Pakistan comprising of whole of Assam, Bengal minus Burdwan Division and a portion of Purnia district in Bihar. Actually in 1944 there different proposals came out of the discussion. 1. Raghīb Ahsan's plan, 2. Formation of East Pakistan and 3. Hamidul Huq Choudhury's proposal for a united Bengal and Assam as a unit of Pakistan. Md. H R Talukdar, *Memoirs of Hyseyan Saheed Suhrawardy*, Dhaka, 1987, p. 28; also Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p. 232.

237. Harun-Or Rashid, *op. cit.* pp., 174-180.

238. For details see, Harun-Or Rashid, *Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, *op.cit*,pp. 193-207.

239. *Star of India*,9 April,1946.

240.For details see, Amalendu De, *Swadhin Bangabhumi Gathaner Parikalpana Prayas O Parinati*,Calcutta,1975,pp.7-33.

241. See Barrows' Partition of Bengal Scheme and Explanatory Notes, The Transfer of Power,X,pp.390-94cited in ,Harun-or Rashid,*op.cit*,p.269.

242.Harun-or-Rashid,Ibid., pp.274-275.

243. Viceroy's Personal Report,No.2,cited in Harun-or Rashid,*Ibid*,p.275.

244.Durga Das,(ed.),*Sardar Patel's Correspondance,1945-1950,Vol.IV*, Amdabad, 1972,p.159.

245.Ibid.p.160.

246.Ibid,p.161.

247. Only eight of the Executive council members of the party including Leela Roy, Satya RanjanBakshi,Anil Baran Roy, Hem Ghosh and Jotish Joardar supported Sarat Bose's move.Memo dated 5 May,1947,in Government of Bengal, Special Brach of Police, PM Series, File No. 938/47IV.

248.Statement by Humayun Kabir in *The Statesman*,13 May,1947,p.4.

249. Bhabani Sen., *Bangabhanga O Pakistan*, Calcutta, pp.45-47 cited in, Amalendu De,*op.cit*.pp.82-89.

250.Amalendu Sengupta,*op.cit* pp.230-233

251. Prayer Meeting,8 June,1947,Mahatma Gandhi Collected Works,vol.88,p.103

252. Amalendu De,*op.cit*,pp.

253. Interview to Norman Cliff of the News Chronicle, 25 May, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru Selected Writings, 2nd Series, vol. 2, p. 179.
254. Nitish Sengupta, *Bengal Divided; The Unmaking of a Nation 1905-1971*, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 154-155.
255. For details see, Jaya Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-265
256. See the *Thesis of the RSP on the Russo German War—Intensify National Struggle: On To Revolutionary Defense of USSR*, Calcutta, 1941, pp. 15-18
257. See Amit Kumar Gupta, *Agrarian Drama; The Leftists and the Rural Poor in India*, New Delhi, 1996, p. 402
258. *Ibid*
259. Forward Block at a meeting in March, 1947 at Calcutta adopted a resolution denouncing the transfer of Power as a 'bogus transfer of power'. The resolution asked the masses and other patriotic forces to carry on relentless struggle for the seizure of power for the Indian people. *Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta, 1947, p. 197
260. Amit Kumar Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 402.

Conclusion

The Partition of Bengal in 1947 and the subsequent socio economic and political turmoil have ever been a matter of great concern. The depth and complexities of Bengal partition can not be fully understood through a general analysis of the high politics of the major political parties only. Right from the introduction of Diarchy in 1919, the minor political parties appeared on the political scene of Bengal and elsewhere of India with specific programmes and objectives different from the major political parties. From this time these parties responded in different ways on various occasions considered to be crucial for the history of Indian national movement. The overarching presence of the major political parties, however, created problems time to time for these minor political parties to balance their transnational Bengali identity with the political decisions taken by the former for the purpose of all India political problems. India was partitioned in spite of having two major parties with similar backgrounds and structures mainly because of the prejudice on the part of the parties towards one another. The Indian National Congress was not ready to accept Muslim League as the representative of the Muslims and claimed itself to be the representative of all communities. On the other hand the leaders of the Muslim League were not interested in conceding their position as being the spokesmen of the Muslims to any other political party. Therefore the sentiment that the Congress was a Hindu body, and that in spite of the presence of a few Muslims in the Congress, it did not represent the Muslims, gained a ground in Bengal. As soon as the Muslims entered politics formally and acquired a separate constitutional identity, a number of Muslim political

parties emerged to safeguard the interests of their community. These parties were not more than in a form of electoral adjustment, however, they signified the dilemmas and confusions of the non Muslim political parties in adopting the Muslim cause openly. The Swarajist failure to implement the Bengal Pact of 1923 further consolidated the Muslim block in the assembly. There were a few in the Bengal Congress who took serious concern on the very fate of the pact. A large section of the Congress including the militant revolutionaries was overly anti Muslim while others only paid a lip support to the pact. If after the untimely death of Chittaranjan Das in 1925 the Congress and the Swarajists had then taken anti zamindar stand inside and outside the legislature, the peasant masses of Bengal could perhaps remain out of the sectarian influences. If it could happen, the peasant masses might have been involved in anti colonial struggle under the leadership of the nationalist parties. However, the very unwanted development took place in Bengal politics. It is noteworthy in this respect that the Swarajists equally failed in sustaining its Hindu support base intact in Bengal. At a time when attempts were made to whip up sectional and communal divisions in Bengal from early 20th century, the Bengali Hindus remained in general cold to the movement of the All India Hindu Sabha. The communal commonsense of 'dying Hindus' did not evoke considerable response from the large section of the Bengali Hindus. As soon as the politics of reservation and communal electorates received a boost under the new system of representative government in the 1920s, a considerable section of the Bengali Hindus felt an urgent necessity to institutionalise Hindu community consciousness if not a manner the minor Muslim parties had done. The political vacillation of the Swarajists perpetuated the position of the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal, however, the Bengali Hindus in general never took the Suddhi and

Sanghathan propagandas seriously rather took an ambivalent position on the electoral role of the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal. For a certain period of time Hindu Mahasabha movement remained as a socio-cultural movement in Bengal and the Bengali Hindus opted for some other minor parties like the Nationalist Party to stand by their cause inside the legislature. The *Hindu Mahasabha* like the minor Muslim parties did not take any wide scale programme against social abuses and especially against poverty and illiteracy. Neither the Sangathan movement addressed the basic reasons of low caste alienation in Bengal nor did it take the cause of removing untouchability forever. It was basically concerned with the politics of number and chooses those issues which would cater the needs of organizing the Hindus from a pure political view point. The economic aspects of Depressed Class problem had never been taken seriously by this party and it left the fate of this class in the hands of some over exposed city politicians who occasionally traveled in the rural areas of Bengal either for electoral meeting or for providing lectures on the issue of strengthening the consciousness of the Hindu community.

