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■ State Politics in North-East India : A Framework of Analysis ■ Inter - State conflict in North-East India : An Angle of vision ■ Assam - Arunachal Boundary Dispute : A Note ■ Asom Gana Parishod's Accession to power : A close look ■ Implications and Approaches to Land Reforms in the Tribal Society of Meghalaya ■ Factionalism and power politics in Ruling Parties : A study of Intra - Party Conflicts in Orissa ■ Emerging trends in State Politics in West Bengal : New Experiment in Alternative strategy for Structural changes in Society, Economy and Politics ■ The Eight Parliamentary Elections in West Bengal : A Swing towards Right

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STATE POLITICS IN EASTERN INDIA

EDITOR

MN DAS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
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Girish Phukon

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EDITORIAL

The present volume of the *Journal of Politics* is devoted to some of the problems and issues relating to state politics in Eastern India. This is an area where systematic and comprehensive studies have been lacking. State politics is the resultant of forces of challenge and response. It does not yet have any conceptual mould. Even operationally it can not be treated as an isolate. In a federal set up, there are problems which are equally the concern of the centre as well as the states. It is evident that many political issues are regional in character. The questions of even the centre-state relationship, inter-state boundary disputes are not only constitutional and administrative problems but also have their political implications.

In the present volume we intended to publish articles on subjects which are deemed to be the constituent elements of state politics in Eastern India. It has neither been our intention nor is it practicable to present a treatise on state politics, complete in all its details and despite all its variants. The present volume attempts to discuss some of the aspects of state politics which when taken in their totality may present a coherent overview of the state politics in Eastern India.

A K Barua in his article *State Politics in Northeast India : A Framework of Analysis* raises a series of questions to examine the multi-dimensional contextual framework of state politics in our federal structure which should provoke further discussion. His article is devoted wholly to a critical examination of the nature of state politics in Northeast India. Barua submits that the state politics in Northeast India can be studied in a meaningful way in the light of the Marxian framework.

G Phukon in his article *Inter-state conflict in Northeast India : An Angle of vision* discusses inter-state conflicts in Northeast India in a historical perspective. He submits that the British administration widened the difference between the people of the plains and the hills. It was thus, the Britishers, to some extent, responsible for the pollution of the social air among them. By differentiating between them, they planted mutual distrust, suspicion and unhealthy relation which still continues as a British legacy.

The Submission of Phukon is supplimented by AC Talukdar in the article *Assam-Arunachal Border Dispute : A Note*. He states that Assam-Arunachal boundary dispute owes its origin to the Notification of 1914 during British rule in India. He analyses the different aspects of the complex problem of boundary dispute. In his final analysis of the problem Talukdar states that the solution of the problem is possible by a political approach rather than legal approach.

P Sengupta in his article *Asom Gana Parishad's Accession to Power : A close look* discusses how AGP came to power in Assam in 1985 elections. In this perspective he submits that the consequence of the dispersion and democratization of power in India is that new elements have entered into the political arena. Introduction of modern parliamentary system based on universal adult suffrage has encouraged the organisation of interests on the basis of particularistic loyalties. He further states that so long as the regional parties agree to function within the existing constitutional order, so long they do not call into question the legitimacy of India's democratic political process, their emergence may pose a challenge not to India's unity but to the party which is at the helm of national affairs.

D Bhagawati in his article *Implications and Approaches to Land Reforms in the Tribal society* of Meghalaya discusses the emergence of new economic forces which in return will threaten the dominance of the ruling class. Ruling class tied to feudal or semi feudal economy and it is afraid of new economic forces. A well intentioned land programme or reforms has been interpreted as distortions of customs, exploitation of tribals by outsiders precisely because land reforms would break the hold of ruling class in the tribal society. Ultimately the issues involved in land reforms bogged down to trivial.

H H Das & Choudhury in their article *Factionalism and Power Politics in Ruling Parties : A study of Intra-party conflicts in Orissa* state that factionalism is a peculiar characteristic of the Indian Party system. As in other parts of the country, in Orissa also it has become a part and parcel of the democratic process and its concomitant of the party government. Factional politics acquires a predominant position when a political party comes to power with a slender majority and finds it difficult to maintain the political balance. Such a situation is common in both central and state level politics. Dissidentism or factionalism both in ruling and opposition is a common feature. Factional politics of the centre reflects on state politics in a miniature.

SN Roy in his article *Emerging trends in state Politics in West Bengal : New experiment in alternative strategy for structural changes in society, economy and politics* outlines perceptively the nature and spectrum of change

of state politics in West Bengal and its role and relationship with socio-economic and political conditions with adequate materials and states that state politics in West Bengal has assumed a left orientation.

B Mukherjee in her article the *Eight Parliamentary Elections in West Bengal : A swing towards Right* submits that both positive and negative factors worked jointly that produce the 'rightist' swing in the electoral scene of West Bengal. The negative factor correctly accounts for erosion of Left support and the positive factors, particularly the craving for national unity created the tilt for which the Congress (I) could improve its position so spectacularly. Swing to the right after 1984 poll in the political culture of West Bengal may be the product of certain temporary factors and it may be ephemeral.

The present volume has been possible only with the help of the contributors and I wish to express my deep gratitude to them. We are grateful to the University authority for making available the funds for the publication of the journal. I am thankful to all the members of the Editorial Board who helped me in this venture.

I must thank the proprietor and the workers of the Chandrakanta Press, Tarun Nagar, Gauhati, for completing the printing of the journal in time.

EDITOR

AK BARUAH

STATE POLITICS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

A Framework of Analysis

In a federal society like ours, the constituent units of the federation, called states and their political processes need to be studied very carefully. These constituent units can be studied not only in terms of their relations, with, what we have come to call in India, the centre but also in terms of their relationship with sister states. But all this can be studied properly only if we have a clear picture of the politics of these states themselves. It is in this sense that state politics requires a framework of analysis. This problem of developing a framework of analysis for the purpose of studying state politics was first discussed by Professor Iqbal Narain in 1966.¹ The point was made forcefully by him in 1976 when he argued that "a framework is needed to identify and articulate the points of study and research; to provide for a sensitive refracting structure for observing the changing political phenomena and locating the 'constants' and 'variables' in the panorama of politics; to serve as a basis of comparison between one pattern of state politics and another; and to encourage scientific investigations into the labyrinth of state politics, which may ultimately lead to the emergence of a possible theory of state politics in India"² A close look at the major works on state politics in India reveals that almost all the serious attempts at analysing the political processes of the states have been influenced by one or the other of the two dominant frameworks developed by Myron Weiner and Iqbal Narain.³

Weiner views the Indian states as constituent units of the Indian Political System. But he treats the individual states as separate political systems. He of course does not give any theoretical reasons for doing so but merely says that they are large enough to be studied as total systems. However his framework seeks to analyse the political processes in individual states in the context of the socioeconomic environment and the performances of the government.⁴

For Iqbal Narain state Politics is to be understood basically in terms of linkage politics with the help of a three dimensional framework. These dimensions are contextual, structural and operative. The contextual dimension com-

Rises the historical background of a state, the geographical locale, the infrastructure which manifests itself in the social pluralism of the country, the level and pattern of education, urbanization etc.⁵ The structural dimension includes the constitutional structure, political parties, pressure groups, elections and the administrative structure.⁶ The operational dimension embraces role orientation, political behavior, and functional aspect or the 'balance sheet of performance'. While summing up the discussion on his framework Narain states that it has a "bias towards systematic approach" he claims that it has a difference in the sense that it insists on a dynamic perspective. He also indicates that it is an open system. Whatever may be the qualifications Narian's framework too falls in to the same genera as that of Weiner because it views state politics from a systems point of view and the systems approach does have its problems.

Ever since its emergence in Social Sciences systems paradigm has been criticised for its maintenance bias. Critics have pointed out that it is incapable of explaining social conflict and move particularly the processes of fundamental social change. A related issue has been that it assumes the existence of an equilibrating mechanism in the systems under study.⁸ Such criticism is invited by the very idea of "system". All systems do have boundaries. These boundaries separate them from the environments. Such an idea of a system within a boundary implies that it tends to maintain itself through various processes whenever it is disturbed by stress from within or without its boundaries. The question of maintenance, thus, occupies a central position in all systems analysis. Maintenance infact is viewed as the normal state; changes, specially radical change, is viewed as an abberation only. As Allen says "The conceptual approach that assumes reality as basically static provides the framework for theoretical explanation which explains and justify the status-quo."⁹ It is therefore clear that the systems approach will always bring in a statuse-quo bias to the analysis.

Moreover, the systems approach with its inherent emphasis on the state of equilibrium assumes that "any social system tends towards a state of rest in which the conflicts and strains among its component parts are reduced to a minimum"¹⁰ By assuming that conflict tends to be reduced to a minimum this framework builds up a model of politics the essence of which is consensus. The consensual framework stresses a common obeisance by the general populace to values crucial to the society, acceptance of the basic legitimacy of the existing structural forms, and suggests- while recognising some differences and conflicts within society-the compatibility and reconciliability of differences rather than the possibility of non-compatibility, non-resoluable difference.¹¹

It is rather clear from the above discussion that if we use a framework with a systemic bias for the study of State politics, in the North-East India or elsewhere we shall be bringing a status-quoist, conservative bias to our analysis. It is precisely because of this reason that we shall have to avoid using any of the two dominant frameworks currently being used by the students of state politics in India. For a fruitful study of state politics, politics must be viewed as persuasive and omnipresent articulation of social conflict. This conflict must not however be sought to be located in the superstructural phenomena or accepted as general for all types of societies. Because then conflict will have to be defined and any analysis in a way that prevent it from altering social structures. For a comprehensive idea of any political reality conflict must be viewed as often generated by the clash of interest among social classes and thus entering into all social relations. This approach of course demands a class analysis of politics which is possible only under the framework of dialectical materialism.

A look at the social reality of the region makes the point abundantly clear. Until the British occupation of Assam in 1826 this region was a sparsely populated territory. Except for the feuds among the local rulers and occasional attacks from outside the region the life here had been rather placid. Even Assam, where the Ahoms ran an administration for six hundred years was a "semi-tribal, semi-feudal society of petty producers." The British annexed Assam, controlled its economy and exposed the closed society to immigration of labourers, new skills, new vices and new ideas. By the seventh decade of the nineteenth century almost the entire region came under British administration. The British introduced a new system of administration, English education and, more important a set of new economic policies. The British imperialism exploited the region, but at the same time it began a process of change. As this process was superimposed on the old system of production, its pace was very slow and it did not effect any radical transformation in the living conditions of the vast masses of the region immediately. But over a period of time it led to the emergence of new social classes. When these classes began to articulate their interest the society began to experience a series of tensions.

In the post independence period increased popular participation in administration, improved system of transport and communication and spread of education expedited the process of change and process of class formation acquired some speed. The most significant development of this period is the emergence of the middle classes and the educated elite. In the absence of a significant industrial bourgeoisie and organised working classes the middle

classes where they exist and the educated elite in others have become the most dominant sections in their respective communities. Articulation of interest by the sections of the various ethnic communities of the region has generated conflicts of interest among these communities.

It is interesting to note that as the most dominant sections, the middle classes and the educated elite articulate the interests not only of their own classes but, may at times, also of the subordinate classes. Under the influence of the dominant ideology such articulation acquires the kind of universality in the society concerned which enables these to be projected as the interest of the entire community. For instance when the Assamese students take up causes like establishment of industries and protection of cultural identity or protest against unchecked foreign immigration, or the APHLC demands a separate hill state, they seem to articulate the interest of the "entire community". That is why the issues they raise and the struggles they launch acquire such unbelievable magnitudes. Most of the burning issues pervading the state politics of this region like the tensions among various communities, emergence of student power, separatist and cessationist tendencies and even occasional opposition to developmental measures, the failure of many welfare measures to effect any significant improvement in the life of the masses, and the search for identity among many tribal and other ethnic communities can be studied fruitfully only if we relate these to the process of class formation in the region.

It is obvious that the burden of the argument here is that the state politics in the North-East India can be studied in a meaningful way only if we adopt a marxist perspective. One of the constant and almost wornout objections to the use of marxism in political science has been that lands one in the clutches of economic determinism. But except for the most unimaginative no social scientist worth the name would today take a deterministic approach to the study of politics. It must however be stated here even at the risk of elaborating the obvious that marxism does not necessarily imply determinism. It is true that certain statements of Marx and Engels can be interpreted as turning politics into a very deterministic activity which in turn deprives politics of any substantial degree of autonomy. But Marx himself has argued that because of innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences etc, the economic basis may show " infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances."¹² Moreover, Engels himself stated in that famous and oft quoted letter to Bloch that they (Marx and Engels) did not have the necessary time " to allow the other elements involve in the interaction to

come into their rights".¹³ It is therefore clear that this objection to the use of marxism in the study of politics is not at all valid. Infact marxism allows sufficient autonomy to the political and for that matter to all superstructural phenomena. The only point that marxism hammers is that we can't understand superstructural phenomena including political phenomena without relating it to the structure. The insistence of the non-marxist social scientist at calling marxism deterministic despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary merely reflect their biases. In this context it is necessary to remember that believing in Marxism does not mean believing in this or that thesis, It means believing in a method, As Lukacs says " It is the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its method can be developed expanded only along the lines laid down by the founders."¹⁴

There, indeed, is a major problem of applying marxism to the fields of study like state politics, and in any other branch of political science. It is that it insists on a wholistic perception of social phenomena which makes the separation of the political, economic social and cultural parts of a social whole artificial and arbitrary. Such an approach would appear to rob politics of its specific character. Thus, particular treatment of politics would turn out to be a mere formal description of the processes and institutions. But as Ralph Miliband points out "...it is perfectly possible to treat politics as a specific phenomena, namely as the ways and means whereby social conflict and notably class conflict is manifested. At one end, this may mean accomodation and agreemant between social groups which are not greatly devided (or for that mattar which are); at the other and it may mean civil war which is politics carried out by other means.". ¹⁵

If we accept such a definition of politics and try to analyse the political events in the state of North-East India in context of the formation of classes in the region and their role in society and relate these to the structural phenomena it may be possible for us to study state politics in a manner which is free from a conservative, status-quoist bias. An effort in this direction is overdue.

Notes and References :

1. Iqbal Narain, 'The Problem', *Seminar* No. 87, 1966.
2. Iqbal Narain, *State Politics in India*, (Meerut, 1976) PXVI
3. The only notable exception to this rule appears to be Shri Ram Maheswari's book State Government in India, (Delhi, 1969) Which was written from the perspective of public administration. There are of course some descriptive accounts of political events in some states. But these can't be considered studies in state politics.
4. Myron Weiner, (ed) *State politics in India*, (New Jersey 1968) p.7.

5. Iqbāl Narain, *State Politics in India*, opcit PPXX-XXXII
6. *Ibid* PP XXXII-XXXVII.
7. *Ibid* PP XXXVII-XL
8. For a discussion see, J.Rex, *Key Problems in Sociological Theory*, (London 1961), J.C.Harsanyi, "Rational Choice Models of Political Behavior Vs functional and conformist Theories" *World Politics*, VOL 21, No 4. PP.531-538. Ralph Dahrendorf, *Essays in the Theory of Society*, (London 1968) PP.107-120
9. VL. Allen, *Social Analysis*, (London 1975) P.44
10. Barrington Moore, *Political power and social theory*, (Cambridge Mass 1958) P 137.
11. See. H.Sandor, *Mass society and Political conflict*, (London 1976) P 235.
12. K. Marx, *Capital* Vol.III (Moscow,1962) P 772.
13. K.Marx & F.Engels, *Selected works* (London 1968) P.692.
14. George Lukacs, *History and class consciousness*, (London, 1971) p 1.
15. Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics*, (London,1977) PP.6-7.