At the time of the Communal Award and the Poona Pact uproar in the province, the so called leaders of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha failed to respond adequately to the Depressed Class problem because the Depressed Class people were seen to have been lacking their confidence on the Hindu Mahasabha and even the anti Award Congress Nationalist Party did not take up their causes seriously. In their efforts to balance a spontaneous protest against the anti nationalist spirit of the Communal Award with the justifications of safe guarding Hindu upper caste interests, the Bengali Hindus of either or the other minor parties lost themselves before the

mischievous designs of the colonial government and the sectarian forces. In the meantime an attempt to resolve the communal and caste question on provincial basis by some leaders from both the communities failed to get matured without the official sanction of the high command of the Congress and the Muslim League. From this point the roles of the Congress and the Muslim League became conspicuously diverse. With the passing of the Government of India Act in 1935, the imminent danger of communal and sectional rivalries took a visible turn towards constitutional politics. Nevertheless, the legislature under the new constitutional framework looked like an imposed one and the so called popular parties accepted it as an opportunity to satisfy their aspirations as well as to make a test of their ideologies before the newly franchised electorate. Since the Muslim League had not yet attained the status of a solid political party in Bengal, the Krisak Praja Party fully utilized the privileges and possibilities of separate electorate in Bengal. Unfortunately the popular political programmes and objectives of this party did not reach up to the mark of expectation because of the situational obligations to make an adjustment with the Muslim League. Suffering from some ideological uncertainties, the Congress did not come to a coalition with the Krisak Praja Party in Bengal after the election of 1937. Had the Congress high command thought in favour of Bengal, the course of future politics might have been different.

It was not the first time that Bengal had suffered from the manipulative impact of all Indian politics rather it happened to be a regular feature of Bengal politics ever since the question of Bengali exclusiveness had emerged on the political scene. The most important instance of this exclusiveness was that here in Bengal most of the peasant masses were

Muslims and most of the zamindars and moneylenders were Hindus. Till the vivisection of the province none of the minor political parties satisfactorily handled this crucial trend of Bengal politics and fell within the same quandary of separating religion from economic language of politics. Those who could achieve some success in this regard were the minor communist parties and the Krisak Praja Party. But the ground realities of colonial compulsions did never make it an easy task for those popular parties. It is a fact that the same degree of success was not attended in case of coalescing the anti feudal ideas of the peasants as had been achieved in carrying to the peasants the ideology of anti colonialism. The response of the peasants seems to have been weak to the call of anti imperialism and the call of anti feudal violent revolution. The minor communist parties failed to realize that unless the anti feudal programmes of their parties were sanctioned by the historical consciousness of the peasants themselves, the movements against the rural exploiters would neither be dynamic nor be justified from a peasant point of view. Most of the minor parties who were active in the peasant front of politics in late colonial Bengal had totally surpassed this fact that the revolutionary ideologies and radical programmes would not be successful in mobilizing the peasantry unless the mindset of the peasantry was ready to accept an overall transformation of their pre existing consciousness. The Young Comrade League made a direct entry into the realm of peasant politics with some revolutionary programmes but could not realize the necessity of carrying on those programmes into a wider direction to transform the political consciousness of the poor peasants. A sheer sense of economism always prevailed in the consciousness of the leaders although it was not enough to change the existing norms of socio economic imbalance in rural Bengal. In the 1930s almost all the minor communist parties were

passing through a phase of political vulnerability when practical difficulties like financial or organizational weakness limited the possibilities of wide scale movement in Bengal. It is not to deny that in this situation also the minor communist parties attempted to make a separate place for themselves in popular politics. Had the higher leadership of these parties been a little serious about educating its workers on the actual objectives of Socialist Revolution, they might have created conditions for the transformation of peasant consciousness towards the goal of revolution. In that case the actual objectives of socialist revolution in a colonial situation would have been near the reality. Each of the minor communist parties claimed to be the real communist party. This sense of communism was visible in case of party discipline and in a sense of leftist sectarianism. However, factional disputes and ideological rigidity of the leaders retarded the growth of communist movement to a greater extent. It was the lack of understanding of waging an ideological struggle from the part of the communists that after a certain level of politics sectarian forces took a hold over the popular movements and the same peasants, who were mobilized on class line early, then joined hands with the sectarian forces. It was seen that once the economic grievances of the peasants were addressed to an extent, the existing consciousness of the peasants fell to get jeopardized within the communal or sectional whirlpool of vested interests. In fact it was very much true in case of the Krisak Praja Party. The radical agrarian programmes of this party fell short to mobilize the poorest section of the peasantry because of the growing communalization of the agrarian class structure from early 1930s when the immediate patron of the lower peasantry easily came within the influence of the communal vested interests due to their growing insecurity in face of the new socio economic challenges in the post Depression period. If the Krisak

Praja Party could wage a real fight against the existing system of socio economic structure in rural Bengal, the majority of Muslim peasants might have some opportunities to foster their political consciousness with economic struggle and larger transformation of the society by simply legitimizing the spirit of radicalism. However, the dramatic rise and the gradual fall of this party can be viewed within the circumstantial compulsions equally generated by the major political parties and to some extent by the political dualism of its leader.

The minor political parties who were mostly active in the labour front were not free from the anxieties of the time. Apart from dueling with the inner tensions of labour consciousness, these parties exercised much more of their energy into trade union disputes and made tactical strategies of labour control. One may not deny that official restrictions and a continuous tussle with the right wing leaders of the Congress over labour issues endangered the prospects of radical labour reforms from the part of these parties. All the more in their bid to take a Comintern line of experience, they often neglected the actual issues of labour discontent germane to a colonial situation. Neither they had come to an understanding on how to lessen the difference between them and specially the non Bengali workers nor did they address labour issues from a nationalist perspective. The utter insecurity and helplessness of these parties could have been seen in face of state sponsored communalization of the labour issues in the last years of 1930s. At this time practically the labour representatives of different parties remained more or less busy with a kind of economism lacking the spirit of wide scale transformation of labour consciousness towards anti imperial nationalist perception. The Bengal Labour Party, the Samyraj Party, Workers' Party

and the others after a period of cavernous labour activities even ceased to exist while the Workers and Peasants Party, the Congress Socialist Party and the official Communist Party fell short of keeping the workers immune from the forthcoming challenges of the critical time ahead. In this study the minor student organizations have been given a special place in order to make a proper realization of the popular language of politics although these organizations did not work in a form of a political party or a mere pressure group. They indeed helped to extend the constituencies of popular politics in Bengal but at a time exposed the conflicts and dissensions of the minor parties over the issues of student discontent in particular and popular movements in general.

After Britain entered the Second World War in 1939, the minor political parties responded differently to this most obvious incident of the century. The stand and policies taken by the minor political parties during the war and the Quit India movement not only revealed the self-seeking attitudes of a few but also emphasized the need to understand the political mechanism of these parties for a better understanding of the situation. If the rise of Forward Block and the Revolutionary Socialist Party could have made the leftist forces more stable and organized than the previous period, it was the changing role of the communists on the character of the war, which totally revised the existing language of politics in Bengal. The Peoples' War line of the communists changed the outlook of the minor parties on the very character of the communists and until the partition of the province, the communists could not come out of the criticisms of betraying the national causes at the hour of need. In this study it has been discussed that how the changing political viewpoint of the minor political parties gradually became invalid in face of the growing

political activities of the Congress and the Muslim League in Bengal. Neither they realized the potentialities of Bengali identity nor did they make any attempt to raise the voice of Bengal before the Indian public opinion. Keeping in view these issues it may be pointed out that most of the minor political parties who had directed the course of Bengal politics from 1920s failed to play a decisive role on the question of Bengal at the time of partition. Apart from the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Communist Party of India, most of the minor political parties were historically non-existent at that moment. But other minor political parties also remained as silent spectators when the whole nation was on the trial for its destiny. It is likely that had there been any positive response from the minor political parties, the future of Bengal as well as the identity of Bengalis would have been different and the history of Bengal might have been written otherwise.

APPENDIX I

MANIFESTO OF KRISHAK PROJA SAMITI

1. Full responsible Government for India with adequate and effective safeguards for Mussalmans and with that in view work for the immediate replacement of the present Provincial Constitution and the proposed Central Constitution by democratic full self government.
2. To protect and advance the political and religious and other rights and interests of the Indian Mussalmans.
3. To promote friendship and union between the Mussalmans and other communities of India.
4. To maintain and strengthen brotherly relations between the Mussalmans of India and those of other countries.
5. Abolition of the present Zamindari System (permanent Settlement) which is highly detrimental to the interest of the people at large by legal and constitutional means.

(PROGRAMME)

1. To protect the religious rights of the Mussalmans. In all matters of purely religious character due weight shall be given to the opinions of Jamait-ul-Ulema Hind and the Mujahids.
2. To make every effort to secure the repeal of all repressive laws, e.g. the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act, the Public Security Act etc.
3. To resist all measures which are detrimental to the interest of Bengal and of India, which encroach on the fundamental liberties of the people and lead to economic exploitation of the country.
4. To reduce heavy cost of the provincial administrative machinery and allocate substantial funds for the nation-building departments.
5. To encourage development of industries including cottage industries

through (a) immediate steps for the fixing up of a minimum price for jute, (b) the organisation of marketing and sale of local commodities on a provincial scale, (c) the adoption of Indian products to be used for all Government purposes and (d) the provision of loans, against the security of the Government for the expansion of large scale and heavy industries.

6. To regulate currency, exchange and prices in the interest of 'the economic development of the country'.
7. To stand for the social, educational and economical uplift of the rural population, e.g. State provision and control of public utilities and social welfare services.
8. To sponsor measures for the relief of agricultural indebtedness by raising loans, if necessary.
9. To make elementary education free and compulsory immediately without the imposition of any fresh tax or cess on the tenantry.
10. To protect and promote Urdu language and script but with proper safeguards for the 'development of the vernacular'.
11. To devise measures for the amelioration of the general condition of the Mussalmans specially of Bengal.
12. To take steps to reduce the heavy burden of taxation, particularly on the poor.
13. To create a healthy public opinion and general political consciousness throughout the country.
14. Thorough overhauling of the Bengal Tenancy Act in the interest of agriculturists ensuring the vesting of proprietary rights in the tillers of the soil and including, (i) the abolition of the Zamindars' right of 'nazar' and 'salamy' right of pre-emption, (ii) Tenants' right of mutation of name without additional payment, (iii) Reduction of rate of rent.
15. To take adequate and effective measures against illegal exactions by the zamindars, money-lenders and their representatives.
16. To take steps for securing from the Government of India the entire amount realised on account of the duty on jute and to earmark the amount for expenditure on the improvement of agriculture and rural sanitation.
17. To adopt measures for the improvement of agriculture and cattle.
18. To provide for adequate water supply in villages.
20. To take steps for the adequate representation of Muslims and the Scheduled Castes in the Services with a view to ensuring justice to all the communities.
21. To derive ways and means for the solution of the unemployment problem.
22. To introduce measures for the amelioration of the condition of labourers by the provisions of minimum wages, and control of the condition of sanitation and housing.

APPENDIX II

LEAGUE MANIFESTO & PROGRAMME

(Excerpts)

After discussion lasting over four days, the A.I. Muslim League Parliamentary Board, under the presidentship of Mr. M.A. Jinnah, adopted a manifesto and issued it from Lahore on 11th June, 1936. It said inter alia... The Lucknow Pact, which is known as the "League-Congress Pact in 1916" will go down in Indian History as a landmark in the political evolution of the country as signal proof of the identity of purpose, earnestness and co-operation between the two great sections of the people of India in the task of the attainment of responsible government.

But the Pact was not the last word of the question of adjustment of political differences between Hindus and Mussalmans. Nor was it even intended or could be so considered in the new circumstances that arose and developed since then. The national demand for complete responsible government after the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms became more and more insistent from 1921 onward. Mussalmans stood shoulder to shoulder with sister communities and did not lag behind in their patriotic cooperation with Hindus. But as a minority they maintain the principle that this position in any future political constitutional structure should be protected and safeguarded... It deplores that as a result of the Round Table Conference, the British Parliament has forced upon the people of India a Constitution embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935. Its attitude towards the Constitution is defined by its resolution passed at the session of A.I.M.L. to the following effect : "while it accepts the Communal Award till a substitute is agreed upon between the communities concerned, emphatically protest against the constitution embodied in the Government of India Act 1935 being forced upon the people of India against their will and in spite of their repeated disapproval and dissent expressed by the various parties and bodies in the country."...