G Phukon

INTER-STATE CONFLICT IN NORTHEAST INDIA

An Angle of vision

Northeast India consists of the territories of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. This is virtually most isolated region and strategically it is much more important than any other regions as it faces China and Bhutan in the North, Burma in the southeast and Bangladesh in the west. Prior to the advent of the British different areas of this region were ruled by different kings and traditional local chiefs maintaining independent sovereign status. The whole region has been full of heterogeneous population with their distinct socio-cultural identities. During the British rule most of the areas of this region were, however, brought under one administrative unit. And even after independence, most of these areas remained as a single administrative unit in the name of Assam. But since the sixties, the process of reorganization of the states in northeast India started and consequently the states and Union Territories such as Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh (1972), Mizoram(1972) have been carved out of the original state of Assam. All these newly formed states and union territories cover a wide range of hill areas inhabiting various hill tribes with different traditions, culture and social system characteristically distinct from the people of the plains who occupied the dominant position in the undivided Assam. The hill states were mainly created in order to fulfil the socio-political aspiration of the hill people. They felt terribly insecure of their interest within a greater Assam. Indeed, they were never happy with the dominant leadership of the plains during the British rule. After independence, the sense of deprivation and exploitation by the plains reached its extreme point in the minds of hill people which ultimately led to the formation of afore-said hill states and union territories. But surprisingly though, it may seem, even after creation of separate states on the basis of hill sentiment, the same attitude and feeling still persists among a section of the hill people which manifest in different border clashes and in the exposition of anti-Assamese feelings in the hills. It may be noted that when we talk of inter-state conflict in northeast region, it mainly refers to the conflict of the plains of Assam

with its neighbouring hill states particularly with Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram in the form of border disputes and anti-Assamese movement in these areas. The inter-state conflict in this region, may therefore, be understood in terms of conflict between the hills and the plains which has a legacy of the past. In this paper, an attempt has been made to understand this legacy which still continues to be a factor in determining the nature of inter-state relation in northeast India.

II

After British occupation, the neighbouring hill areas were gradually brought within the administrative jurisdiction of Assam. As such the Khasi and Jaintia hills were annexed with Assam by the British in 1828, Garo hills in 1871, Naga and Lushai Hills (now called Mizoram) in 1890 and the NEFA (now called Arunachal) in 1911. Ethnologically, the tribes of these hills are primarily of the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock with a sprinkling of Austric and Dravidian blood.¹ These tribal people had never been brought together under any central power before the British annexation of this region. They possessed their own language and culture with different socio-political institutions characteristically distinct from the plains. Although the British incorporated these areas into Assam, they administered them separately from the plains of Assam and conceded traditional pattern of governance. The hill areas were kept excluded from all Constitutional Reforms until 1937. Under the Act of 1935 they were administered under two categories namely "Partially Excluded areas" and "Excluded Areas". The districts of Garo Hills, Khasi-Jayantia Hills and Mikir Hills were partially excluded areas which could send representatives to the legislature and were placed under ministers with Governor's discretionary control. On the other hand, the Excluded Areas such as the Naga Hills and the Mizo Hills remained under direct Governor's control. Thus the hill tribes had very little scope of mingling with the people of the plains during the British rule. The political demarcation and separate system of administration in the hills had always been a factor of division between the hills and the plains. Non-tribals were not given admittance to the "Excluded Areas" without special permission. Such restrictions deepened the isolation of the hills from the plains and accentuated the economic backwardness of the hills. The backwardness in relation to the plains widened the gap between the people of the hills and the plains. In effect, socially, culturally, and even politically, the hill people were not sufficiently integrated with the people of the plains and they could not assimilate with the mainstream of the culture of the plains. Just before independence, an Adviser to the Governor of

Assam for the tribal areas felt that "the hillman of today is more separated from the plainsman than was his great grandfather".² Whether this was done deliberately in conformity with the policy of "divide and rule", as many local historians claims,³ or it was due to a policy of not disturbing susceptibilities of the hill people, is difficult to assess. However, it may be assumed that although the British might not have made direct efforts to divide the people of the hills and plains, indirectly their policy had this effect. As a result, the hill people were afraid of the plainsmen more than they were of the British. Rightly or wrongly, they even laboured under a suspicion that the rule of "white people" in the hitherto "Excluded Areas" would be replaced by their "more advanced" neighbour of the plains in free India.⁴ In fact, the hill elite believed that after independence, the plainsmen would be in an advantageous position to exploit them on a permanent basis. In this connection, the Report of the Sub-Committee formed by the Constituent Assembly on "North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas" maintained that :

The fear of exploitation by the people of the plains on account of their superior organization and experience of business, the hill people fear that if suitable provisions are not made to prevent the people of the plains from acquiring land in the hill areas, large number of them will settle down and not only occupy land but will also exploit them in the non-agricultural professions.⁵

Such fears and anxieties led to a strong anti-Assamese feeling among a section of the hill tribes. Even after independence, this section, in a memorandum submitted to the States Reorganization Commission complained that :

The Assamese who happened to be the single majority community in a heterogeneous state try not only to dominate others in all affairs of administration of the state, but also try to impose their language on the non-Assamese. We feel that it is quite unfair to divide the people into so many administrative units which are not the same, while the Assamese carry on their imperialist policy over the non-Assamese.⁶

It is true that hills were not bound with the plains by any ties of language and religion. The hill elite were very much concerned with the language question - how the various difficulties that might arise, with Assamese becoming the official language of Assam, could be overcome. In the subsequent period, the inevitable logic of reorganization of Northeast India on the basis of language

was the separation of non-Assamese speaking hill districts from the Assam valley. The Christian Missionaries, through the help of the British administration, succeeded in converting a sizable section of the hill people to Christianity under the cover of certain philanthropic and welfare activities. Westernised education kept abreast of Christianity, and, understandably shaped the social and political out-look among the hill tribes. The spread of Christianity was mainly due to the absence of any rigid social inhibitions or taboos such as watertight castes among the hill tribals. It may be noted that the civilizing and social welfare work done by the Missionaries amongst the tribals, though commendable in itself as a highly philanthropic work, had nothing in it, nor could it be expected to have anything, for giving them true ideals of nationalism and patriotism in the larger Indian context. But still the hill people feel indebted to Christianity for making them aware of their rightful place and status in independent India. It is, however, obvious that but for Christianity, perhaps, the hill people would have remained as yet another relatively neglected segment in the vast complex of humanity. Contact with the rest of India and the world outside through the medium of English - which came with Christianity - has enabled the hill tribals to assert themselves. The seeds of the demand for the hill states were, by and large, sown with the advent of Christianity. In fact, the Christianity has become the cultural dimension of the political process in the hills. It also provided a symbol of tribal identity and organized leadership among the hill tribes. The inherent fear of the hill people of losing their identity, accentuated by the fast pace of modernization to which the hill people has been exposed, has still been successfully exploited by the Christian missionary. They have been able to impress upon the bewildered tribal mind that even after achieving modern modes of life, they can save their identity from being swamped by the Hindu-dominated society of the plains if they accept Christianity. To counteract this stream no successful attempt was made by the plains to popularise the culture of the plains. The spread of Vishanabite and Aryan Hindu culture was on a very low web which could not at all attract the hill people. At the same time, the leaders of the plains had failed to establish adequate political communication with the hills. Even The Assam Tribune, which usually articulated the sentiment of the Assamese, in one of its editorials admitted that;

The plains people and their leaders have hardly made in the post planned efforts to develop closer ties between the two sections of the population or devoted any of their time to the problems with which the hill people are confronted ... the fault is entirely ours, the plains people's, for we have done absolutely nothing to earn their confidence to prove

that we have no evil designs on our brothers and sisters in the hills.⁷

It may be noted that although a section of the Assamese elite made themselves responsible for the attitude of the hill people towards the plains, they at the same time alleged that this was mainly due to result of a, as The Assam Tribune, put it, "well thought out imperialist policy".⁸ Perhaps, when the Assamese leaders failed to influence the hill people, they felt that the British pursued a policy of deliberate segregation of the hill people from the people of the plains. Similarly, Sri Prakasa, the Governor of Assam, also asserted that "during the British regime, the plains and hills instead of being helped to units, were kept apart from each other".⁹ Such assertions made so very often by these quarters, were, however, not without justification. While the British may have made no direct effort to divide the people of the hills and the plains, it appears that they took advantages of the existing differences between these people. In this connection, Disreeli, a British Parliamentarian maintained that :

Our empire in India was indeed founded upon the old principles of divide et impera (Divide and Rule), but that principle was put into action by us not with any Machiavellian device, but by merely taking advantage of the natural, and if I may use the expression, spontaneous circumstances of the country in which we were acting a part.¹⁰

Thus it is evident that during the colonial rule, the British instead of bridging the gaps between the hills and the plains, perpetuated the existing spirit of distinctness and separateness among them. As the strength of Indian national movement increased and the British realised that they might have to part with power, they obviously encouraged these sentiments in order to exploit the existing situation. Moreover in a bid to make complete separation of the hills from the plains, during the Second World War, the British toyed with the idea of a "Crown Colony" consisting of all the contiguous hill areas of Burma and Assam.¹¹

III

From the above discussion, it appears that the British took full advantages of the existing difference between the hills and the plains in order to perpetuate imperialist exploitation in this region. The British administration widened the difference between the people of the plains and the hills. It was thus, the

Britishers, to some extent, responsible for the pollution of the social air among them. By differentiating between them, they planted mutual distrust, suspicion and unhealthy relation among these population which still continues to be a factor of inter-state conflict in northeast region. And now this sense of distrust and suspicion among a section of the hill people have been exploited by the interested groups which occasionally led to anti-Assamese movement in the hills and border dispute between Assam and its neighbouring hill states. In fact, the British left a legacy of conflict between these two sections of population. Therefore, the inter-state conflict in the northeastern region is to be better understood in the context of its seeds sown by the colonial rule.

Notes and References:

1. E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, Calcutta (1926), p.25.
2. *Pataskar Commission Report* (1965-66), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
3. In this connection Amalendu Guha assoerts that "the official efforts were successful to the extent of nurturing the seeds of suspicisons in the tribal mind against their more developed neighbour in the plains" (See Amalendu Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977).
4. Participating in the debates of the Constituent Assembly on the provision of "sixth scheduled", the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy, the only representative of hills tribes, articulated this feeling of the hills and said: "When I speak in this House, I speak with a knowledge of the feeling of the hill tribes. The people of the hill areas are afraid of exploitetion by the plains" (Constituent Assembly Debates, (hereinafter CAD) Vol. XI, p. 711.
5. CAD, Vol. II.p. 109, Appendix 'C', Annexure IV.
6. Memorandum of the United Mizo Freedom Organization, Lushai Hills, submitted to the Secretary, States Reorganization Commission, New Delhi on 28th May, 1954.
7. *The Assam Tribune*, October 28, 1947.
8. *Ibid*, December 4, 1947.
9. Sri Prakasa, "Assam- The Frontier Province", *The Assam Tribune*, January 26,1950.
10. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, Third Series, Vol. 0 , XLVI, 1857.
11. R.Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam* (London, 1966) p. 110; Also see, CAD, Vol. IX, p. 1010 (Gopinath Bordoloi).

A C Talukdar

ASSAM-ARUNACHAL BOUNDARY DISPUTE

A Note

Boundary disputes between Assam and the newly created states of the North-Eastern Region is an important aspect of interstate relations. Such a dispute between Arunachal Pradesh and Assam has assumed serious importance in recent years and posed a threat to an otherwise cordial and co-operative relationship between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The dispute has led to occasional bitterness between the people of the two states and several boundary incidents of serious nature, in the past. Even now the boundary is very sensitive at several places and a solution to the problem has not yet been found out, inspite of best efforts of the two governments. The present paper tried to study certain aspects of the boundary dispute such as its historical background, nature of the dispute, ethnic composition of the boundary, political perspective and the efforts made to settle the dispute at various levels.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically the present boundary between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh owes its origin to the British Raj. The British, after annexing Assam and establishing their rule, there undertook a series of expeditions to the adjoining hill areas and gradually extended their administration into these areas.¹ Such newly acquired territories of present Arunachal Pradesh were made part of Lakhimpur District of Assam but were kept separate from the plain areas of the district by an Inner Line introduced under the Inner Line Regulation, 1873.² This line extending from the trijunction of Bhutan and the Kamrup and Darrang districts of Assam to Nagaland forming an arc around the present Darrang, Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh districts of Assam formed the basis of present Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary.³ In 1914, the hill areas of Lakhimpur district was separated by creating the Central and Eastern Section and the Western Section of the North-East Frontier Tracts of Assam.⁴ The Notifications issued to create these two Sections of the North-East Frontier Tracts, described in details their boundaries with their adjacent plain districts.⁵ The boundary ran, more or less,

along the Inner Line than in force, and served as the boundary between the Frontier Tracts and the plain districts of Assam till Independence. At the eve of the Independence, the Constituent Assembly of India constituted a Sub-Committee for the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas to examine the future administrative set up of these areas, in independent India, under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi.⁵ This Sub-Committee recommended to the Constituent Assembly of India for the continuation of separate and central administration in the Frontier Tracts with the Government of Assam as its agent and the continuation of a policy of gradually extending regular administration into these areas. The Committee also recommended that the areas over which administration has already been satisfactorily established, should be taken over by the Government of Assam for regular administration.⁶

One of the important aspects of this Sub-Committee, which later came to be cited often by the people of Arunachal Pradesh, was that the Committee did not include any representative from the Frontier Tracts although it co-opted members from other Tribal areas including Naga Tribal Areas of Assam.⁷ In pursuance of the recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee certain areas belonging to the Frontier Tracts were transferred to plain districts of Assam in 1951.⁸ Changing of the administrative jurisdiction of these areas, popularly known as the Transferred Areas, substantially altered the position of the boundary in Jonai, Sadyia, Balipara And Margherita Sector of the Frontier Tracts. This shifted the boundary line described by the 1914 Notifications so as to exclude the transferred Area from the then frontier Tracts and District and to include them in the then Lakhimpur District of Assam. Earlier in 1934 the boundary line described by the 1914 Notification in the western section of the Frontier Tract was modified to create the Balipara Frontier Tract and to separate it from the Darrang District.⁹ The Creation of NEFA in 1954 and Arunachal Pradesh in 1972 did not alter the boundary line of the former frontier Tracts. They only re-defined the same line described in 1914 modified in 1934 and 1951. Thus the legal position of the boundary between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh today is as described by Notification No 977 EB and 979 EB of 25th September, 1914 modified vide Notification No 6779 AP of 2nd November, 1934 and read with Notification No. TAD/R/35/50/109 of 23rd February, 1951. This boundary is also described partially in Assam Government Notification No RSS,296/51/126 of 5 March, 1957 which described the boundary of the then Lakhimpur District of Assam.¹⁰ However the boundary remained mostly un-demarcated on the ground leaving scope for future disputes.

THE GENESIS OF THE DISPUTE

Although the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary problems assumed importance only in recent years, due to emergence of a number of factors the boundary dispute between the then NEFA and ASSAM early years of our independence in some form or other. The people of Arunachal Pradesh, at least a section of them, did not reconcile to the transfer of certain areas of former Frontier tracts to the plains district of Assam in 1951. As early as in 1961 D. Ering the then Member of Parliament from NEFA asked a question in Parliament seeking confirmation from the Government whether it was aware of a boundary dispute between the people of NEFA and Assam and whether the Government had appointed a committee to enquire into the matter and to demarcate boundary between the two. To this prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru replied on 5th May 1961 in the following words :

The people inhabiting a large part of the Siang Frontier Division of NEFA are known as Adis. There are some Adi villages in the Lakhimpur District of Assam also. When the physical demarcation of Inner Line was taken in hand in this area some time ago, the Adi villages in Assam represented that the Line should be revised to include them in NEFA. One Adi village from NEFA represented that its right over some cultivable land outside the Inner Line in Assam should be safeguarded.

A meeting of senior officials from Assam and NEFA was held in Shillong to discuss the problem. The Political Officer of the Siang Frontier Division and the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur district jointly toured the area. It was not considered necessary to appoint a Committee to enquire into this matter.

The Assam Government are understood to have decided to extend the same privileges as are enjoyed by the people in the transferred areas of Assam to the Adi villages under their jurisdiction. They have also confirmed that the right of the Adi village from NEFA possessing cultivable lands in Assam will not be affected in any way by the demarcation of the Inner Line. An officer each from Assam and NEFA have been deputed to remain in the area to settle the differences on the spot till the demarcation is completed.¹²

Eight years later another Parliamentary question was asked on Assam NEFA boundary dispute by Vishwa Nath Pandey M.P.¹³ In reply to this question Vidya Charan Sukla, Minister in the Ministry of Home Affairs admitted on Lok Sabha on 25th April 1969 that the people of NEFA had been submitting a number of representations and memoranda requesting the Government to take

necessary steps in regard to its boundary dispute for last 15 years. He also admitted that there had been some incidents and activities in connection with the alignment of the boundary. Regarding the action taken by the Government the minister said that all possible steps were being taken, by the Government to remove the difficulties of the local people and dispel unnecessary misunderstanding jointly by the NEFA Administration and the Government of Assam.