...The manifesto laid down the following programme for the ensuing elections : To protect religious right of Mussalmans in which connections for all matters of purely religious character, due weight shall be given to opinions of the Jamiat-Ulema-i-Hind and Mujahids to make every effort to secure the repeal of all repressive laws: to reject all measures which encroach upon the fundamental liberties of the people and lead to economic exploitation of the country, to reduce the heavy cost of administrative machinery, and allocate substantial funds for nation building departments, to nationalise the Indian Army and reduce military expenditure: to encourage development of industries, including cottage industries; to regulate currency; to stand for social, educational and economic uplift of the rural population; to sponsor measures for the relief of agricultural indebtedness; to make elementary education free and compulsory; to protect and promote Urdu language and script; to

SPECIAL PROGRAMME OF BPML

The special programme announced by the Bengal Provincial Muslim League was as follows :

1. To protect the religious and other rights of the Muslims.
2.To take necessary steps by legal and constitutional means to minimise the evils of Permanent Settlement and the Tenancy Laws and if possible, to get them replaced by an equitable system suitable to the needs and requirements of all classes of people in the Province.
3. To take steps to secure the revision of the Bengal Tenancy Act with a view-
 - (a) to repealing the provisions relating to (i) enhancement of rent (ii) transfer fees (iii) pre-emption (iv) and other provisions affecting the interests of the tillers of the soil and
 - (b) to securing the betterment of the rights of the cultivators and tenure-holders, including reduction of rent, commensurate with the productive capacity of the soil and the general price level.
4. To relieve agricultural indebtedness and with this end in view
 - (a) To press for the enforcement of the Bengal Agricultural Debtors Act and
 - (b) to organise village societies of debtors and rent payers in order to enable them to reap the full benefit of the Act.
5. To devise effective measures to protect the rural population from victimisation and illegal exactions by Zamindars, Mahajans and their agents.
6. To take effective steps to raise the price of jute and other money crops.
7. To organise the marketing of agricultural commodities.
8. To undertake an agricultural survey of Bengal with a view to crop planning and cultivation of suitable money crops.
9. To improve the breed of cattle and to organise dairy and poultry farming and cultivation of fodder crops.
10. To reclaim and resuscitate the dead and dying rivers, waterways, drainage, channels, tanks and reservoirs.
11. To make provision for the supply of good drinking water, better medical facilities, village sanitation and public health.
12. Immediate introduction of compulsory and free primary education.
13. Amendment of the Calcutta University Act.
14. Establishment of a Board of Secondary Education.
15. Development of technical, industrial and agricultural education.
16. Adequate religious instruction for Muslim boys in schools and improvement of the standard of Madrassah education.
17. Proportionate representation of Muslims and other communities in the public services of the province.
18. To take steps to solve the unemployment problem.
19. Development of Cotton and Hemp Industries.

APPENDIX III



Document

THE ROLE OF FORWARD BLOC

*Signed editorial by Subhas Chandra Bose in the
Forward Bloc,
the organ of the newly formed party Forward Bloc,
dated 12 August 1939*

After a number of preliminary skirmishes, the left-wing under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in capturing the Indian National Congress in 1920. That was the signal for several of the erstwhile leaders like Messrs. Jinnah, B. C. Pal and B. Chakravarti to walk out of the Congress. The left-wing became the dominant party in the Congress and for a time commanded an overwhelming majority. With the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1922, a rift occurred within the majority party and, over the issue of carrying the fight into the Legislatures, it

split into two groups — the Swarajists and the No-changers. After a time the differences were made up through the Congress accepting the Swarajist plan of extending the fighting front to the Legislatures.

With the publication of the Nehru Committee's Report in 1928, in which the majority of the members advocated a Constitution for India based on Dominion Status, a left-wing emerged in the form of the Independence League. At the annual session of the Congress held in Calcutta in December, 1928, the members of the League endeavoured but failed to induce the Congress to alter its creed so that Independence would be declared in unmistakable language to be the goal of the Congress. The opposition to this move came from the main body in the Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi. The conflict with the Independence League went on for a year, till at the Lahore session of the Congress held in December, 1929, the Congress at the instance of Mahatmaji, adopted Independence as its goal.

This compromise enabled all sections in the Congress to join hands and march shoulder to shoulder in the Civil Disobedience Campaign which was launched in 1930.

The suspension of the struggle in 1933 and the adoption of a parliamentary programme by the All-India Congress Committee in 1934 provoked a revolt from the Left. The Congress Socialist Party then came into existence and, thanks to its timely appearance and its dynamic activity, the drift towards Constitutionalism was checked to a large extent. The Congress Socialist Party soon

became the rallying-centre for the leftist elements in the Congress.

From 1934 to 1937, the Congress Socialist Party made considerable headway both in numbers and influence. But in 1938, at the Haripura Session of the Congress held in February, it was found that the C. S. P. was no longer forging ahead. In my Presidential Address at the Haripura Congress, I observed that the role of the C. S. P. within the Congress should be anti-imperialist left-wing role and not a Socialist role and only by playing the former role, would it continue to make headway.

Socialist and Communist friends with whom this matter was discussed after the Haripura Congress agreed with this view. It was generally felt that all progressive, radical and anti-imperialist elements in the Congress, who might not be ready to join the Socialist or Communist Party, should be organised on the basis of a common minimum programme. I felt, further, that only by that means could the onslaught of the Right be resisted and the soil prepared for the growth of a Marxist Party.

The Gandhi Seva Sangh, which may be regarded as the 'steel frame' of the present majority party (or Gandhi Party) in the Congress, held an important Conference at Delang, in Orissa, in March, 1938. At this Conference the Gandhi Seva Sangh decided to launch an offensive against the Left. The Sangh decided, among other things, to send its agents into the labour field with a view to ousting those trade-unionists who stood for a class-conscious trade-

union movement in this country. It decided also to depute its prominent members to capture provincial and other Congress organisations in the country.

The parliamentary programme adopted by the All India Congress Committee in 1934 found its culmination in the acceptance of ministerial office in the provinces in 1937. This enabled the Right-wing to so consolidate its position and strengthen its influence and prestige as to launch an offensive against the Left in 1938. Against this determined attack, the Left could hope to preserve its existence, only if it were consciously organised and disciplined.

If all the progressive, radical and anti-imperialist elements in the Congress had rallied together on the platform of the Congress Socialist Party, then matters would have been greatly simplified. But this did not happen. Because of this, the idea of a Left Bloc for organising all the left elements on the basis of a common minimum programme was mooted after the Haripura Congress. If the existing Leftist Parties had undertaken the responsibility of developing the Left Bloc (now renamed as the Forward Bloc) — then the task of Left-consolidation would by now have proceeded apace.

But though individuals or groups may fail us, the cause cannot be allowed to suffer to be neglected. Hence the Forward Bloc has been formed with such left elements as are now available. There is no doubt that the Bloc will grow and expand with unprecedented rapidity, despite the many obstacles that beset its path. And

the time will soon come when even those who are hesitating to join today, will shake off their vacillation and take plunge. Left-consolidation, winning over the majority in the Congress, and resumption of the national struggle — these represent the three-fold task before the Forward Bloc and before the Left in the Congress. Let those who criticise us or pick holes produce a better alternative. We shall not hesitate to accept it. We are afraid, however, that no other alternative is possible.

The Congress has to be saved from the clutches of the Right which has given up the idea of a struggle and is now thinking in terms of Constitutionalism and Reformism. Only the Left can preserve the revolutionary character of the Congress and bring about an early resumption of the fight for national freedom.

Today, in certain quarters, the word 'Socialism' has become cheap. One can even find Socialists in some provinces who are the henchmen of the Ministers. Let us therefore beware of Rightists who masquerade in the cloak of Socialism. What is wanted is deeds not words. Genuine Socialists must play an anti-imperialist left-wing role in their day to day activity. Uttering leftist slogans and making spicy speeches will not suffice by themselves.

Forward Bloc will rally all progressive, radical and anti-imperialist elements in the Congress, whether they be Socialists or not. Through this consolidation, the people will equip themselves for the anti-imperialist struggle that will bring

India her birthright of liberty. But the attainment of political Independence will not mean the dissolution of the Bloc. It will only mean a new phase in its life and activity. And that phase will undoubtedly be a Socialist one.

APPENDIX IV



Document

ALL POWER TO THE INDIAN PEOPLE

*Presidential address given by Subhas Chandra Bose at
the
All India Forward Bloc Conference at Nagpur on 18
June, 1940.*

COMRADES ! Early in May 1939, the Forward Bloc of the Indian National Congress was inaugurated in Calcutta following a momentous session of the All India Congress Committee. In the last week of June 1939, the first session of the All-India Conference of the Forward Bloc was held in Bombay and the constitution and programme of the Bloc were adopted there. Since then, a year has rolled by — a year which will be memorable not only in the history of India but in the history of the whole world. We are, therefore, meeting at a most opportune moment. We shall have to do a great deal of heart-searching as well as stock-taking. We shall have to determine our

course of action in the crisis which has overtaken India and the world, a crisis which is deepening and worsening, not only from day to day but also from hour to hour.

The first question which I shall pose before you is : 'Has our policy and line of action been a correct one? And have we acted in the best interests of the country by launching the Forward Bloc?' To that my reply is : 'Most certainly, yes.' I shall remind you that we were constrained to start the Forward Bloc in the light of four considerations. The Right Wing had definitely told us that they would not work in co-operation with the Leftists in future, and they had rejected the proposal of a composite cabinet which was our demand. Secondly, Mahatma Gandhi and the Right Wing had told us that a national struggle in the near future was out of the question. Thirdly, the attempt to consolidate the anti-imperialist and radical elements in the Congress under the name of the Left Bloc had been given up by the Socialists and Communists. Consequently, a further attempt at Left consolidation could be made only by us and, for that, the Forward Bloc had become indispensably necessary. Fourthly, the Right-wingers had already consolidated themselves under the aegis of the Gandhi Seva Sangh and any further delay on our part would have meant the strangling of the Leftist elements in the Congress by the Rightists.

It was clear in 1939 that most of those who had entered the Congress as Leftists in 1920 and 1921, and had retained the leadership of the Congress in their hands for nearly two decades, had ceased to

be revolutionary or even radical. Any further political progress under such circumstances presupposed a consolidation of all anti-imperialist, radical and progressive forces in the country and particularly in the Congress.

Towards the end of April 1939, when I was seriously considering the idea of resigning the presidency of the Congress and inaugurating the Forward Bloc, I had an interesting and important discussion with a very prominent Leftist leader of the Congress who has since then thrown himself into the arms of the Gandhiites. He advised me to refrain from either course and he added that since an international storm was brewing, we should avoid everything in the nature of a split within the Congress. I replied saying that since a war was inevitable in the near future, it was all the more necessary that the Leftists should be organised and prepared in advance, so that in the event of the Rightists developing cold feet in a war situation, we at least could do something off our own bat. Differences had become so fundamental between the Right Wing and Left Wing that a split — whether permanent or temporary — had become inevitable. That being the case, it was desirable that the internal crisis should come and should be transcended before the external or international crisis overtook us. I added that if I accepted my friend's advice and lay low for the present, the consequences would be far worse for us when the international crisis appeared. In such a crisis, we would never agree with the Rightists. But many people would blame us for causing a split, if we attempted to act on our own at that time.

Moreover, if we did want to act independently then we would have no organization behind us to fall back on. Consequently, the argument of my friend only strengthened my case.

Looking back on the last twelve months, can we not claim that events have justified our policy and line of action? Barring the Kisan Sabha of Swami Sahajananda (and Prof. Ranga, Comrade Yajnik, etc.) and the Forward Bloc, who is there to stand up to the Rightists today? The Left Consolidation Committee which came into existence in June 1939, after the formation of the Forward Bloc, has disintegrated by now. The Royists (or Radical Leaguers), the Congress Socialists and the Communists (or National Fronters) have in turn deserted the Left Consolidation Committee and only the Kisan Sabha and Forward Bloc have been functioning as the spearhead of the left movement in this country. This was evident when we held the All India Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh in March 1940. There we found that the Royists, Congress Socialists and National Fronters boycotted that Conference and threw in their lot with the Gandhites. There can be little doubt today that if there had been no Forward Bloc and no Kisan Sabha, no voice would have been raised against the policy and the line of action pursued by the Gandhites during the last 12 months.

We shall now consider another question : 'What has been our actual achievement during the past year?'

In the first place we can claim to have successfully resisted the tendency towards

constitutionalism and compromise within the ranks of the Congress. Thanks to our efforts, the Congress Ministries had to vacate office as a protest against the policy of the British Government. If they had not done so, they would have been carrying out the war policy of the Government of India, as agents of British Imperialism. In spite of all efforts made hitherto, no compromise has yet been made with the British Government, and for this we can legitimately claim some credit. Secondly, we have so far frustrated all attempts to secure the co-operation of the Congress in the prosecution of the war. Friends will remember that in September 1939, when His Excellency the Viceroy invited Mahatma Gandhi for a talk at Simla on the war situation, the latter gave out that he was of the view that India should give unconditional help to Great Britain during the present war. This was reiterated by Mahatmajji in a Press statement issued soon after the above interview. Nevertheless, up till now, the Congress Working Committee, which usually follows Gandhiji blindly has ignored his views on such an all-important issue. Would the same thing have happened if there had been no Kisan Sabha and no Forward Bloc?

Thirdly, we can perhaps claim that we have succeeded in creating an atmosphere of struggle. Today we find Congress leaders drilling in shirts and shorts and Congress Committees being converted into 'Satyagraha' Committees. Moreover, the Rightist leaders have been constantly talking of a struggle. Would all these

have taken place, if there had been no Forward Bloc and if the Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh had not shown which way the wind of public opinion was blowing? There is no doubt that today the talk of a struggle is everywhere in the air and the more our people talk of it, the more will they move away from a compromise.