Meanwhile the Administrative Reforms Commission Report(ARC) 1968 which emphasised the importance of the Assam NEFA boundary dispute, created a stir both in Assam and in Arunachal Pradesh. The ARC Report stated that the boundary dispute between Assam and NEFA had aroused strong feelings. According to the Commission the shortage of good cultivable land in NEFA was the main reason behind this dispute. It emphasised the urgency of evolving an early solution of the boundary problem between Assam and NEFA "otherwise attitudes will harden and made it difficult to find an acceptable solution later on" and the problem may assume the form of an agitation. The Commission suggested two alternative solutions to the problem one, suitable land may be provided by the Assam Government in areas bordering NEFA which can be allotted to NEFA people for cultivation. The ownership of the land can continue with the Assam Government. Two, new land can be located and developed for cultivation within NEFA itself.¹⁴ The very next day of appearing the ARC report in the press, the Assam Tribune a leading english daily in the region brought out an editorial in its issue of 23rd September, 1968, urging an early solution to the Assam- NEFA boundary problem before attitudes harden making it difficult to find an acceptable solution later on. It also expressed its opinion in favour of the second solution suggested by the ARC expressing fear that the first alternative suggested by the ARC might lead to misunderstandings and consequent hard feelings between the NEFA tribals and the plains people. Sri Lummer Dai, an author and a high ranking official from Arunachal Pradesh, then a student at Shillong, supported this view of the Assam Tribune. Writing to the Editor of the Assam Tribune, he also expressed his fear that the first suggestion of the ARC might lead to further misunderstanding, specially in view of the existing dispute regarding the boundary. He thought that the second suggestion of the ARC to be worth considering.¹⁵

The ARC report also evoked interest among other student leaders from NEFA. Following the publication of its report, Bakin Pertin, a student leader (later an MP from Arunachal Pradesh) wrote a series of letters to different dailies in the country urging an early demarcation of NEFA-Assam boundary

to "forestall any unpleasant incident in future." He suggested constitution of a Boundary Commission for the purpose. In these series of letters, he added a new dimension to the problem by questionning, for the first time in public, the validity of the 1951 notification transferring certain areas of the former Frontier Tracts to the plain district of Assam by calling it an *ex parte* decision without consulting the people from the area. He opined that the people of NEFA were not represented in the Bordoloi Committee, on the recommendation of which these areas were transferred to plains districts of Assam, and hence they are not bound to accept the transfer.¹⁶

A section of the national press, at the time, also gave due importance to the problem. For example, The Times of India, in its issue of 29th October, 1968 gave stress on the issue of demarcating the boundary between Assam and NEFA and said that Shillong should lose no time in taking the necessary steps in this direction. It also suggested that the first thing to do in the circumstances is to secure co-operation of the Surveyor General of India to survey the area and to fix the boundary.¹⁷ But no serious attention was paid to the problem, at the time either by the State Government or by the Central Government. As a result, although certain attempts were made to fix and demarcate the boundary, it could not be completed due to opposition from various quarters.¹⁸ The boundary dispute, therefore, lingered on with sporadic incidents here and there.¹⁹ Meanwhile, emergence of a number of factors on the scene, in last one and a half decade has further aggravated the problem. In 1979, a border incident that took place at Likabali led to a very strained relations between the Assamese and the Arunachalee people and threatened to assume the proportion of communal violence at certain places in Arunachal Pradesh.²⁰ This incident along with the repeated appeal of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union aroused the concerned governments to take the matter seriously and to do something tangible to solve the problem. But the dispute is yet to be settled and the border is still pregnant with possibilities of violent incidents at any moment.²¹

NATURE OF THE DISPUTE

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has a 704 kilometre long common boundary making it the second longest interstate boundary in the North-Eastern Region²².

A part of this boundary is already demarcated and there is no dispute regarding this portion of the boundary. Recently some more parts of the boundary between Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and Dibrugarh district of Assam has also been fixed.²³ The dispute is thus confined to only a portion of the boundary. The total length of this portion is officially stated to be 316 kilometres.²⁴ The

actual areas of dispute on this 316 kilometre stretch of the boundary, are again, divided into severral sectors. They may be placed under two categories according to the nature and intensity of the dispute. In certain sectors the dispute is, more or less, confined to claims and counterclaims for certain areas with no or very rare boundary incident. For example the Balijan-Bandardewn (Tipling) Sector in Lakhimpur-Subansiri area or the Kanubari Sukanjuri-Nagakhat Sector in Dibrugarh-Tirap district area. Secondly there are areas where the boundary is very sensitive and where frequent boundary incidents take place. For example the Jonekorong, the Debing-Depi, Telam-Dekapam and the Likabali sectors of the boundary. In the former category the dispute is mostly regarding a village or a reserve forest while in the later category the dispute mostly involves cultivable lands on the boundary. The actual areas disputed are not very big at any given site. It involves a plot or a patch of cultivable land or a commercially important site from less than an acre to few hundred acres. The nature of the boundary dispute in these sectors is therefore, essentially that of a land dispute with all the complexities that go with it. Sometimes lands traditionally cultivated by the people on one side are claimed by the people on the other side on the ground that it lies on their side of the boundary. Sometimes lands reclaimed by the people of one side is occupied by the people living on the other side because they think that it is on their side of the boundary. At other times a tenant tilling the land for his landlord for several years suddenly claims the land to be his own when somebody tells him that the land is on the other side of the boundary.²⁵ As is natural every such case leads to a quarrel, often violent among the parties and since the incidents happen to be on the boundary or since the parties concern happened to belong to different states these quarrels assume the proportion of a boundary incident/dispute. Hopefully, however, the leaders of the states appear to have realised the real nature of the dispute in this area.²⁶

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE BOUNDARY

The ethnic composition of the population in the disputed areas has a direct bearing on the nature of the boundary dispute. The population pattern on the disputed areas of the boundary presents two distinct patterns. A homogenous population belonging to a single tribal group living in the area since long. They are found in the disputed areas mentioned in the first category. Here the main cause of the dispute appears to be the desire of a village to come within the jurisdiction of the state where the majority of their tribe lives or to gain the right to use a forest or so. Secondly mixed population of several subtribes of a tribe or tribals and nontribals who have migrated to the area from different places in

the respective states. This is the pattern found in the more sensitive areas of the boundary. For example, in the Jonekorong and Debing-Depi area of the boundary the people living on the Arunachal Pradesh side belong to Padams, Miniyongs, Gallongs, Millangs etc living in the same village. They are comparatively recent migrants to the area from different interior villages of the two Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. On the Assam side the population consists of the Mishings, Kacharis and to some extent Nepalis. Most of them, except the Mishings are new settlers in the area who came to the area later than their counterparts in the Arunachal side. Even a section of the Mishings are people coming from other parts of the state. Towards the west, in Telam-Dekapam and Likabali sectors the population pattern changes a little. While it is the same mixed population on the Assam side, the population on the Arunachal side is predominantly Gallongs in these areas. Thus compared to the Balijan-Bandardewa (Tipling) or the Chengajan-Sukanjuri-Nagakhat sector of the boundary, the population pattern of the Jonekorong Debing-Depi sector and the Likabali sector is more complex adding to the complexity of the problem in these sectors.

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Boundary problem is a very sentimental issue and hence is bound to acquire a political perspective wherever it exists. Although in Assam, the Assam-Arunachal boundary dispute does not appear to have much political significance, in Arunachal Pradesh it figures as a very important political issue at all levels. Public leaders, political parties and certain other organisations are equally seized with the problem. It frequently figures in the statements and public utterances of both the political parties in the Territory. The People's Party of Arunachal, a regional party operating in the territory and enjoying a considerable popularity includes it even in their election manifestoes.²⁷ The All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union, a political heavy weight inspite of its professed non-political character, raises the issue in almost all its sessions and includes it in each of their memorandum submitted to the government.²⁸

Formation of responsible government in Arunachal Pradesh and emergence of political parties in the scene, are in fact, the real reason for which the Assam Arunachal Pradesh boundary problem received the public attention as it did today. In earlier years when there was no popular government or political party in Arunachal Pradesh a boundary incident was handled by the local officers at the local level and the Union Territory or Assam as a whole was hardly drawn to the problem. Now a days however, any incident occurring in the boundary receives prompt attention of the Arunachal government which takes

up the matter with its counterpart in Assam or the Central Government. The political parties, specially the Opposition immediately brings it to the notice of the people and the government and thereby does not allow any boundary incidents to go un-noticed.

A further political punch has been added to the problem by questioning the validity of the 1951 notification by a section of the people in Arunachal Pradesh. While the ruling party has agreed more or less to settle the dispute as per existing notifications ²⁹ the opposition party in Arunachal Pradesh has refused to recognise the 1951 Notification transferring certain areas to Assam. They not only described this notification as unlawfull and unilateral but staked their claim further to the North bank of Brahmaputra. ³⁰

OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROBLEM

In recent years emergence of a number of social, economic and demographic factors have added certain new dimensions to the problem. They have made the boundary in certain sectors more sensitive. An understanding of these factors are essential if we are to understand the Assam-Arunachal boundary problem in its real perspective.

As mentioned by the ARC in its report and also discussed in the 'current topic' column of the Times of India, in 1968, the most important factor aggravating the boundary problem between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh appears to be the growing pressure for flat arable land in Arunachal Pradesh. Traditionally the people of Arunachal Pradesh practised 'JHOOMING' (Terrace cultivation) cultivating the hilly slopes that abound the territory. But in recent years due mainly to governmental efforts, the primitive and unremunerative method of cultivation has increasingly been replaced by permanent wet rice cultivation. Due to its comparative economic advantages more and more people in Arunachal Pradesh are taking to this new method of cultivation. This has led to a spurt in the demand for flat arable land in the Territory. Although Arunachal Pradesh is very large in size it does not have enough flat lands to meet this growing demand. Most of its flat lands lie in the foothills areas along the Assam-Arunachal boundary. The pressure for more land is, therefore, felt more in this region. There is a tendency on the part of the villagers of Arunachal in this region to occupy all suitable land available in the area. This frequently leads to clashes and quarrels over lands, at times such quarrels take place between parties across the boundary. Lack of any demarcation of the boundary on the ground in certain sectors leaves ample scopes for such quarrels to develop

into boundary disputes.

Improvement of transport and communication facilities and extention of Railway Line up to Jonai along certain portion of the boundary has also served as a factor emphasising the problem. In fact the most sensitive sectors of the boundary lie along the newly extesded Railway Line from Lakhimpur to Murkongselek station of N.F.Railway. Before the opening of the Railway line and later the road that runs parallel to this line, transport and communication in this area were very poor. The population in the area was very sparse and the farmers from both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh were more so less free to cultivate any patch of land they chose. People recognised the rights of each farmers to the land he reclaimed irrespective of the boundary and there was no interferance from any quarters. It is no wonder that the people seldom bothered for the Assam-Arunachal boundary. But the extention of Railway line to the area has completely changed the situation.

Another factor adding to the problem is the opening of police outposts along the boundary. During the last few years a number of new police outposts have been established along the boundary, specially by the Assam government. It is alleged that the police personnels of these outposts instead of maintaining peace and amity in the boundary area, contributed more in creating tensions among the people across the boundary. It was alleged by the villagers of Arunachal along the boundary during the authors visit to these villages that Assam police even helped certain people to encroach lands tilled by Arunachali villagers for years in the plea that these belong to Assam. An old widow in Depi village complained to the author that all her lands were userped by the Nepali person who used to till these lands for her, on the plea that it falls on the Assam side of the boundary. She suspects that the Nepali was incited and backed by the Assam police. Even the 1979 incident was sparked off by an encroachment of an Anchal Samiti Hall by the Assam police at Likabali.

Last but not least is the influx of new settlers in the Assam side of the area. Following devastations of flood in successive years and facilitated by the opening of the rail and road communications up to the Jonai area, a stream of new settlers, mostly Boro tribals from Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam, Mishings from Mazuli area of Sibsagar and also some immigrants from Nepal, poured into the area. They have increased the pressure for land in Assam side as well, changed the demographic pictrure on the boundary area and disturbed the equilibrium among the indigenous population living on the boundary. Since the new settlers are ignorant about the rights of a person over a particular plot of land which due to the nature of heavy growth of vegitation in the area looks like jungle land if it is left follow for a year or two, and new settlers have a

tendency to reclaim the most suitable lands, this influx lead to frequent land clashes and boundary incidents. They also added to the complexity of the problem by increasing the number of claims and counterclaims over a plot of land.

Efforts at Finding a solution and role of Central Government.

Although the boundary dispute between Assam and then NEFA existed since early fifties no serious attempt appears to have been made to find a solution to the problem either by the State or by the Central Government. Occasional attempts to demarcate the boundary on the ground progressed very slowly and appears to have been abandoned at slightest protest from any quarters.³¹ Boundary incidents between Assam and NEFA were dealt with at local levels by officers of the governments as and when they occurred. Occasionally NEFA Administration requested the Central Government to find a solution to the Assam-NEFA boundary problem but the Central Government appears to have done nothing tangible in this regard except perhaps forwarding those to the government of Assam.³² The Assam Government also appears to have failed to realise the urgency of the matter. This is evident from the manner in which the Assam government deals with its boundary problems with its neighbouring states. Although Assam has boundary disputes with four of the six Indian States and Union Territories it has no "separate division for border, no separate ministry, no secretariat not even a separate office."³³ Boundary problems are dealt by Home Department which is very busy and can spare very little time for the boundary problems. In most cases clearifications never reach the district. In case of complicated matters the top bosses generally remark in the papers as 'file in border file', and the border file becomes fat with unattended papers,³⁴ According to an official posted near a sensitive sector of the boundary for several years, the pattern of dealing with the boundary incidents during the period was like this: As soon as an incident occurs a Deputy Commissioner on one side contacts his counterpart on the otherside, visit the place, some patch up solution is found out till another incident occurs again. This kind of approach, to some extent appears to have continued till today.³⁵

The issue of settling the Assam-Arunachal boundary dispute seems to have assumed importance after creation of Arunachal Pradesh into a Union Territory in 1972. The matter was frequently discussed in the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh.³⁶ However a genuine attempt at solving the problem was made only after the 1979 incident. A lot of activities were seen in that year both on the part of the state governments and the Central government regarding the boundary issue. There were also certain efforts made at non-official level to find

out a solution to the problem. A meeting between the two chief Ministers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh agreed to appoint a Tripartite High Power Committee to study the boundary dispute between the two states, besides agreeing to maintain the statusquo in the boundary. The Tripartite High Power Committee was to consist of the representatives of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and the Central Government. Two more high-level meeting also took place in 1979. One between the Governor of Assam and Lt, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh accompanied by their Chief Ministers on 20th March ,1979 and the other between the Government and Chief Ministers of the two States with the representative of the Central Government on 11th April, 1979.³⁷ The High Power Committee was finally appointed in October that year with the Director of Eastern Circle of the Survey of India as the representative of the Central Government and three representatives each from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.³⁸ The terms of reference of this Committee were : 1. Delineation of the boundary according to the existing notifications on the map. The map will then be referred to the State and Union Territory Governments for acceptance with mutually agreed adjustments as may be necessary ; and 2. Survey on the ground and demarcation of the agreed boundary with pillars.³⁹

At the non-offical level the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) took initiative and met its counterpart the Assam Students' Union (ASU) to discuss the possibility as to how they can help find out a solution to the problem. A meeting of the delegations of the two student organisation led by the General Secretary of AAPSU and the Asst, General Secretary of AASU took place at Tezpur on 29th February, 1979. In this meeting the AASU and the AAPSU agreed to work for the maintenance of statusquo on the boundary and peace and amity among the people living there, to press their respective governments for arriving at an amicable settlement of the boundary dispute and to convene a joint conference of the AASU and the AAPSU, preferably at Itanagar.⁴⁰ Unfortunately soon the events took a different turn in Assam and the ASSU got deeply involved in a prolonged agitation and nothing was heard about the efforts the student bodies to help find a solution to the boundary problem between the state and the Union Territory.