Lastly, we can claim that at Ramgarh we launched our struggle with such strength and resources as we possessed. During the last three months a large number of our fellow-workers, including men of outstanding influence in the country, have been arrested and incarcerated. Nine members of the All India Working Committee of the Forward Bloc are at present in prison or internment. In addition to them, leaders of the Kisan Sabha headed by Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, Prof. Ranga and others, are behind the bars.

The national struggle we launched at Ramgarh has been steadily gaining in strength and volume. The campaign has made considerable headway in Bihar and the United Provinces. In Bengal, the struggle was launched as early as January 1940 over the question of civil liberty, which had been violated by the drastic ordinances promulgated by the Government in September 1939. Thanks to the civil disobedience movement launched by the Bengal Congress, we have restored in a large measure the *status quo* which existed prior to September 1939. The special session of the Bengal Provincial Political Conference which met at Dacca on the 25th and 26th of May, 1940 took stock of the situation in the province and

formulated a plan for intensifying the struggle and widening its scope. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee will give effect to this plan.

Before I proceed to deal with the international situation, I shall refer to one or two criticisms which are constantly levelled at us. We are told, for instance, that we have created a split in the Congress. The fact, however, is that it is the Gandhites who have created a split by refusing to co-operate with the Leftists. We have all along been strongly in favour of joint action and a composite cabinet for ensuring such action.

We are also told that we have brought disruption within the ranks of the Leftists. But it is not we who have caused disruption or disunity. The Royists, the Congress Socialists and the National Fronters (or Communists) have, one after another, deserted the Left Consolidation Committee.

We stand today exactly where we did twelve months ago. During these months, we have passed through an ordeal. Suffering, persecution, banter, ridicule — such has been our lot. But we have gone ahead along the path of uncompromising struggle in a most unflinching manner. Numerous fellow-workers of ours have been persecuted by the Congress High Command and in the province of Bengal, owing to the disaffiliation of the Provincial Congress Committee, all Congressmen of our way of thinking have been virtually thrown out of the Congress.

The question which will naturally arise at this stage is : 'Why have the Royists and others deserted us?' So far as I can judge, they are afraid

of being expelled from the Congress and they feel, perhaps, that once outside the Congress they will be completely lost. What amuses me, however, is that these comrades had been hoping to fight the Rightists and had not anticipated that before being defeated by the Leftists, the Rightists would do their worst and would do all in their power to maintain their supremacy in the Congress. The backbone, the stamina and the toughness that are needed in order to fight the Rightists successfully, these Leftist (or shall I say pseudo-Leftist?) comrades do not possess. We are now passing through a phase of our struggle when history itself will put all of us to the test and declare to the world as to who the genuine Leftists in India are.

We are also told that without the help of the Gandhites the struggle we have launched will prove to be a failure. To this allegation, our answer is as follows : it is too early to say whether our struggle will be successful or not. That will depend on whether the masses will join it or not. It always takes some time to get the masses to rally round the banner of a non-violent struggle. Let us, therefore, hold ourselves in patience yet a while.

But supposing for argument's sake that the struggle will fail, does that mean that it should not have been launched? Could we not argue, on the opposite side, that the campaigns of 1921, 1930 and 1932 should not have been launched because they did not bring us Swaraj? Failures are often the pillars of success. So what does it matter if we fail for the fourth time? Not to try at all is more dishonourable than making the attempt and failing

to achieve success. The whole world is watching us today. What will the free nations of the world think of us if we miss the golden opportunity that has now come — an opportunity that is rare in the lifetime of any nation? But nobody will think ill of us if we fight and then fail.

There is another point which we should not overlook either. Shall we not consider what posterity will think of us twenty or fifty years hence if we do not acquit ourselves manfully today? What do people today think of the leaders who mismanaged the affairs of the country between 1914 and 1919? I, therefore, make bold to say that if we do not rise to the occasion and join the struggle without delay, neither history nor posterity will ever pardon us.

Twelve months ago when the Forward Bloc was formed we were obsessed, as it were, with the idea of the coming struggle and how to prepare for it in advance. At that time we did not know how far, if at all, outside events and international developments would aid us in our efforts to win Purna Swaraj. Consequently, we had to make 'self-reliance' our motto in life and action.

Today, the situation has altered to some extent. In the war between rival imperialisms, the old ones have been faring very badly indeed. During the last few weeks the Germans have carried on the campaign with lightning rapidity. Kings and kingdoms have toppled down in the course of a few days and the German Army — the Reichswehr — has proceeded to the gates of Paris and occupied that queen of cities in a way which appears to the layman as a miracle in military

warfare.

What has been happening in Europe in a kaleidoscopic manner has had its inevitable repercussions on India.

The wheels of history are grinding on, quite regardless of what we may be doing in India. But in order to fully utilize the opportunity which international events have presented to us, we must have sufficient unity and solidarity among ourselves. If India could speak with one voice today, our demand would indeed be well-nigh irresistible. It follows, as a consequence, that while we should think of intensifying the national struggle and widening its scope, we should at the same time try to develop national unity and solidarity to the maximum limit.

National unity will presuppose unity within the Congress on the basis of a dynamic programme of struggle and at the same time unity between the Congress and other organizations like the Muslim League.

If we can develop sufficient unity and solidarity among ourselves in good time, we may very well hope that even if the country passes through a struggle and even if catastrophic events take place in Europe, the transference of power from the hands of British Imperialism to those of the Indian people will take place in a peaceful manner.

It is not necessary that the Indian revolution should be a bloody one or that it should pass through a period of chaos. On the contrary, it is desirable that it should be as peaceful as possible; and a peaceful transition can be ensured if the people are united and are determined to have their

freedom.

My own suggestion to you is that we should immediately go out into the country with the rallying cry — 'All power to the Indian people'. This will galvanize the masses in a moment. In order to put forward this demand in an effective and irresistible manner, we should leave no stone unturned in our effort to attain national unity. This effort will necessitate the setting up of a machinery which will preserve harmony and goodwill among the people under all circumstances. Such a machinery will be provided by a Citizens' Defence Corps organized on an all-party basis.

But such a Corps should be quite independent of the Government. Our Citizens' Defence Corps will only aim at preserving internal peace, harmony and goodwill. The question of defending the country militarily from any other force or power is one which should concern the Government only.

Before coming to the epilogue of this address, which will be a consideration of the international situation of today and tomorrow, I should like to remind you of the historical role of the Forward Bloc. The Bloc has come into being as the result of historical necessity. It is not the creation of an individual or of a group of individuals. So long as it will serve a historical purpose, it will live and thrive — despite all obstacles, internal or external.