The Tripartite Committee submitted its report in 1983 and a meeting between the state government and the Central Government was convened to consider the report at Itanagar in may 1983. This meeting was presided over by the Union Minister of State for Home N.R. Laskar and attended by the two chief Ministers, the two Chief Secretaries and the Joint Secretary in the Union Home Ministey I P Gupta. Apparently the boundary suggested by the

Tripartite Committee was not acceptable to either government and Committee failed to find a solution to the problem although both the Chief Ministers later told newsmen that a permanent solution to the Assam-Arunachal boundary would emerge in near future and that all difficulties in demarcating the boundary would be removed.⁴¹ However, a definite shift in the approach to the problem on the part of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is noticed following this meeting. So, long, too much reliance was placed in the Central Government for solving the problem although it failed to play any imaginative role in the matter or to find a solution to the problem. Hereafter, all efforts to find a solution to the problem was directed towards a bilateral and mutual approach between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

An indication of this shift in approach to the problem was noticed even a month earlier to the May' 83 meeting. In a public meeting at Borguli near Pasighat, in April 1983 the Health Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Tadak Dulom said that the controversial boundary dispute between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh will be solved with due consultation between the two Governments.⁴² Contact between the two Chief Ministers have also increased. In early 1984, they met twice in quick succession once on 31st January at Sibsagar on the occasion of Medamehphil and then on 18th February at Ruksin near Pasighat on the occasion of Alia-Ligang festival. On both these occasions they are believed to have discussed the boundary issue. It is also believed that the two Chief Ministers have agreed to do away with the Tripartite Committee and settle the dispute mutually between the two governments. In any case nothing is being heard of the Tripartite Committee these days and the Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia told the public at Ruksin that the boundary problem between the Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is not a boundary dispute but a land dispute and that it will be mutually settled in an amicable manner.⁴³ A similar view was expressed by the Arunachal Chief Minister on 6th April, following a boundary incident at Jonai, when he said that the boundary dispute must be settled through mutual discussions in a spirit of give and take. He stressed the traditional relations between the Union Territory and the State of Assam and said that he would soon meet Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia to continue the effort. Sri Apang also suggested that the two Chief Minister should undertake a joint survey of the boundary areas. He accused the opposition parties of creating misunderstandings over the issue and appealed to them to co-operate with the government in its efforts to find a peaceful solution to the problem.⁴⁴ It is not known whether Chief Minsiter Apang could discuss the matter further with the Chief Minister of Assam, and the boundary dispute is yet to be settled permanently. But lately, will to solve the problem bilaterrally on the part of both

Assam and Arunachal has emerged and in this the initiative taken by the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh is clearly noticeable.

CONCLUSIONS

Although Arunachal Pradesh was created only recently the Assam-Arunachal boundary has a long history and clear notifications existed in this regard as early as 1914. The boundary was a line arbitrarily drawn by the Britishers. There was no boundary dispute in those days. This was probably, because, the boundary was almost uninhabited. During British period the Hills people kept confined to the hills and the plains people were well within the boundary.⁴⁵ The boundary dispute appears to have originated only after the 1951 notification transferring certain plains areas of Arunachal Pradesh to Assam. Of course, over the years a number of factors social, political, economic and demographic have made the issue more complex and the dispute more intense. As a result the boundary for the most parts remain unsettled undemarcated on ground till to-day.

Certain attempts at demarcating the boundary were made in the past, by the Government of India but these attempts instead of fixing the boundary for good, gave rise to boundary incidents and brought the dispute to the fore. As a result a number of memoranda and representations were submitted to the Central Govt. by the people and the Administration of NEFA.⁴⁶ But no serious attempt at settling the dispute by either the Assam Government or the Central Government was made in time. The warning given by the ARC in 1968 also failed to convince the authorities of the urgency of the matter and the issue was allowed to drift. A serious attempt at settling the dispute and demarcating the boundary was made only in 1979 following an agreement between the chief Minister of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to appoint a High power Tripartite Committee, but the Committee has also failed to deliver the goods. The problem has however, continued to get the attention of the governments of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh since then and the two Chief Ministers have been meeting more frequently than ever before on the issue. They also appear to be determined to find a solution to the problem, if necessary without the involvement of the Central Government.

The problem has already assumed a very complex character and any attempt to settle the dispute on a legal approach is not likely to succeed. In fact the main cause of failure to find a solution so far is the legal approach to the problem. Any solution to the problem, therefore, will have to be a political one.

The recent statement of the Arunachal Chief Minister that the dispute must be settled in a spirit of give and take is a significant move in this direction. A mutually acceptable boundary line with necessary adjustments here and there to the one already notified is perhaps the only answer to the problem. This can be done by the political leaders of the two states. In this regard Gegong Apang's suggestion that the two Chief Ministers undertake a joint survey of the boundary, is a step in right direction. If the present efforts of the two Chief Ministers continue, a permanent settlement of the dispute should not be far off. After all state boundaries in India are not sacrosanct. The boundary line set were the two states can certainly be adjusted on humanitarian grounds and to accommodate sentiments of the people living on the boundary, to find a solution to a long standing dispute, and to ensure cordial relation between the two neighbouring states.

Notes and References

1. See, Alexander Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, Delhi 1981 pp
2. M.L. Bose, *historical and Constitutional Documents of North Eastern India*, Concept Publishing Company, Delhi 1979, p. 157
3. In Balipara area the Inner Line was redefined in 1934 vide Governor of Assam's Order in Council No. 6778 AP dated 2nd November 1934.
4. See *Notification No. 977 EB and 979 EB* both of 25th September 1914, republished in *Assam Gazette* dated 13th October, 1914.

Notification No. 977 EB described the boundary of Central and Eastern Section with the Lakhimpur district of Assam from Siplumukh on the Subansiri East to the Nogyong lake now probably in Nagaland. While Notification No. 979 EB described the boundary between the Western Section with the Darrang district of Assam from Subansiri to the trijunction of Kamrup, Darrang and Bhutan.

5. The Composition of this Committee was as under:

1. Gopinath Bordoli - Chairman
2. JJM Nicholesroy - Member
3. Rupnath Brahma - "
4. A V Thakkar - "

Besides the Committee co-opted certain members from then the then Tribal Areas of Assam including Mr. Kezehol, Mr. Kheloushe and Mr. Aliba Imti.

6. Para 20(a) of Part I of the Recommendations of the Constituent Assembly of India, North-East Frontier (ASSAM) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee 1947.
7. See para 2 of the forwarding letter dated 28th July, 1947 from the Chairman of the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights Minorities, Tribal Areas etc. of the Constituent Assembly

of India.

8. *Notification No. TAD/R/35/50/109 dated 23rd February, 1951.*
9. *See Governor's Order in Council No 6778 A.P. dated 2nd Nov. 1934 published in Assam Gazette of Nov 7,1934.*
10. *Assam Gazette dated 13 March, 1957, Part II(A) p.109.*
11. *Lok Sabha unstarred Question No. 4611 of 1961. (from Private papers of late D. Ering)*
12. *Reply to above question.*
13. *Lok Sabha unstarred Question No 7726 of 1969.*
14. *ARC study Team on Assam-NEFA boundary problem, The Assam Tribune dated 22nd Sept. 1968.*
15. *Letters to the Editor, The Assam Tribune, October 7 1968.*
16. *His letters to the Editors of :*
 - The Hindustan Standard, October 18, 1968.*
 - The Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 19 1968.*
 - The Assam Tribune, October 21 1968.*
 - The Statesman, October 23, 1968.*
 - The Indian Express, October 23, 1968.*
 - The Patriot, October 23, 1969.*
 - The Times of India, Nov. 9, 1968.*
17. *'Current Topics', The Times of India, October 29, 1968.*
18. *However, the author could not find any records of these attempts.*
19. *Such boundary incidents used to be reported in the press. For example, The Hindistan Times of November 14,1968 reported that several batches of Adis entered Assam at Jonai area and burnt down some houses of Miri Tribals. They have also erected several pillars well inside Assam territory and asked the people to leave the area threatening dire consequences if they refused. They claimed that the area was theirs, A similar news was also carried by the Statesman in its issue of November 15, 1968.*
20. *It was alleged that an Anchal Samiti Hall belonging to an Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat was encroached and occupied by the Assam Police at Likabali, claiming that it is situated inside Assam. The local people demanded immediate vacation of the building and tried to force the Assam police out of it. This led to a skirmish and the Assam Police opened fire. Following this incident an Arunachali student Sri Talo Aje was assaulted at Silapathar railway station in Assam leading to a series of nasty incidents both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Interview with Sri Tanya Davi, the then General Secretary of All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union. on 15.3.84 at Pasighat.*
21. *See the Assam Tribune, May 23,1983. The Chief Secretary of Assam said that in a meeting of the Chief Ministers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and the Union Minister of STATE for Home it was decided to deploy CRPF personnel at vulnerable points of the boundary to check untoward incidents.*
22. *See, The Sentinel, September 4,1983.*
23. *See, Assam Tribune, September 2,1984.*
24. *See, The Assam Tribune May 23,1983.*
25. *The Author came across such stories, as noted earlier, during his visit to villages on the boundary.*
26. *The Chief Minister of Assam showed evidence of such appreciation when he said in a Public*

Meeting at Ruksin (Arunachal Pradesh) on 18th February, 1984 that the Assam Arunachal boundary dispute is not a boundary dispute at all but a land dispute. He also stressed in this meeting that this should be amicably settled with the efforts of the two governments.

27. Election Manifesto of United People's Party of Arunachal, 1980, p. 10.
28. Interview with Sri Tanya Davi Ex General Secretary of AAPSU, on 15.3.84 at Pasighat. and Demand 1 of Students Demande dated 12 Feb, 1982 submitted by Sri Jarbom Gamlin President, AAPSU to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh.
29. See Assam Tribune May 23, 1983; and Letter No E/A/11586/40-J-2 Terms of reference of the High Power Tripartite Committee appointed in 1979, which reads among other things that the Committee was to delineate "the boundary according to the existing notifications".
30. Letter No. PPA/2/79 dated 4.9.79 from the President of the People's Party of Arunachal to the Convenor, High Power Tripartite Committee, Arunachal-Assam Boundary Dispute.
31. Reply to unstarred Question No. 4611 of 1961 in Loksabha
32. Ibid.
33. Assam and its borders in *The Sentinel*, Sept. 4, 1983 cited in *The North Eastern Press Digest*, Vol 1, No 6, p.30 Compared to Assam, Nagaland a smaller state with much less border than Assam, has a fullfledged Border Department with a separate minister and a separate Secretariat.
34. Ibid.
35. See, *The Assam Tribune*, Sept 2, 1984.
36. Interview with Sri Talo Kadu HLA on 30.3.84 at Pasighat. Sri Kadu claimed that the Assam Arunachal boundary issue was discussed in Arunachal Pradesh Assambly several times including a call attention motion. According to him a resolution was also passed by the Assembly on the issue ueging for an immediate amicable settlement of boundary dispute. The author, however could not examine the records for this except a starred Question No. 114.
37. Interview with Sri Tanya Davi, the then General Secretary of AAPSU, who took active interest in the solution of the Assam-Arunachal problem.
38. Col. B Sarin, Director Eastern Circle, Survey of India was the Convener of the High Power Tripartite Committee. Arunachal's representatives were, Sri R.K. Patir, Sri Takap Ringu and Sri Kuru Hasang. Assam was represented by the Chief Secretary, one other Secretary and an Advocate.
39. Letter No. E/A-11586/40-J-2 (Assam-Arunachal Pradesh) dated 21 Sept. 1979 of the covenor of the Tripartite Committee to the President of the PPA.
40. Interview with Sri Tanya Davi at Pasighat on 15.3.83 at Pasighat. Sri Davi in his capacity as General Secretary of AAPSU took initiative for this meeting and atteneded it.
41. *The Assam Tribune*, May 23, 1983 cited in the North-Eastern Press Digest, Vol 1, No 2, p.2
42. *The Assam Tribune* April 29, 1983
43. *The Assam Tribune* 19th Feb. 1984.
44. *The Sentinel*, April 7, 1984.
45. There were certain raids by certain Hills Tribes into some Assam villages near the boundary line but they cannot termed as border disputes.
- See, A. Mackenzie, The North-East Frontier of India, Mittal Publications, Delhi 1979 pp. 15-51
46. Interview with Sri Bakin Pertin at Pasighat on 1.3.84.

P Sengupta

ASOM GANA PARISHAD'S ACCESSION TO POWER

A Close look

‘Hathi Jai Dispur’ (The elephant goes to Dispur)- this slogan chanted by followers of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was turned into a reality in 1985 Assembly elections in Assam. By rounding up 67 seats in the 126-member assembly, the AGP, which was formed a mere 67 days before the elections, grabbed power consigning the Congress(I) to merely 25 inconvenient perches in the Opposition benches in a remarkable reversal of electoral fortunes. This paper, which falls into three sections, hopes to take a close look at the AGP’s accession to power. Section I traces the emergence of the AGP and discusses the immediate pre-poll political situation obtaining in Assam. The focus of Section II is on the electoral performance by the parties that joined the fray. Though many parties appeared as contenders for power our attention is paid to the major contenders, the AGP, the Congress(I) and the UMF (United Minority Front UMF. The final section contains a few concluding observations.

1

Any worthwhile study of the emergence of the AGP should proceed from a discussion on the ‘anti-foreigner’ movement in Assam. Our intention is not to write a long history of the movement. We shall try to show how and why the movement grew out of an apprehension that the indigenous people would be swamped politically, economically, and culturally by the outsiders. For understandable reasons, a few words about the outsiders in Assam are necessary.

Assam is now linguistically and ethnically the most diversified state in India. About 57 per cent of the state’s population speaks Assamese; another 16 per cent speaks one of the local tribal languages. Bengali, the language of Bangladesh and the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal, is the mother tongue of 17.4 per cent of the population. Hindi, the language of migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, is spoken by 4.3 per cent of the population. Into this low-density region(254 people per square kilometer) came millions of

settlers from Rajasthan, Bihar, Punjab, Napal, and most of all, from Bengal, occupying land, moving into tea plantations, entering the bureaucracy, starting new business and trade, taking up the modern profession of teaching law, medicine, and journalism.¹ For them Assam was 'a land of opportunity'. Since the turn of the 20th century, nearly six and a half million migrants and their descendants have settled in Assam. The population in 1971 was slightly under 15 million. The most significant 20th century development in Assam has been a 345 per cent increase in population between 1901 and 1971 largely through migration; population increase in the rest of the country over the same period was only 130 per cent.² Had Assam's population increased at the all- India rate, there would have been only 8 million people in the state in 1971. The extra 7 million people were either immigrants or descendants of immigrants.

The social composition of Assam today is coloured by a large number of migrant communities including tribal labourers, Bengalee-Muslims, Bengalee-Hindus and the Marwaris. Tribal labourers from the Chota Nagpur region of Bihar and Orissa, mainly belonging to the Santal, Oraon and Munda tribes, are employed in tea gardens. They have never been, nor are they now, economic, cultural or political threats to the Assamese. The jobs they are engaged in are not those sought by the Assamese. Indeed, "their tendency to assimilate linguistically makes them model migrants to the Assamese."³ Routine contacts between tea garden workers and the Assamese are limited due to a number of laws and rules (for example, the Plantations Labour Act of 1951 and the Assam Plantation Labour Rules of 1956). To the growing and aspiring Assamese middle class, the Bengalee-Hindus have appeared "as an obstacle to their economic advancement". As the Bengalee-Hindus were among the first social group in India to study at the British created missionary and government colleges, first they moved into administrative positions, and then entered the modern professions. By the beginning of the 20th century the doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, clerks, railway and post office officials, as well as officers of the state government, have been Bengalee-Hindus. The persistently dominant position of Bengalees in middle occupations in Assam is indicated by their concentration in urban areas especially in the Brahmaputra Valley towns.⁴ To the growing and aspiring Assamese middle class, the Bengalee-Hindus have appeared as "an obstacle to their economic advancement". The economic aspect apart, the cultural content of the struggle can hardly be ignored. There is a tendency among the indigenous people of Assam to view the Bengalee Hindus as "cultural imperialists" who, if given the opportunity, would assimilate the Assamese.⁵ It is important to note that Bengalee migrants have been feeling comfortable and secure in Assam having their own schools, newspapers and

even their own localities where they could speak their own language. As a result, they are in a position to provide a persistent attraction for Bengalee friends and relatives who have not yet migrated.