We should also bear in mind that the Forward Bloc will have a role to play in the post-struggle phase of our history. It will have to preserve liberty after winning it and it will have to build up

a new India and a happy India on the basis of the eternal principles of liberty, democracy and socialism.

Let us not commit the fatal mistake of thinking that our mission will be over, once we win our freedom. The organization or party that wins freedom must undertake the responsibilities of post-war reconstruction. Only in this manner will continuity of progress be maintained.

Let us now proceed to consider the international situation as we find it today and as it will probably be tomorrow. After reading the outspoken statements of Messrs. Winston Churchill and Paul Reynaud we cannot blink the prime facts of the situation as they emerge from the quick tempo of war. Every day makes it more clear that M. Paul Reynaud's summing up of the situation in the Chamber of Deputies (that victory for the Allies could only be brought about by a miracle) was a true measure of the military conditions then obtaining. Dark as was the picture then, it has grown darker since. The prospect today is positively bleak. And when one remembers this is a totalitarian war, it dawns on us how impossible is the situation in which the losing side is placed.

We may also concede that Monsieur Reynaud's ringing resolution 'to intensify the struggle and not to give up' is brave and resolute, and his words not empty heroics. For all that, he fails to convince when he says : 'We will shut ourselves into one of our provinces and if we are driven out we will go to North Africa and if necessary into our possessions in America.'

Today we have every right to examine the stark realities of the war as it has developed until we see them in the white light of clarity. The leaders of the French and British peoples have been frank. We should also be frank with ourselves.

The cause of the Allies' continuous defeat seems to be lodged somewhere in their system. It was a system which Mr. Clement Attlee, speaking, I believe, for the last time from the Opposition benches, said had failed to meet the need of the crisis.

It was the fundamental weakness of a system in which slavery and freedom existed side by side that had resulted in British being 'decisively beaten' on the propaganda front. This was, what the *Daily Mail* said was happening. Propaganda radiocasts from the Reich, it wrote at the end of March, were 'influencing not only the civilian population of Bratain, but also our armed forces.' Goebbels, it asserted, had had a walk-over.

But we are not so much interested in a particular method as in the basic principles of action. And we are not to be dissuaded from pressing home our demand for the admission of our fundamental rights by a clouding of the issues and the cry of 'saboteur!' We have too long been taken in by the clever imperialist propaganda.

We cannot but ask ourselves where we stand in this international flux. Some of our statesmen, it seems have been possessed with the dream of India being converted into a bastion of democratic resistance against the dictators' hordes. What a grotesque picture!

Almost the whole of the English Channel coast on the French side is in the hands of the Germans, making ordinary communications difficult and hazardous and the transport of troops all but impossible. Some of the best industrial regions of France are in the hands of the invaders. Paris, the heart of France, has ceased to throb. In the Champagne region a powerful German drive is developing to isolate the Maginot Line from the rest of France. In the south-east the powerful and fresh Italian legions are pressing. And everywhere the retreating French forces are harried by the admittedly superior air arm of the admittedly superior Reichswehr. Such is the gloomy picture of the Allied position in Europe. From the Northern Arctic regions to the Atlantic, the Nazi eagle has spread its wings in an unbroken line. It is not surprising we should be told that there is no cause for optimism.

When the Nazi hordes crossed the German frontier into Holland and Belgium only the other day with the cry of 'nach Paris' on their lips, who could have dreamt that they would reach their objective so soon? A miracle in military warfare has happened, as it were, before our eyes, and for an analogy one has to turn to the Napoleonic wars or to the catastrophe at Sedan in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Whatever the French High Command may say, in the face of mechanized transport, innumerable tanks and dive-bombers, no resistance worth the name is possible after the capitulation of Paris. The days of French warfare are over.

SARAT BOSE FORMULA

On 12 May 1947 the Associated Press of India released a report based on enquiries from authoritative sources that Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose took the initiative in January 1947 in the matter of settling communal differences and bringing about an agreement regarding the formation of a new Cabinet in Bengal and also regarding the future Constitution of Bengal. The report that Mr. Bose's talks with some Bengal Muslim leaders followed the appointment by the Provincial Muslim League Working Committee of a sub-committee to contact leaders of other parties was stated to be incorrect.

It was stated that Mr. Bose's basic ideas were as follows :—

- (1) Bengal to be a Socialist Republic.
- (2) The Bengal legislature to be elected after the Constitution of the Republic is framed, should be elected on the basis of adult franchise and joint electorate.
- (3) The Bengal legislature so elected should decide the relations of Bengal with the rest of India.
- (4) The present Muslim League Ministry should be dissolved and a representative interim Cabinet formed without delay.
- (5) The public services in Bengal should be manned by Bengalees, and Hindus and Muslims should have equal share in them.
- (6) An ad hoc constitution-making body consisting of 30 or 31 members should be set up by the Congress and the Muslim League in Bengal.

It should frame the Constitution of the Republic of Bengal expeditiously.

It was further stated that in the course of discussions that had taken place between Mr. Bose and Congress and Muslim League leaders during the last four months, other relevant matters had also been discussed and some were still under consideration. Details regarding them were not yet available. It was however authoritatively stated that the report that had been circulated in certain quarters that Mr. Bose had entered into a secret pact with certain Muslim League leader was entirely without foundation.

II. In the course of a Press statement on 20 May 1947 Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose said :

During the last few years I have given considerable thought to the question of the future constitution of India and of the provinces. On the 29th January 1947 when I was in prison, I recorded my ideas in the following words :

“I conceive of my country as a Union of Socialist Republics—an immense melting pot in which the characters of all the races and nationalities comprised in it will be mixed and out of which a new world-ism will arise which will recognise no frontiers, no races and no classes.”

In spite of all that has happened during the last few months in Bengal and in other provinces, I adhere to those ideas. In January last I took the initiative in the matter of settling communal differences and bringing about an agreement regarding the formation of a new Cabinet in Bengal and also regarding the future Constitution of Bengal and discussed my ideas with Mr. Abul Hashim, Secretary, Bengal Provincial Muslim League (now on leave). A few days thereafter — to

be exact on the 26th January last — I spoke at the reception given to Azad Hind Fauj officers and men at Belgachia Villa. I said among other things — “I have always held the view that India must be a Union of autonomous Socialist Republics and I believe that if the different provinces are redistributed on a linguistic basis and what are called provinces are converted into autonomous Socialist Republics, those Socialist Republics will gladly co-operate with one another in forming an Indian Union. It would be an Indian Union of Indian conception and Indian making. I look forward to that Union and not to the Union of British conception and British making.