The impact of Muslim migrants, coming particularly from Mymensingh district of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) on land use in Assam is considerable. Be it noted that throughout the 19th century Assam was regarded as an area with large virgin tracts, not only within forest lands to be cleared, but also within arable land along the Brahmaputra river. Between 1930 and 1950, some 1,508,000 acres, mostly in the Brahmaputra Valley, were settled by immigrants.⁶ Though numerically small (22,000 according to the 1961 census), the Marwaris are not only the most visible of the migrant communities, but also the major business community in Assam, dominating trade, commerce, banking and credit. As Weiner points out, "They (the Marwaris) played an important role in opening up Assam to trade. They acted as moneychangers, bankers, and general agents to the managers of the tea gardens, especially in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts, operated the mustard trade in Kamrup and Goalpara districts, sold throughout the state hardware and other articles imported from other parts of India, and became dealers in rice and grains. They served as bankers not only for agriculturists, but for officers of the government as well".⁷ Besides, there is a scattering of other migrant communities such as Nepalis, who have settled in the low-lying hills around the Brahmaputra Valley, tending cattle; Behari males, who work as seasonal migrants in construction projects and in the towns; and a small but economically significant number of Punjabis working in the transport industry, and more recently in their own business⁸

It is significant that the new opportunities created by the opening of Assam and the extension of British influence were exploited not by the Assamese but by migrant communities. This is explained in various ways. According to one view, what was perceived as opportunity by others was not seen as such by the Assamese. Others contend that the Assamese were largely unequipped, educationally and entrepreneurially, to take advantage of new opportunities. This view was widely held by British officials throughout the 19th century. Many politically articulate Assamese explain their backwardness in relation to the migrant communities as a consequence of political circumstances.⁹ Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the growing number of migrants in Assam are viewed by the indigenous people as a threat to their socio-cultural, political and economic life. This view has found an explicit expression in the writings of two Assamese writers. Referring to the immigrants of the past 100 years, one writer observed: "If we cannot assimilate the major part of the population into

our fold by giving them our language and culture, there is danger for us". Twentyfive years later another writer concurred: "How will this nationality(Assamese) be able to keep its numerical position in Assam in the face of uncontrolled and unassimilated immigration... In the absence of any arrangement in the form of assimilation of immigrants into its linguistic fold or of a constitutional provision for maintaining its majority position a weak nationality in the face of a ceaseless influx of people belonging to a strong linguistic national may face another eventuality".¹⁰ In 1949 a local English daily posed a similar question:

"Has Assam no right to exist as the land of Assamese people? Is it the intention of the (Central) government to turn the Assamese people into minority community in their own province and jeopardise their language, culture and their very existence?"¹¹ In 1950, however, a piece of legislation, named Immigrants Expulsion Act, was enacted discouraging Muslim immigration from the then East Pakistan. The Act provided for the removal of immigrants except bonafide refugees whose stay in Assam was undesirable politically.¹² The Act, however, did not become much effective. As the influx of outsiders continued, the anxiety of the indigenous people for being swamped remained alive. The recent movement on the issue of 'foreign national' spearheaded by the All Assam Students Union(AAUS) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) was the manifestation of this anxiety.

The issue of foreign national surfaced in march 1979 when a by election was to be held in Mangaldoi parliamentary constituency. During the process of revision of voters list, a large number of foreigners' names was in the constituency and about 15,000 were declared foreigner by courts.¹³ It may be mentioned that before the Mangoldoi by election, the AASU met in Jorhat in July 1978 and prepared a charter of demands including expulsion of foreigners from the state. The revelation of the presence of such a large number of foreigners in the voters list in Mangoldoi was perhaps the immediate cause that led to a deep involvement by the students in the demand for deportation of foreigners from the state. Gradually the cause championed by the AASU and the AAGSP gained the support of other organizations.

The anti-foreigner movement culminated in the Assam Accord that was signed on August 15,1985 between the movement leadership and the Union government.¹⁴ Under the Accord, those foreign nationals who entered the state between January 1,1966 and 25 March 1971 would be disenfranchised for ten years, and those who came after 25 March would be deported. The signing of the Accord apart, two important political developments occurred in Assam. The

state legislative assembly was dissolved and a 17-member care-taker government was set up. It is necessary to mention that the dissolution of the assembly and the formation of care-taker government were not part of the formal Accord; these were two important demands put forward by the movement leadership, as they were negotiating for a settlement of the Assam problem. The movement leaders, however, remained unhappy, because the care-taker government was headed by the Congress(I) leader, Hiteswar Saikia who became chief minister of Assam on the basis of the 1983 controversial poll results.¹⁵ Meanwhile two political parties of great significance emerged in Assam. The AGP was formed by those who were engaged for the last six years of struggle in the shape of Assam movement against foreign nationals. It is significant that two major regional parties of Assam, named Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad and Asom Jatiatabadi Dal, also merged in the AGP. Another political formation was the UMF which was launched to "safeguard the legitimate interests of linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities" in the state.¹⁶ It claimed to be a political party representing various minority organizations including the Citizens Right Preservation Committee, the All Assam Minority Students Union and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind. Though the UMF leadership had a few Bengalee Hindus, yet the main appeal of the organization was the immigrant Muslims. With the Assam Accord signed and the state assembly dissolved, the stage was set for a battle of the ballots. The major contenders were the AGP, Congress(I) and the UMF.

II

Points of similarity between the AGP and the Congress(I) were many. In the Assamese script, if a stroke was added to the Congress (I)'s election symbol Haath(hand), it changed to Hathi(elephant), which was the AGP's election symbol. Besides, the AGP flag only replaced the orange band in the Congress(I) flag with a green one, and the spinning wheel at the centre with a spoked wheel overlapping a pinion. More similarities were revealed in their election manifestos. Swearing by the Accord and setting its implementation as their goals, both promised in identical languages to protect the minorities and usher in a new era of amity, peace, progress and prosperity in a state torn apart by six years of turmoil.¹⁷ The manifesto of the AGP said that the party would take effective steps for the permanent solution of state's foreign nationals problem and to establish peace and amity among all sections of the people keeping the Accord in view. The party would "end the divisive policy" pursued by the "so called Congress(I) government in the state. It would also take positive steps for the

development of agriculture, industries and commerce in the state, so that these could bring real benefit to the people and bring an end to all exploitations of the weaker sections of the people.¹⁸ It deserves note that Saikia ultimately became the biggest target of the AGP's high-pressure campaign. While nothing was said against prime minister Rajiv Gandhi anywhere in the valley, AGP followers lashed out at Saiklia. More than an AGP versus Congress(I) election, it was a battle against Saikia and his assembly elected in the controversial 1983 poll with its slender 32 per cent turn out.

It is of interest to note that the AGP, which had drawn its strength mainly from the Assamese speaking people and had united in it the parties and the groups which jealously sustained the anti-immigrant agitation for six years, became the greatest champion of the minority cause. The key leaders of the AGP resented and regretted exclusion of large number of eligible minority voters, estimated variously between 20,00,000 from the electoral rolls mainly on objections raised by their followers. While signing the Assam Accord, they said, they had the interests of the minorities uppermost in their minds.¹⁹ The reason is not hard to seek. For no group or party was it possible to form a government in Assam without a wide support base. It may be noted that of the state's projected population of about 22.5 million, the Bengali-speaking Hindus and Muslims together account for about 6.5 million, the Assamese-speaking for another 7.6 million, the plain tribals for a little over 2 million, the scheduled castes and mostly tea garden labourers for one million each. In the circumstances, it was only natural that the minorities would be pampered by all the political parties. Of the 126 state assembly seats only in 41 were the Assamese speaking people in majority.²⁰

The AGP realized quite early that it could never hope to wrest power from the ruling Congress (I) without a fair share of the vote of the tea garden labour and the Muslims. In order to find some purchase in the Muslim area of the state, the party sought help from Farooq Abdullah who sent in a poster with a signed appeal to voters, as he could not come.²¹ By far the greatest contribution was made by N.T. Rama Rao and his party Telegu Desam. Rama Rao toured extensively through tea garden areas with their huge share of labour of Telegu origins. Besides, a group of six members of parliament belonging to Telegu Desam Arrived in Assam to campaign for the success of the AGP.²² The AGP's main strength was the massive force of youth and student workers who carried the party's message to the deepest interiors. They reached almost every household individually, requesting people to vote. This resulted in the unprecedented high turnover, more than 90 per cent in all areas dominated by the ethnic

Assamese.²³ The AGP was not without its problems. It had its share of discontent within the party over the selection of its candidates. The fact that the AGP leaders made a public statement apologising for denying nominations to a large number of claimants and pleading with them not to desert the party was an acknowledgement of the dissent within its camp.²⁴

Claiming that it was the only party that could properly implement the Accord the Congress(I), in its manifesto, reiterated its stand to implement the Accord in its letter and spirit 'with a national outlook'. Taking the credit for the solution of the foreigners problem, the party said that the Accord represented the triumph of the ideals of democracy, unity and secularism, and was a shining example of the commitment of the party to the nation's basic values.²⁵ The party, however, worked under various constraints. It was handicapped by the adverse reaction that the Assam Accord had caused among the minority voters. That the minorities by and large were not reconciled to the Congress(I) was evident from the fact that party stalwarts like Anwar Taimur, Md. Idris and Zahirul Islam found it difficult to pacify minorities in their respective constituencies where minorities were predominant.²⁶ The party's prospect was also threatened when several prominent party leaders and activists deserted the party and at least 26 of them filed nominations as Independents against official nominees. Most aggrieved was a section of the youth Congress whose members went on a day's hunger strike to protect against the 'shabby treatment' meted out to them.²⁷

Selection of 'wrong' and 'weak' candidates added to the woes of the Congress(I). Newcomers, unknown and lesser entities, and even those 'unpopular' images got nominations, triggering intense factionalism and discontent within the party.²⁸ Thus the party was badly handicapped not only by the adverse reaction the Assam Accord had caused among the minority voters, but also by factional bickerings. All this partly dimmed whatever chances the party had to fare well in the elections. Not only was the party's poll campaign compared to the other parties negligible and very much on a low key, but it lacked cohesion, direction and content.

A substantial threat to the Congress(I) also came from the newly emerged UMF. The UMF sought to work for the scrapping of the Assam Accord. It promised to make efforts for the impeachment of the Election Commission for "violating" all established norms while preparing the 1985 electoral rolls. It stressed that the political refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh) intending to settle permanently in India be treated as citizens according to the "national commitment on the eve of partition". It demanded that no foreigner should be deported unilaterally and that appropriate bilateral arrange-

ment should be made with their countries of origin for deportation.²⁹ In the areas (Barpeta for instance) where both the majority and minority communities were almost evenly matched demographically the Congress(I) found it hard to cope with the surging tide of Assamese sub-nationalism that was sweeping throughout the majority-inhabited areas and the persistent anger of the minorities for having been abandoned with the signing of the Assam Accord. The UMF sought to do everything possible to strengthen this fear.³⁰ It was this factor alone that largely helped the UMF to penetrate into the traditional and large immigrant vote banks of the Congress(I)

As mentioned earlier, the AGP managed to bag 64 seats in the 126 member assembly. Later three newly elected independent members of the assembly were admitted to the AGP raising its tally to 67. A close look at the AGP's success in the 1985 elections shows that in addition to the support of a significant section of the Assamese people, the party had also become successful in acquiring the support and sympathy of other communities. AGP's success in Jorhat and Sibsagar would not have been possible without a large percentage of tea-workers' support. Even in Dibrugarh, two constituencies (Lahoal and Chabua) where tea garden tribes were predominant were wrested from the Congress (I) by the AGP. This success in the tea-belt of Upper Assam indicates that the AGP succeeded, to a large extent, in allaying the apprehensions of the tea-workers who, during the last six years of agitation had clashed on several occasions with AASU supporters.³¹ AGP's remarkable success in the plains tribal areas in Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Darrang districts vindicated the Assamese peasant's (both tribal and non-tribal) fear of being alienated from his land and of his way of life being threatened.. The plains Tribal Council, which was the premier organization of the state's plains tribal population, found its influence confined to parts of Goalpara and Kokrajhar and secured only 3 seats. Indeed, the AGP leaders were successful not only in colouring the Assamese psyche by the feeling that if the Saikia ministry returned to power the Assamese as a nationality would face eradication. They highlighted, with considerable success, the need for the Assamese tribals to gang up under a common regional banner. AGP's victory in Barpeta and Nagaon shows that electoral support to the party also came from the immigrant Muslims. The AGP, however, had the problem of finding legitimacy in the minority pockets of Goalpara, Dhubri and the Barrack Valley districts of Cachar and Karimganj. Similar problem was found in North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglog and Kokrajhar.

In explaining the AGP's accession to power one might argue that the party had successfully capitalized on the Assamese quest for a cultural identity and

economic security. In Assam, where the Assamese had remained a predominantly non-mobile people, the high rate of migration had far reaching social and economic consequences. In the influx of migrants was found by the Assamese a threat to their cultural identity. This had made it necessary for the Assamese to pursue an assimilationist policy if they were themselves to avoid being assimilated. As weiner has observed : "What characterized the Assamese quest for a cultural identity was their need to distinguish themselves from the migrants, particularly from the Bengali migrants in their midst; it is likely that the presence of large number of migrants from other states, especially from Bengal, sharpened the sense of Assamese identity and gave it what many outsiders perceived as its peculiarly aggressive character".³² The economic consequence was that the aspiring Assamese middle class had viewed some migrant communities as a substantial threat to their economic advancement. In the circumstances, the AGP became their obvious choice when casting vote.

Another factor that facilitated the AGP's accession to power was the Saikia government's problem of finding legitimacy in the Assamese-dominated areas in particular. Elected on the controversial 1983 poll results, the Saikia government was at no stage accepted by the overwhelming majority of the Assamese people. Though the government consolidated its hold through strict control of the administration, the subterranean anger persisted.³³ Moreover, the accusation by the AGP that the Congress government had failed to improve the economic situation, including the employment situation, cut much ice with the electorate. Estimates made on the basis of household consumer expenditure(32 round of NSS July1977 to June 1978) indicated the level of poverty line. Compared to this, 48 per cent of the people in India during 1977-78 lived below the poverty line.³⁴ Besides, while all -India averse per capita income increased at the compound annual rate of 1.1 per cent during the period from 1960-61 to 1982-83, the corresponding figure for Assam was 0.2 per cent.³⁵ While firm estimates of the unemployed in Assam were difficult to obtain due to paucity of reliable data, the Employment Exchange statistics reflected the trend and dimension of the problem. For instance, the number of job-seekers on the live register more than doubled from 1.89 lakh during 1975 to 4.03 lakh during 1982. Out of 4.03 lakh job seekers in 1982, 1.76 lakh were educated unemployed, of whom the matriculates numbered 1.11 lakh. In other words, the matriculates constituted the bulk of the educated unemployed representing 63 per cent.³⁶

Still another factor ensuring the rise of AGP to power was the UMF-Congress(I) rivalry. The emergence of the UMF, chosen by a large percentage of the state's minorities, particularly the immigrant Muslims, posed a threat to the

Congress(I) so far as mobilization of the minority vote was concerned. Pledged to scrap the Assam Accord, which it felt was "anti-minoity", the UMF scored remarkable success in garnering the votes of immigrant Muslims in the Goalpara and Nowgong districts. This victory, won at the cost of the Congress(I), benefited the AGP because the minority votes were divided between the Congress(I) and the UMF. As one close observer has pointed out: " Its (UMF's) emergence has come as an indirect boon to the AGP which has greatly benefited in all those constituencies where the traditional Congress(I) vote was split between the UMF and the ruling party. This has been particularly true in Nalbari, Kamrup and Barpeta districts where AGP victories have been ensured by UMF-Congress(I) rivalry".³⁷

Finally, the signing of the Assam Accord had served to brighten the image of the AGP. Claiming credit for the Accord the AGP assured the voters that it would take effective steps for a permanent solution of the state's foreign national problem keeping the Accord in view. The Congress party also claimed similar credit. But the AGP's anti-Congress campaign was so vigorous that the Congress(I), already constrained by several factors described above, could not derive much benefit from the situation.

III

Our study suggests that several socio-economic, psychological, and cultural factors may promote the formation of regional party. It is far from easy to draw a distinction between national party and regional party. There are parties, known as national parties, which have regional jurisdictions. As one regional party leader(P.Upendra of Telegu Desam) asks: "What is really the strength of the Janata party without Mr.Hegde? Is not the Bharatia Janata party losing its hold in the few states where it was once strong? Is not the Lok Dal now confined to portions of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana? Is not the influence of the CPI(M) mainly restricted to West Bengal and Tripura? Is not the influence of the Congress(S) confined to Maharashtra mostly? Is not the Congress(I) itself gradually shrinking to the status of a regional party of the Hindi belt?³⁸ However, from the viewpoint of the nationalist leaders, the most grave defect of regional party is that political action seems to be based upon loyalty to caste, religion, tribe and region to the neglect of national loyalties. Their feeling is that these kind of loyalties have no place in a modern democracy, and if they continue they could weaken the national state and destroy the fabric of India's democratic order. India can only be a united nation, feel the nationalist leaders, when each ethnic group and region recognizes that its interests must be sub-

sumed under national loyalties and goals, and democracy can only function if individuals are guided by a more rational concern for issues and ideologies. Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had baited the regional parties for being something less than relevant, even downright dangerous to Indian politics. He had implicitly described both the AGP and the UMF as "forces of disintegration". Whatever the strictures, regional parties have been in existence in various states and have also held power intermittently, contrary to the expectations of the national leaders. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK or the AIADMK has been in power since 1967. The National Conference has been in the saddle for a long time in Jammu and Kashmir. It is only lately that Andhra pradesh and Assam have opted for regional parties.

The consequence of the dispersion and democratization of power in India is that new elements have entered into the political arena. In many instances, politically ambitious individuals have found their caste, tribe or religious group a natural political unit. In other words, the introduction of a modern parliamentary system based on universal adult suffrage has encouraged the organization of interests on the basis of particularistic loyalties. True, the demands of some groups has threatened the geographical unity of the country. In most instances, however, the demands had simply been for more facilities for the particular ethnic groups. And not all the demands could be called traditional. In the circumstances, particularistic loyalties and conflict between various social groups had become only natural. It seems unrealistic not "to recognize that conflict is a normal part of the political process, that conflict is a normal part of the political process, that ethnic loyalties are inevitable in an ethnically diverse society, that the struggle for patronage and power is part of the democratic process, and that political parties and pressure groups are also an essential part of that process"³⁹ So long as the regional parties, as commonly defined, agree to function within the existing constitutional order, so long as they do not call into question the legitimacy of India's democratic political process, their emergence may pose a challenge not to India's unity but to the party which is at the helm of national affairs.

Notes and References

1. Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 82.
2. *The Sunday Statesman Miscellany*, December 15, 1985.
- 3 Ibid.
4. Of 913,000 urban dwellers in Assam, 350,000 are Bengalees whereas only 304,000 are Assamese. Assamese speakers constitute 33.4 per cent of the urban population. Some 37.9 per cent are

Bengali speakers. In some towns in Goalpara, Darrang and Nowgong districts, Bengalees constitute over 40 per cent of the population. Another way of looking at it is that only 5 per cent of the Assamese in the Brahmaputra Valley live in urban areas, as compared with 40 per cent of the Bengalees.

5. This theme persistently emerged in Myron Weiner's interviews with Assamese regarding their attitude toward the Bengalee Hindus as a cultural entity. See *Sons of the Soil*, p. 113.
6. Regarding this migration several reasons are advanced. One reason is that Mymensingh was and continues to be one of the most densely populated rural areas in the world, a density of 925 persons per square mile, while in Assam a density of 254 persons per square mile. Another explanation is that the land tenure of the two regions was significantly different. Still another is that the Muslim government which controlled the state before and during the war encouraged the Muslims to migrate. For some details of these views, see *Sons of the Soil*, pp. 100-101.
7. Myron Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
9. See Myron Weiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-108.
10. These two observations are cited in Myron Weiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.
11. *The Assam Tribune*, December 10, 1949.
12. Girin Phukon, *Assam's Attitude to Federalism* (Ph. D. dissertation) New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., 1984, p. 28.
13. *The Assam Tribune*, August 9, 1985.
14. Between 1979 and 1985 Assam had witnessed a series of communal strife, bandh, and various violent activities. In the six years of communal violence in connexion with the anti-immigration agitation started in 1979, more than 4,000 people lost their lives, numerous settlements were burnt; even by conservative official estimates 400,000 people were either displaced or rendered homeless. Following the disruptions, the state government lost Rs. 45 crores in revenue and suffered production losses amounting to Rs. 13,000 crores. Education suffered tremendously and life became highly insecure with communities fighting each other. See *The Sunday*, 15-21 December 1985.
15. Many political parties did boycott the 1983 assembly poll on the ground that the lists of voters were defective. As a result the turn-out at the 1983 elections was very low. The turn-out figures for elections in Assam were as follows: 1952:50 per cent; 1957:47.01 per cent; 1962:52.77 per cent; 1967:61.89 per cent; 1972:61.14 per cent; 1978:66.85 per cent; 1983:32.66 per cent only.
16. *The Assam Tribune*, November 13, 1985.
17. *Sunday*, 15-21 December 1985.
18. *The Assam Tribune*, November 27, 1985.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Sunday*, 1-8 September 1985.
21. *India Today*, January 15, 1986.
22. Talking to newsmen leader of this group(C. Madhava Reddy) said that his party wanted the regional forces to rule the states to meet the hopes and aspirations of the sons of the soil consistent with the national interest. "We support the AGP", said he, "because it is fighting for a right cause. The problem caused by influx of foreigners being a national problem, the entire nation should share the burden of its solutions". See *The Assam Tribune*, December 1, 1985.
23. *India Today*, January 15, 1986.

24. The dissension came to the fore when two of the party's nominees withdrew from the contest in protest. One of them Bijoya Chakraborty, a front-rank Assam agitation leader, withdrew, complaining of poor representation of women in AGP nominations. Another nominee, Habibur Rahman, withdrew for not being nominated from the constituency he asked for. See *Sunday*, 15-21 December 1985.

25. *The Assam Tribune*, December 4, 1985.

26. *Sunday*, 15-21 December 1985.

27. *Ibid.*

28. For instance, Mr. Ismail Hussain, sitting Congress(I) MLA of Barpeta assembly seat, who was a popular minority leader of the Barpeta district, was replaced by a "loyalist" who was less acceptable not only to the local party leaders but also to the electorate. For other examples, see *The Statesman*, December 12, 1985.

29. *The Assam Tribune*, December 2, 1985.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Udayan Misra, Assertion of Regional Identity, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, January 4, 1986, p. 14.

32. Myron Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

33. Udayan Misra, *op. cit.*

34. Jogram Hatibruah, Assam and the 7th Plan, *The Assam Tribune*, August 24, 1985.

35. *ibid.*

36. *ibid.*

37. Udayan Misra, *op. cit.*

38. P. Upendra, Regional Parties are Not a Threat to the Nation's Unity, *Sunday*, 26 January-1 February, 1986, p. 22.

39. Myron Weiner, *Political Change in South Asia*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963. p. 150.

D Bhagawati

IMPLICATIONS AND APPROACHES TO LAND REFORMS

In The Tribal Society Of Meghalaya

Meghalaya is a predominantly tribal society comprising three major tribal groups, the Jaintias (also known as Pnars) the Khasis and the Garos. The tribals constitute 80.58 per cent of the total population of the State according to 1981 census. Land reforms in the tribal society has distinct implications. A considerable portion of the total land surface of the State is barren uncultivable terrain, steep and precipiced. Deep forests also occupy a good portion of land in the State. Land utilisation in Meghalaya in 1974-75 shows that total geographical area in the State is 2,248,900 hectares. Out of it forests cover 820.174 hectares, barren uncultivable land covers 247,604 hectares, net area sown covers 182,385 hectares, total cropped area covers 211,297 hectares and the rest is uncultivable waste land. Given this picture of land utilisation, the decadal variation of population in Meghalaya between 1971 and 1981 census is 31.25 per cent and it should explain the pressure on land in these years.

The tribal people of Meghalaya follow largely the age-old mode of shifting cultivation which destroys the top soil and arable land surface, causes erosion in the hills and damages valuable forests. The shifting cultivation also involves a time consuming and weary process of agriculture. Shifting cultivation is, therefore, another factor causing strains on land utilisation in the hills.

Land tenure system of tribal people adds another dimension to the confusing situation over land in the State. Land among the tribals is owned by clans, families or individuals and also by community in certain cases. There have been no uniform cadastral survey, revenue survey of land and record of rights throughout the State. The customs regulating land tenure system have not been codified. Customs themselves are changing during the recent past. The absence of data and records of land creates problems for the planners in formulating developmental schemes. Uncertainty of customs and rights over land stands in the way of implementation of developmental schemes. The tribal farmer who

does not get loans from the Government or the banks by mortgaging his land for absence of record of rights over land is exposed to the exploitation of private money lenders and 'undeclared Zaminders'.

In the context of difficulties in land tenure system of the hills, land reform entails certain actions such as collection of data of different types of land, survey of land, preparation of record of rights over land and codification of customary laws of the land tenure system. In this context land reform is purported to facilitate developmental schemes like easy flow of credit to farmers, organisation of co-operative societies among the farmers, development of permanent cultivation and abolition of exploitation of the tribals by money-lenders.

A few words about the general patterns of land holdings of the three tribal groups of the State will reveal the complexity of the situation. In the Garo Hills the most common pattern of land holding is Akhing land which includes land held by a clan or family and also land held collectively by a village or group of villages under the custody of the Nokma (traditional Chief). According to custom the wife of the Nokma is the sole heiress of the Akhing land and the Nokma manages it. Under the authority of the Nokma land can be held and utilised by any individual family. The Akhing land can again be divided into two categories on the basis of utilisation - land utilised by individual family and common land of a village. The first category covers cultivated land and household sites with garden plots of families and the second covers all other types of land utilisation including market place, the Government offices and the land occupied by outsiders. The income from the second type of land goes to the Nokma.

The District Council keeps record of holdings of the Akhing land. It assesses and collects land revenue from certain categories of land through the Laskar (an institution above the Nokma introduced by the British Government) and the Nokma.

In the Jayantia Hills land is primarily of two types - the Raj land and the Buniaj land. Rajland includes all sorts of land that originally belonged to the King of Jayantiapur and subsequently passed to the British. The British levied land revenue on the occupants of the Rajland. Buniaj land is managed and transferred by individual families. The British introduced a system of house tax on the people of the Jayantia Hills. Besides Rajland and Buniaj land there is Highland in the Jayantia Hills, which has been traditionally used by the community for shifting cultivation. The District Council now regulates utilisation of High land. The Rajland has been surveyed and assessed for land revenue by the District Council. The record of rights over the Rajland and the Buniaj land

is maintained by the District Council in the Jayantia Hills.

The most complex and confusing situation over land tenure system has developed in the Khasi Hills. The difficulties obtaining in the Khasi land tenure system will claim the major portion of our enquiry. There are several patterns of landholdings in the Khasi Hills like the Ri-Raid land the Ri-Kynti land and the Government land. Ownership and management of every type of land is distinct. The British granted autonomy to the Khasi States and introduced land revenue only in the directly administered areas of the Khasi Hills, The land has not been surveyed and rights over land are not recorded. Uncodified customs regulate the land tenure system. As a result, distortion and deviation from the customary practices have grown over inheritance of property, transfer of land, issue of sale deeds, holding of records etc.

Since the creation of the Autonomous State¹ the legislative leadership of Meghalaya seized upon the problem of adjustment of the customary practice in the land tenure system to make customs accommodate the forces of economic development. The ruling leadership is also enthusiastic to remove distortion and deviation from the customary practices.² The opposition leaders are not less conscious of the sanctity of customs. They are even more sensitive to the issue of reform which, some of them even apprehend, might lead to the violation of customs. Then, there is a group of leaders affiliated to the national political parties who interpret land reforms in terms of ceiling on landholdings and distribution of the surplus land. As a result, we find varied interpretation of and varied approaches to land reforms in the Assembly.

The views of the legislators of any political party largely represent political ideologies of the party and the sections of electorate from whom the party receives support, though clear-cut demarcation of electorate in this line is not possible. The legislators from the ruling party (the APHLC) took the problem from the points of complex land tenure system in the State, particularly in the Khasi Hills, absence of record of rights, survey of land, difficulties faced by the agriculturists in getting loans from the Government because of the absence of records. Except a few, the party members did not seem to recognise any other dimension of the problem. The party members did not also favour any radical change of the prevailing customs regarding the land tenure system.³ The members of the INC also wanted land survey and land record to be maintained by the Government. Some members of the INC even suggested that the Government should not hesitate to part with the customs if the customs stood in the way of social progress.⁴ Views of the INC members were marked by a desire to realise desired objectives in a regional situation even by uprooting the tribal

customs.⁵

The legislators from the HSPDP group were mostly silent on the question of land reform in any aspects. They came in direct confrontation with the problem on several occasions. But they simply avoided the issue of land reform or difficulties of the prevailing land tenure system.⁶

The Government recognised the difficulties faced by agriculturists in getting loan from financial institutions for the absence of land records but shifted the responsibilities to the District Councils first, then it agreed to examine the ways in collaboration with the District Councils and finally shifted the responsibility to the Union Government by sending a draft of a bill for the latter's approval.⁷ In the proposed bill ownership of land would be identified in such a way that even the people not considered as owners might be declared as owners provided they had interests over the land. This proposal was in line of the suggestions of the Reserve Bank of India. As it would require assent of the President, the State Government would wait for the approval of the draft of the bill by the Union Government.

The State Government's efforts to pass a legislation on land did not succeed, the Government of Meghalaya was persuaded by the Union Government to take up land reform measures as a part of the programme for celebration of silver jubilee of the independence. The Government consulted the members of the Assembly and the members of the District Council of the Khasi Hills about difficulties of the land tenure system. The Government decided to study land tenure system and make necessary recommendation for the Khasi Hills.⁸ A Land Reforms Commission was appointed for the Khasi Hills with a view to making certain 'institutional adjustment of the land tenure system within the framework of the existing social order'.⁹

The decision of Government had already raised a controversy among the public and the controversy was also surfaced in the debates of the Assembly. The HSPDP group was very critical of the Government decision and denied that any consensus was arrived among the legislators and the members of the District Council to form such a commission.¹⁰ The INC took a favourable stand on the decision of the Government.¹¹ The efforts of the Government to explain away the apprehension and confusion of the HSPDP members could not much succeed.¹²

The HSPDP members made no secret of their position that people did not want land reforms, that land reform would mean throwing away of age-old customary rights of people, that there was no landlord class warranting any measures for land reforms, that a land records department not a commission

would serve the purpose of the Government and that a referendum should be held on this issue.¹³ The HSPDP organised public demonstration against the decision of the Government. The Land Reforms Commission itself faced demonstration by the public in three places.¹⁴

The primary cause of opposition of the HSPDP to land reform was its apprehension that the customary rights of the tribal people would be violated by actions of the Government. Difficulties of the prevailing land tenure system were not denied by the HSPDP members but they preferred a land record Department to the Commission for enquiry of the land tenure system.

Another cause of opposition to the land reform by the HSPDP was its fear that land reform might entail ceiling on landholdings and the surplus land might be distributed among the non-tribal outsiders by the State Government. The apprehension of the party was so deep that it demanded a referendum on the issue of land reform. Any referendum or consultation with people as demanded by the HSPDP meant nothing short of a mid-term poll. To preserve sanctity of customs was a holy deed and similar sacrosanctity was attributed to the prevailing land tenure system by the HSPDP members. But customary practices might be used as a camouflage to protect interests of the rising middle-class among the tribals.

The problems for the APHLC were not less critical. Its members recognised the difficulties of the prevailing land tenure system.¹⁵ But they were afraid of offending the traditional sources of power.¹⁶ When the Union Government put pressure on the State Government for embarking on a land reform programme, the state Government decided to enquire into the prevailing land tenure system in the Khasi Hills as a part of land reform and attempted to evolve a consensus on measures to be adopted for the purpose. The Government consulted a large section of the public and the Ministers attempted to persuade the opposition members in the House to cooperate with the Commission. The members of the ruling party welcomed the Commission and justified its appointment.¹⁷

The members of the INC welcomed the decision of the State Government to appoint the Commission but insisted on radical change of customs in keeping with the needs of the society. But the members of the INC were absent in the House during the discussion on cut motion on land reform. The alliance with the HSPDP in the District Council and understanding with the PDIC in the Assembly placed the INC in a delicate position on the issue of land reform.¹⁸

Social injustice consequent upon the prevailing land tenure system and demands for progressive land reform measures were the basic issues in the

speeches of the legislators of the INC. The members of the INC pointed out the growth of land capitalism, rise of the landlord class in disguise, rise of a middle-class from the traditional tribal leadership concentrating land in their hand e.g. the Nokmas in the Garo Hills.¹⁹ The INC legislators demanded correction of social injustice, ceiling on landholdings, distribution of surplus land among the landless people and establishment of an egalitarian society.²⁰ A member of the INC observed that contrary to the common belief, three fourths of the population of the Khasi Hills and more than half of the population of the Garo Hills were landless people. Benefits provided to the farmers including loans would ultimately go to the landlords or headman of the clans.²¹ The INC members insisted on the Government that it should pursue national objectives of land reform in Meghalaya.²²

There were certain legislators in the APHLC too, who demanded land reform measures for the correction of social injustice and an Agrarian Reform Commission for the benefits of poor farmers.²³ But most of the ruling party members were silent on the necessity of progressive land reform measures. The ruling party considered the correction of prevailing land tenure system as the pre-requisite to progressive land reform measures. The indifference of the Government to progressive land reform measures was revealed in its attempt to shift the responsibility to the District Councils and its proposal to study modern land reform measures adopted in other parts of the country.²⁴ All this made no headway. The ruling leadership was not prepared to offend the traditional forces by radical steps.