Since then I have had opportunities of discussing my ideas with several Congress and Muslim League leaders in Bengal as a result of which concrete proposals have emerged. During the period, events have happened in Bengal and in other parts of the country which have driven large sections of my countrymen to desperation and have led persons prominent in public life, who until recently had unequivocally declared that they were against Pakistan and partition, to lend their support both to Pakistan and to partition. Notwithstanding all that has been said and is being said, I hold firmly to the opinion which I have expressed more than once that conceding Pakistan and supporting partition would be suicidal to the cause of Indian independence and also to the cause of social progress. It will make the partitioned provinces happy hunting grounds for imperialists, communalists and reactionaries. It will dissolve the existing linguistic bonds and instead of resolving communal differences will accentuate and aggravate them. Instead of thinking and talking of Pakistan and partition and thereby bringing into existence armed communal camps, we have to devise ways and means as to how to live and work together and how to form people's governments which will look not to communal interests but to common political, social and economic interests of the people. The real solution of

the existing communal differences, to my mind, lies in the creation of Socialist Republics on a linguistic basis and in the establishment in this country of a Central Union of Socialist Republics.

We cannot and must not allow ourselves to be led by the British imperialists or the Indian Communists and reactionaries in framing our policies. It is the common interest of the common man which will form the basis of a new and Socialist unity and dissolve communal antagonisms. I call upon the youth of the country to take part in this great adventure with robust faith and optimism in the future of our people. It is for them to light the path which the common man has to tread.

It is to me a matter of very deep regret that on account of my continued ill health since December last, I have been unable to take as much part in public affairs as I had been accustomed to do. But as I have been feeling somewhat better during the last fourteen days, I propose to take the field in the very near future and to convince my countrymen that the solution which I have offered is the right solution.

III. The Associated Press of India reported on 22 May 1947, quoting very authoritative sources, that complete terms had emerged out of the discussions that took place between Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose and certain prominent Congress and Muslim League leaders regarding the future constitution of Bengal and the formation of a new Cabinet.

The terms were as follows :

1. Bengal will be a Free State. The Free State of Bengal will decide its relations with the rest of India.

2. The Constitution of the Free State of Bengal will provide for election to the Bengal Legisla-

ture on the basis of joint electorate and adult franchise, with reservation of seats proportionate to the population amongst the Hindus and Muslims. The seats as between the Hindus and the Scheduled Caste Hindus will be distributed amongst them in proportion to their respective population, or in such manner as may be agreed among them. The constituencies and the votes will be distributive and not cumulative. A candidate who gets the majority of the votes of his own community cast during the elections and 25 per cent of the votes of the other communities so cast, will be declared elected. If no candidate satisfies these conditions, that candidate who gets the largest number of votes of his own community will be elected.

3. On the announcement by His Majesty's Government that the proposal of the Free State of Bengal has been accepted and that Bengal will not be partitioned, the present Bengal Ministry will be dissolved and a new Interim Ministry brought into being, consisting of an equal number of Muslims and Hindus (including Scheduled Caste Hindus) but excluding the Chief Minister. In this Ministry, the Chief Minister will be a Muslim and the Home Minister a Hindu.

4. Pending the final emergence of a Legislature and a Ministry under the new constitution, the Hindus (including the Scheduled Caste Hindus) and the Muslims will have an equal share in the services, including military and police. The Services will be manned by Bengalees.

5. A Constituent Assembly composed of 30 persons, 16 Muslims and 14 non-Muslims, will be elected by the Muslim and non-Muslim members of the Legislature respectively, excluding the Europeans.

IV. At a Press interview on 23 May 1947, Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose said :

If the Free State of Bengal comes into being, it will be a republic ; and its nature and character will be socialist. Details of the Socialist Republic will have to be worked out if and when Bengal will have a Constituent Assembly of her own. There is no difference as far as fundamentals are concerned between me and those with whom I had discussions on the subject since the last five months.

I want to impress upon the public of Bengal and of the rest of India that the cure for communalism is not communalism. We have to approach things from an altogether different and healthier outlook — and that is the socialistic outlook.

No one knows more than I do that there is deep distrust between the communities all over India. It has been growing since August last. But Bengal and India will perish unless that is removed and it has to be removed.

The solution I have offered is the creation of socialist republics — call them free states, if you will — that is the expression that has been used in the terms of agreement that were published this morning. By the word 'free' I mean freedom not only from political bondage but also freedom from social and economic servitude.

In order to change the outlook of people, the first step to be taken is to form a new Government of Bengal. The present communal ministry should be replaced by a ministry which would command the confidence of the general public. That has to be done without delay. That, by

itself, will remove a large portion of the distrust that exists in the minds of the people of Bengal. The character of the administration is bound to change rapidly from the moment a new ministry commanding the confidence of all sections of the people takes place. Proposals for legislation will then be examined not from the communal but from the national standpoint. The basis for all legislation will be the economic, social and cultural interests of the people as a whole, and not the benefits of only a section.

Separate electorates have been in existence since the days of Lord Minto. This is the first time after several decades that Congress and Muslim League leaders of any province in India have agreed to the introduction of joint electorate and adult franchise. It is true that certain safeguards have been introduced in the clause. But they are intended to be temporary and I expect they will be allowed to lapse after a period of about 10 years, if not earlier.

We have said that votes will be distributive and not cumulative, — that means that a voter will not be permitted to give all his votes to one candidate.

The terms will have to be considered by the Congress and the League organisations.

I need not dilate further at the present moment except to give you an indication as to how my mind has been working.

It is true that our political vision has become clouded for the moment but I have every hope that our political workers, both Hindu and Muslim, will seize the present opportunity and combine to open a new chapter in the history of Bengal and eventually in the history of India itself.

My information is — and I believe my information is reliable — that in case partition is awarded, Burdwan Division, 24 Parganas District and Khulna District and possibly Calcutta will be allotted to Western Bengal and the rest of the divisions and districts in the province will be allotted to East Bengal. I want the people of Bengal to consider whether they can possibly agree to such a partition.

Speaking for myself, I have always been in favour of our attempting to put our own house in order and not to make British imperialists arbiters of our destiny.

- V. A special messenger carrying a sealed cover from Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose to Mahatma Gandhi left on 22 May 1947 for Patna where the latter was then staying. In this connection the following letter to Mr. Bose from Mahatma Gandhi from Sarat Bose papers is of great interest.

Patna 24/5/47

My dear Sarat,

I have your note. There is nothing in the draft stipulating that nothing will be done by mere majority. Every act of Government must carry with it the co-operation of at least two-thirds of the Hindu members in the Executive and the Legislature. There should be an admission that Bengal has common culture and common mother tongue — Bengali. Make sure that the Central Muslim League approved of the proposal notwithstanding reports to the contrary. If your presence is necessary in Delhi I shall telephone or telegraph. I propose to discuss the draft with the Working Committee.

Yours

Bapu

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