The Commission for land reform for the Khasi Hills was formed with the Secretary of the Legislative Assembly as its Chairman and two other members from the APHLC in the House as its members. The Commission was entrusted with the functions of enquiring into the land tenure system including the changes since the advent of the British in the Khasi Hills, the difficulties faced by people for absence of survey and record of rights and recommending codifications of customs and other remedial measures. The Commission collected its data through questionnaire, direct contact with people and from old and existing literature on the Khasi customs and also memoranda submitted by different people throughout the State.

As the Commission for land reforms was a product of the Assembly and two of its members were also legislators, moreover certain other members of the Assembly also submitted their memoranda to the Commission, a brief discussion on the main aspects of the report of the Commission might be relevant here.

The Commission notes that the Khasis never paid land revenue to their Chief because their Chief was not a territorial ruler and he did not own land. The system of land revenue that prevails in certain parts of the Khasi Hills is an introduction of the British. After the advent of the British certain changes were made in the system of land revenue such as issue of patta (certificate of record of right) by the Chief or owner of Ri-Kynti land and imposition of fixed revenue on sale of land and salami (good will money) on resale of such land. According to original customs Raid land could be occupied by any member of the Raid and Ri-Kynti land could be owned permanently through purchase and no tax was imposed for that. The British violated the customs, recognised the Chief as the authority over land, came in terms with the Chiefs to take over land and then issued pattas to others and levied land revenue on those people.

The Syiem of Mylliem (Syiem refers to the Chief) first started issuing pattas to the Government servants stationed at Shillong because the Government servants needed such pattas to get loan from the Government for construction of houses. The practice was subsequently followed by owners of Ri-Kynti land, when they sold their land to other Khasis. The Commission mentions innumerable changes in customs of the Khasis concerning land tenure, inheritance of Syiemship, powers of Syiem etc. and thereby the Commission refutes the plea that the customs are inconvertible.

Regarding the land tenure, the Commission observes that primarily there are two types of land Ri-Raid and Ri-Kynti land. Ri-Raid land is community land over which no person possesses proprietary, heritable rights. A person can use such land but it reverts to the community if it is not used by the person for consecutively three years. A person can claim transferable and heritable rights over such land if he has made permanent improvement on that land. Even then such rights lapse if the person abandons the land for an indefinite period.

Ri-Raid land is managed and controlled by different types of community such as a village for village Ri-Raid land, a group of villages or the Raid for Ri-Raid land of the Raid, Elaka itself for the Ri-Raid land of the Elaka. Everyone of the community so mentioned has rights to use such land and needs not pay any revenue for it. No one can claim more land than what he actually uses. No person who is not a member of the Raid can occupy Ri-Raid land. A chief of Elaka or Sirdar of Raid or headman of a Village cannot issue pattas and realise revenue for use of Ri-Raid land.

Ri-Kynti land is controlled and managed by a Durbar of the Clan, where only male members, usually the uncles and the brothers participate. The Government has no control over such land except settlement of disputes over such land.

In recent times an innovation in case of Ri-Kynti land is the issue of patta by owner of such land in time of sale with conditions that such land would be resold only with the approval of the earlier owner who can levy taxes for resale. The Commission observes that land revenue charged by owners of Ri-Kynti land in time of sale of their land is against customs, so also issue of patta with conditions. The Commission suggests that a sale deed duly executed and registered and certified copies of relevant entries from the record of rights may be sufficient.

There is still another type of land created during the British rule and it is called the Government land. When the British first settled at Cherrapunjee, they were given a plot of land in exchange of another plot given to the State of Cherra in Sylhet District. The British started issuing pattas and imposed land revenue on the landholders of the newly acquired land against customs of the people. When the British Government needed land at Shillong after shifting of its headquarters to Shillong, it came to an agreement with the Syiem of Mylliem along with his Myntris and elders of the State. Under this agreement the State of Mylliem renounced its supremacy over certain areas at Shillong. Later the Government purchased other lands in Shillong even in violation of customs. Subsequently the Government framed rules to regulate the Government land at Shillong.

The Khasis follow matrilineal system of family relations and inheritance. The daughters and the sons when they grow up and get married leave the house of the mother to start home of their own. The youngest daughter remains in the ancestral home unless otherwise she is expelled for any unpardonable transgression. The performance of religious rites and ceremonies of the family or the clan is responsibility of the youngest daughter. The other sons and daughters of the family also participate in these functions so long they do not establish their independent homes with common consent of the clan. The performance of such functions involves expenditure that is met from the income of ancestral property of which the youngest daughter is the custodian. When the youngest daughter is still a minor the control of undivided property lies with the uncle. If the uncle fails the elder brothers themselves will share the responsibility. Virtually uncles and brothers control management and disposal of ancestral property, not the youngest daughter alone. The mother of the family during her life time may divide her property among her children, daughters mostly, keeping the larger part including the original home for the youngest daughter.

The position of man in the society according to customs is still dominant because he controls property in his original home as well as his wife's home. He alone, not the woman, participates in public affairs, in Durbar, Council or

offices of the State, But during the last few decades man has lost his customary hold in the society and there are now cries for a change to patrilineal system. The situation is created partly by the fact that half of the population in the Khasi Hills have become converts to Christianity resulting in the loss of original responsibility of the youngest daughter to perform religious rites. Being a Christian, the youngest daughter loses respect for customs of the past. The decisions of the courts during the British regime also misinterpreted the customs of the people so that the youngest daughter became sole heir to the ancestral property and thus reduced the position of uncles or brothers in the family.

The Commission makes certain recommendations of different aspects of land tenure system. The main recommendation of the commission is to make a law regulating different aspects of the problem. Provisions of the proposed law should be on the following considerations. For administration of Ri-Raid land a Durbar Shnong in the village, a Durbar Raid in the Raid, a Durbar Elaka in the Elaka should be constituted with both elected members and hereditary heads. A member of the village, or the Raid or the Elaka may occupy and use Ri-Raid land of his Raid without payment of any land revenue. A person can claim heritable and transferable rights on Raid land if he has made permanent improvements on it. Conditions are to be prescribed by the law, under which a Khasi who is not a member of the village or Raid or Elaka can occupy and use Ri-Raid land and also a non-khasi can do so. Competent authorities are to be specified to issue documents certifying occupation of Ri-Raid land by a person together with the rights granted to him. A land tribunal is to be formed to hear all appeals relating to land disputes.

Regarding the Ri-Kynti land also the Commission recommends the constitution of Durbars at different levels like family, branch of a clan, clan to administer such land. It is of the view that in the Durbar women should be allowed to participate and the father of the family will have a formal place and the husband of the youngest daughter should also be a member of the Durbar besides uncles and brothers. The pattas or leases or certificates are to be issued by the Ri-Kynti owners for the land sold to a Khasi. The sale would be without any terms and conditions, no salami can be charged in future when it changes hand by way of sale or transfer. The terms and conditions under which a non-Khasi may be permitted to hold Ri-Kynti land are to be prescribed.

Regarding the Government land the Commission suggests that different leases and pattas with varied terms and conditions should be replaced by uniform and perpetual leases conferring heritable and transferable rights on landholders provided that certain special conditions for non-Khasis to hold such land are

prescribed.

The Commission suggests that the property of the parents should be divided among all children but the parental home should be inherited by the youngest daughter. She should get an additional share to help other members of the family if they come in distress to seek refuge at her home. If the youngest daughter is a follower of Khasi religion she gets an additional share to meet the expenses for religious rites. The male children can inherit property only when parents have no female issues and parents die before choosing a female to inherit their property.

The Commission notes the anxiety of the people and also the consensus among the public on the necessity to identify and secure rights of people with the help of cadastral maps, registration of title-deeds and other documents and regular maintenance of record of rights in proper form and manner. The Commission suggests that a survey of the entire land should be taken up in a phased manner, the cadastral maps of these lands should be prepared and on that basis record of rights should be preserved. The Indian Registration Act of 1905 should be extended to the entire district. A directorate of survey, a directorate of land records and an inspectorate of registration should be organised to implement the above proposals. One more district and certain more subdivisions in the Khasi Hills should be created to facilitate the work. Branches and subbranches of these departments should be established in block headquarters and gram sevak headquarters. In spite of high financial implications of these measures, the Commission feels that the measures are essential to supply necessary data and information regarding land tenure, to ensure a sense of security to the farmers over their land and to enable credit institutions to provide loan to needy cultivators. ²⁵

The Commission sufficiently exposes the complex and confusing situation in the land tenure system of the Khasi Hills. It also brings home the point that the original concept of community ownership of land prevailing in the tribal society has given place to feudalistic patterns of land control during the colonial rule. The fact that the social tension and conflict is largely the result of land relations among the tribals and the non-tribals is also borne out by the report of Commission. In sum, the report highlights land relations in the tribal society, vested interests in land growing during the recent past, deviations from the original customs regulating land relations and benefits appropriated by the middle class from the confusing land tenure system. Though the Commission confines its study to the land tenure system of the Khasi Hills, the patterns of development in other parts of the State are largely in the line obtaining in the

Khais Hills with only minor deviations.

Opposition to land reform can be logically related with the opposition to extension of railway lines, industrialization and generation of hydro-electric potentiality in the state. All this will generate new economic forces which in return will threaten the dominance of the ruling class. The ruling class in the hills is an amalgamation of the traditional leadership, the feudal elements created during the colonial regime and the middle class breed by recent constitutional legal and political arrangements. The present ruling class is tied to feudal or semi-feudal economy and it is afraid of new economic forces. It resorts to false consciousness of tribal identity and sanctity of customs to preserve the traditional structure. A well intentioned programme of land reforms has been interpreted as distortion of customs, exploitation of tribals by outsiders precisely because land reforms would break the hold of ruling class in the tribal society.²⁶ Ultimately the issues involved in land reforms bogged down to trivia.

Notes and References :

1. Meghalaya was constituted an Autonomous State within the state of Assam by the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 and it was raised to the status of a full-fledged State by the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971.
2. The ruling party in Meghalaya from 1970 to 1976 was the APHLC (All party Hill Leaders Conference). In the Provisional Assembly of the Autonomous State INC (Indian National Congress) was the sole opposition group and from 1972 to 1976 the HSPDP (Hills State People's Democratic Party) and the PDIC (People's Demand Implementation Convention) were the opposition groups along with the INC.
3. MLAD (Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates) Vol. IV No 3, 1971, p.30, also see MLAD, 24th to 31 March 1971, p.17 and MLAD, Vol IV, No. 1 1971, p. 520.
4. MLAD, Vol. II, No. 1, 1972, p. 111 and MLAD, Vol II, No: 2 1972, pp. 13-14.
5. Till 1976 the INC primarily represented the interests of the non-tribal sections of the society, it did not accommodate the dominant tribal leadership of the state. The role of the INC has radically changed since the merger of the dominant section of the APHLC with it in 1976.
6. MLAD, Vol. II Mo.% 1972, pp. 4-5 and MLAD, Vol. III, No. 2, 1972, p. 32.
7. MLAD, 24th to 31 March 1971, p. 39, MLAD, Vol. I, No.1, 1972, p.18, MLAD, Vol II, No. 1, 1972, p. 18 and MLAD Vol. II No. .2, 1972, p. 81.
8. MLAD, Vol. I, No. 1, 1973. p 9
9. MLAD, Vol. I No. 1974, p.3.
10. MLAD, Vol. I, No. 2, 1973, p. 12,13 & 19-21
11. MLAD, Vol. IV, No. 4, 1973, p. 78 and MLAD, Vol.I, No. 2, 1974, pp. 87. ff.
12. MLAD, Vol. I No. 3, 1974, pp. 27-29, 30-31, 31-32, & 33-34
13. Vide Report of the Land Reforms Commission for Khasi Hills, Shillong, 1974, Introduction.
14. MLAD, Vol I., No. 3, 1974, pp-34-35, 41-42, & 42-44

15. MLAD, Vol IV, No. 3, 1971, p. 30 and MALD, Vol.I, No.1, 1973, p.29
16. MLAD, Vol I, No.3, 1974, pp. 42-44
17. PDIC (People's Demand Implementation Convention) was a forum formed by G.G. Swell after his expulsion from the APHLC in 1973, it adopted an anti-APHLC stages and brought in collaboration with the INC and the HSPDP a no-confidence motion against the APHLC the Govt in 1973 where land reform was also an issue.
18. MLAD, Vol.I, No.1, 1972,p 93 and MLAD, Vol. II, No.1, 1972, p. 67 and p. 73
19. Ibid, p. 73 also see, MLAD, Vol.I, No.1, 1972 p. 93 and MLAD, Vol.II, No.1, 1972, p. 73 and p. 111
20. *Ibid*, pp. 130-131
21. Notwithstanding the role of the INC elsewhere in the country in bringing about progressive land reforms, in Meghalaya it displayed much progressivism as an opposition party. It may be due to the INC's attempt to project itself as the saviour of non tribal interests in the State before 1976 period and also the absence of any left political parties in the Legislature and in the State as a force to be reckoned with. Where there is no left INC is to play the left of the centre game.
22. MLAD,24th to 31 March 1971, p. 17 and MLAD, Vol..I No. 2, 1974, p.74
23. MLAD,Vol.I , No. 1 1970, p. 52 and MLAD, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1971, p.52
24. *Ibid*, see the whole report
25. Restoration of lands in the cantonment area of Shillong to the Government of Meghalaya and cancellation of leases over the Government lands issued by the Assam Government were the major Demands creating much uproar in the State Shillong Times 9 July 1983, Ibid, 30 June 1984.

H H Das & B C Choudhury

FACTIONALISM AND POWER POLITICS IN RULING PARTIES

A Study of Intra-party Conflicts in Orissa

ORISSA : CULTURAL DEMOGRAPHIC SETTING:

The history of Orissa is remarkable for its political greatness, economic prosperity, social upliftments, architectural and artistic attainments and religious movements through all its ages.¹ It is well known that Orissa was a prosperous country under its own independent kings. This is evident from the writings of both early travellers and later historians. With the advent of British, however, the vivisection of Orissa, which had already got dismembered owing to conquest and annexation at different times became an accomplished fact. Thus the Oriya-speaking areas came to be included in three different contiguous provinces, namely Bengal, Central provinces and Madras. An agitation was, therefore, set on foot under the auspices of the Utkal Union Conference to have all the Oriya-speaking areas amalgamated under one provincial administration.² The demand of the Oriyas for a united Orissa was made on the basis of the Oriya-speaking population. It was proposed that having regard to contiguity of territory, all the Oriya-speaking tracts should be brought under one administration, so that the resultant province or territory might face, so far as possible, the least amount of inconveniences to races or communities included under it.³ For many years the Oriyas had pressed their legitimate demand for the amalgamation of all the Oriya-speaking tracts on the ground of common race, a common language and a common culture. As a result of this long-standing movement the Government of India, recognised, so far back as 1903, the principle of bringing in all the scattered Oriya-speaking population under one administrative unit.⁴ Orissa which remained dismembered originally in three but later on in four provinces became a separate province on 1 April 1936 on the basis of people speaking one and the same language and bound together by common national aspirations. The province of Orissa as constituted on 1 April

1936, consisted of six districts namely, Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Sambalpur, Ganjam and Koraput. The twenty-five Native States including Saraikela and Kharaswan, signed the Instrument of Accession on the 14 December 1947 and merged with Orissa on 1 January 1948. Only Mayurbhanj stood aloof, but that state also merged with Orissa on 1 January 1949. Saraikela and Kharaswan were transferred to Bihar in May 1948. Orissa maintained its separate identity with six districts till January 26, 1950, when the territorial map of Orissa was redrawn with thirteen districts⁵ in place of six old districts.

FACTIONALISM IN INDIAN POLITICS :

Factionalism is a peculiar characteristic of the Indian Party System. Brass has defined the faction as a "Clique with a larger fluctuating membership".⁶ The essential integrating function is evident in the recruitment of new groups into the party and with this its social base is broadened. To Lasswell⁷ the term 'faction' is commonly used to designate any constituent group of a larger unit which works for the advancement of particular persons or policies. The struggle for power within a group exhibits itself in the struggle for office or for unofficial influences. The factions are generally engaged in intra-party fights. The party is the object and not the instrument of their activities.⁸ But for the vitality of the party the existence of factions is a difficult problem, since it almost excludes a consensus on a stable basis. In a political party some of those who do not press their claims spontaneously identify themselves with the aspirations of their friends. This kind of alignment rests on no deep calculation of personal interests. Differences among those who make active bids to capture power often grow out of elementary antagonisms, although such factors are occasionally nullified by an individual who maintains an unquestioned ascendancy over his followers. Viewed in this perspective of history factions were the predecessors of modern political parties. A faction seems to subordinate the public good to private gains and thus the term takes its place in the dialectic of the Political struggle, specially as a means of defence and counter-attack by those in power.⁹

There are a large number of politics in which one party dominates through its aggregative legitimacy orientation, while the others are more or less confined to fringe position of sectional interest articulation - a defensive posture which keeps them in existence but prevents them from competing for effective power. Such a symmetry in party functions in the polity is one of the interesting features at a certain stage in the process of political development. The co-existence of one large (and generally ruling) legitimacy-oriented party with a cluster of small, strongly interest-oriented parties is a quite common pattern in the Third World.¹⁰ The role of the INC in India bears a testimony to this tendency. Thus

the CPI, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Socialist Party were all at one time part of the Congress movement. The inevitability of a struggle over distribution of power within the Congress grew out of its origin and its pre-independence traditions. The Indian National Congress in the pre-independence period was composed of diverse elements. It had experienced many factional rivalries culminating in splits in the party. The "extremists" and "moderates" split in 1907 at Surat, the creation of Congress Socialist Party in 1934, and the difference between the "Conservative" and "Radical" groups during Gandhian era bear ample testimony to it. From the time of the Civil Disobedience Campaign the internal history of the Congress was the reconciliation of a multitude of special interests and points of view.¹¹ The Patel-Nehru differences were resolved in the interest of nation-building in the post-independence era.¹² Dissidents from the ruling leadership also often pulled out of the Congress, set up other parties, and often returned to the Congress when the situation had crystallized in their favour.¹³ Probably impressed by the dominant position of the Congress till the Fourth General Elections of 1967, Kothari¹⁴ developed the theory of 'Congress System', which was also characterised as 'One Party dominant system'.¹⁵ In this system the Congress internalised the Political competition. The internalisation became possible, through an elaborate system of viable factions, whereby the rest of the parties worked as the 'parties of pressure' and lying on the periphery of the system, they influenced the intra-party competition between the Congress factions. The political consensus developed under Jawaharlal Nehru was seriously challenged after his death. The struggle for political ascendancy between rival groups in the Congress continued in the various state and the national organisation. Factional leaders often presided over large groups, with the capacity to tilt the balance against the Congress should they withdraw support from the party. If their demands for a greater share in the spoils of victory were not met, this was what several factions did.¹⁶ The issues on which various factions fought were by no means new in Indian Politics but they were dormant for a long time and came to the surface under the pressure of an open struggle for power.¹⁷ The internal group structure of the Congress became institutionalised in the post-1967 period both at the district and state levels, often resulting in keen competition and rivalry between the "Parliamentary wing and the "organisational" wing. The presence of an elaborate group structure within the Congress representing almost all shades of opinion and interest facilitated the opposition parties to affect the balance of dominant-dissident relations within the Congress. The opposition parties have at times provided refuge to dissidents from the Congress, who were to temporarily wage their battles against the ruling group inside the Congress, and have often returned to the

Congress Party once the rival group in the party had lost power. The process of factionalism was not limited to the Congress, it had also affected all other parties as well.

On the eve of the 1967 general Elections dissident Congressmen formed regional political parties and played a significant role in defeating the parent party.¹⁸ In states where the party factions were more evenly balanced and where no showdown occurred, the party suffered due to sabotage from within resulting in the defeat of the official party candidates.¹⁹ The electoral reverses of the party was also attributed to the failure of the post-Nehru leadership at the centre to perform the most vital function effective mediation in intra-party disputes and divisions. The opposition parties were able to forge alliances on an unprecedented scale and made political capital out of the growing anti-Congressism in the Indian electorate. The 1967 electoral debacle of the Congress followed by further defections from the Congress Legislature Party in many states created favourable circumstances for having co-ventional governments.²⁰ In these defections from the Congress two institutional devices played key roles, the selection of candidates for the party ticket before elections and the formation of ministries after the elections. The nomination politics and ministry formation led to the discontented factions to turn themselves into dissidents in the party.²¹

This factionalism later took the form of open defections from the party.²¹ Thus rival Congress Parties in some states were professedly parties of dissident Congressmen. The factional strategy of Competitive politics and group representation that emerged in the period of Congress dominance had contributed to the politics of coalition-making since 1967.²² The defection of dissident Congress leaders had made the coalition governments in different states possible. The Congress splits in 1969 and later in 1978 had resulted in factionalism in the Congress party. The intense and fluid factionalism in the state Congress parties was due to many factors, important among them being the complex social structure, regional diversities, conflict between modern and traditional values and unbridled personal ambitions. But it can also be explained in terms of the consensual character of the Congress and the accelerated process of political recruitment to swell the ranks of the party.

FACTIONALISM AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN ORISSA BEFORE INDEPENDENCE :

The cleavages in the Orissa Congress were influenced by the dissensions and divisions within the Indian National Congress. There were three groups in the

state unit of the party namely, the Swaraj group, the orthodox Congressmen, who sometimes called themselves 'Gandhians' and the Communists and the Socialists. Each one of these groups had a distinct role in Orissa's independence struggle. From 1920's onwards the Swaraj group and the Gandhians fought a prolonged battle for the control of the Utkal Congress. The Swarajists accepted the office in 1923 in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, whereas the Gandhians remained outside. The Congress Socialist Party organised its first meeting in 1934 in order to form the state unit of the party. The Congress Socialists in Orissa were instrumental in organising the Peasant Councils (Kisan Sabha) throughout the province. Consequent upon the Communist take over of the C.S.P. unit in the state the founder-leaders were compelled to dissolve it in 1938. The Swaraj group supported the war efforts and helped to form a Coalition Ministry, which held office between 1941 and 1944 in defiance of the Congress, resulting in the expulsion of their leaders from the Indian National Congress. The Gandhians, who had boycotted the Assemblies in 1923, shared political power with their Swaraj opponents in 1936, and resigned from the ministry in 1939 in protest against India's participation in the war. Both groups had taken part in the Non-Cooperation Movement of the 1920's and the Salt Campaigns of the 1930's. The Swarajists, however, abstained from the Individual Satyagraha of 1940 and from the Quit India Movement of 1942. The final break between the two groups was on the question of supporting the war. The Swaraj group believed that the defeat of England in the war would have an adverse impact on the achievement of India's independence. Prior to the war the differences stemmed from the tactical line of joining or abstaining from the legislative bodies. The conflict between the Swaraj group and the Gandhians was mainly a struggle to control the Utkal Pradesh Congress.²³ It was later on characterised as a factional fight arising out of the ambitions of powerful individuals.²⁴ It has been argued that these differences were also based upon communal and local loyalties.²⁵ The leaders of the Gandhian groups²⁶ were mostly Karans (Writer caste) from the northern districts of Cuttack and Balasore, while the Swaraj group leaders²⁷ were mainly Brahmins from Puri district, trained in the Satyabadi school started by Pandit Gopabandhu Das on the model of the National Schools like the Kasi Vidyapeeth and Santiniketan. The third group, the leftist forces, first became distinct within the Congress around the mid-1930's. They differed from the rest over the factional issue and in having a positive and clearly defined political ideology, apart from their commitment to the national struggle for freedom. They were disliked both by the Gandhians and the Swarajists because of their loyalty towards foreign ideologists. The left wing was inclined towards resorting to violence, and carried

out the sabotage activities during the war period.

When the war was characterised by the communists as "People's War", the Socialists differed from them and identified themselves with the less radical Congressmen. The Communists on the other hand extended their support to the Coalition Government of Swarajists and landlords. The divisions in the Congress movement in Orissa during the decades preceding India's independence were mainly in the lines of factionalism at the national plan. There was also a difference of opinion on the question of incorporating the Utkal Sammilani²⁸ in the Congress. The Raj families and the big Zamindars were opposed to the Congress. They devoted all their energies to the Utkal Sammilani and resisted attempts to bring it under the framework of the Congress Movement for independence. In 1936 the Utkal Union Conference at Puri passed a resolution expressing loyalty to the Crown. This resulted in the Congress denouncing the conference as a British device to "divide and rule". In 1927 also, the Utkal Union Conference had welcomed the All-white Simon Commission, when the Congress Party in Orissa under the leadership of Gopabandhu Das had boycotted the commission in accordance with the directives of the national party. Krushna Chandra Gajapati, the Maharaja of Parlakhemundi, had started a dialogue with the commission. He wanted that the Oriyas should take full advantage of the commission in favour of their demand for a separate Oriya-speaking province. He appealed to the Oriyas in the following words: "Now or never is the problem we are facing. Should we afford to miss the chance of getting justice from the government ? Certainly not. We must have to guard our own interest, or else none will help us."²⁹

Orissa took a fair share in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement of 1940 and the Quit India Movement of 1942. Foremost among the leaders in the movements were Pandit Nilakantha Das, Pandit Godavarish Mishra, Gopabandhu Choudury and others. The Salt Satyagraha was actively carried on the coastal belt of Eram in Balsore District, despite heavy repressive measures by the British Government. During the Quit India Movement there was severe repression in Bari in Cuttack district, Nimapara in Puri district and Nowrangpur in Koraput district.³⁰

The Orissa Congress also made an impressive show on the Constitutional front. In the elections of 1936-37, the Congress secured an absolute majority in the Orissa Legislative Assembly. Although 36 Congress Candidates were returned at the General Election, one member left the Congress party after being elected, one member of the non-Congress group joined the majority party after taking the Congress pledge and one Congress nominee won a seat in a by-elec-

tion.³¹ The result was the Congress party eventually had 37 members out of 60 in the Legislative Assembly and thus commanded a predominant majority in the Legislature.

On 24th March 1937 the Governor invited the leader of the Congress party to assist him in the formation of a ministry. In the absence of a categorical assurance from the Governor in the light of the directive of the national party leadership the state Congress leadership declined the offer of accepting office. In these circumstances a Ministry was sworn in under the leadership of Krushna Chandra Gajapati Narayan Deo, the Maharaja of Parlakhemundi.³² The Ministry, however, had lacked majority support in the legislature and it was certain that the Ministry would be voted out of power when the legislature would meet. This impending constitutional crisis was averted with the statement made by the Viceroy on the constitutional positions towards the end of June 1937. The Congress Working Committee in early July 1937 decided in favour of accepting the office in the states where the Congress had a majority. Consequent upon the resignation of the non-Congress Ministry headed by the Maharaja, a Congress ministry was sworn in with Sri Biswanath Das as the Prime Minister on 19 July 1937.³³ At the time of the first Congress Government in Orissa in 1937 the factional rivalry between the two groups in the Congress came to the surface. The leadership of Nilakantha Das and Godavarish Mishra was not accepted despite the notable contribution of the former in ensuring the victory of the Congress nominees because of his organisational ability. The Das-Mishra group, however, made an unsuccessful attempt to capture the P.C.C. in 1939. In the Congress organisational election, Radhakrishna Biswasray from Koraput district was elected as the P.C.C. Chief defeating Godavarish Mishra. He was sponsored by the Mahatab group.

The Das-Mishra group steadily lost ground and fell from the grace of the Party High Command due to Mahtab's efforts.³⁴ Mohtab became very powerful because of his proximity with the Central leadership and was elected to the Congress Working Committee. The Congress Ministry in Orissa resigned in 1939 in accordance with the decision of the national Party as a protest against unilateral British declaration that India was a belligerent state in the Second World War. This resulted in bringing the state under Governor's Rule upto 1941.³⁵ The Swarajists resigned from the Congress after their failure to form an alternative ministry in the wake of the resignation of the Biswanath Das Ministry. Seven members of the Assembly belonging to this group later joined hands with the opposition to form a non-Congress ministry in 1941 headed by K.C. Gajapati Narayan Deo.³⁶ It was a second minority government in the State.

The defectors were expelled from the Congress. The Ministry finally resigned in 1944 due to personal incompatibility among the members of the cabinet. Governor's rule was promulgated in the state which continued till 1946. Factionalism in Orissa Congress resulted in the formation of new alliances in the party. The Mahtab group replaced the Satyabadi group in Orissa politics. Mahtab who fromed the cabinet after 1946 elections completely ignored the senior, experienced and traditional leadership of Nilakantha Das, Godvarish Mihsra and Biswnath Das.

Another major political development during this period was the impact of separation of the Congress socialists from the All India Congress Party which had its echo in Orissa Congress. The Congress Socialists under the leadership of Sarangdhar Das, Surendra Nath Dwivedi and Naba Krishna Choudhury formed a separate entity and laid emphasis on agitational politics directed against the feudal elements.

FACTIONALISM AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA :

Political stability means a situation in which one party or a coalition of political parties can control the Government for a resonable length of time and where change in the Government can occur within the prescribed democratic framework.³⁷ Orissa has practically become the citadal of political instability and no Government has completed a full-term of five years till 1980.³⁸ The state of Orissa has, therefore, became famous for the political drama staged mainly by coalition actors.³⁹

The Congress in Orissa has been plagued by factionalism. The factions are headed by a few individuals. Their behaviour at any given point of the political game is nearly predictable. Even though periodically they acquire ideological postures they have no inhibitions in reversing their stand on policy issues.⁴⁰ The intra-party factionalism and inter-party rivalry led to the appointment of commisions of Enquiry against political opponents.⁴¹

Hare Krishan Mahatab, who headed a five member cabinet after the Congress victory in the General Elections to the State Legislative Assembly held in 1946 continued in power till 12 May, 1950 when he was called upon to join the Central Cabinet as Minister of Commerce and Industry in the Nehru Cabinet in which capacity he continued upto 1952.⁴² Naba Krishna Choudhury succeeded Mahtab as Chief Minister. After the first General Elections in 1952 the Congress party formed a Government under the leadership of Naba Krishna Choudhury and the Ministry continued till 1956.⁴³ The Chief Minister, Naba

Krishna Choudhury though supported by all but one of his cabinet colleagues had ultimately forced to step down in favour of Mahtab in October 1956. The fall of the Choudhury government was attributed to intra-party rivalries. Mahatab's role was intriguing in as much as he exhorted his trusted lieutenants to start troubles for Choudhury in openly criticising the Chief Minister, his policies and programmes.⁴⁴ The dissidents also exposed the failures of the government in regard to the handling of the devastations caused by the unprecedented floods of 1955 and the agitations against the decision of the Government of India on the state Reorganisation Commission recommendations giving sareikela and Kharswan, two Oriya-speaking tracts, to the state of Bihar. Some Congress M.L.A.s openly advocated change in leadership. Choudhury Ministry could not withstand the impact of the disrupted economy, divided party-loyalty and dis-affection of the members any longer. This paved the way for Mahtab taking over as the Chief Minister in October 1956.⁴⁵ The Mahtab Ministry continued till the second General Elections of 1957.

The results of the Second General Elections could not bring political stability in the State. None of the political parties secured an absolute majority in the state Legislative Assembly.⁴⁶ Mahatab formed the Government with the help of some Jharkhand M.L.A.s and few others. The Congress Party managed to get an assurance of support from the Jharkhand party having 5 seats and the C.P.I. having 9 seats in the Orissa Legislative Assembly. In addition to this some independent M.L.A.s and at a later stage some Ganatantra parishad M.L.A.s defected to the Congress and expressed their support to the Mahatab Ministry. Thus Mahtab formed a Congress Government though for all practical purposes it was an unstructured coalition like the one formed after the General Elections of 1952. Though supporters of Government did not share political powers, some of them definitely shared the 'benefit of power', especially the Jharkhand Party. The working majority which was manipulated by Mahatab could not be continued beyond May 1959 resulting in the formation of the Congress-Gantantra Parishad Coalition Ministry of 22 May 1959.⁴⁷ The Congress-Gantantra Parishad Coalition, though stable, was a government with many inner-contradictions. The element of instability of the coalition government could be attributed to the Congress Party alone in as much as the dissident forces were mostly in the Congress Party. Biju Patnaik, who was one of the main architects of the coalition of 1959 was interested for a ministerial berth but was kept outside it on the plea that the Ganatantra Parishad was opposed to the change of ratio among the coalition partners. Though the Congress Party had a large number of competent and ambitious leaders, they could not be accommodated in the coalition ministry. Patnaik made a suggestion that the Jharkhand M.L.A.s

be accepted as "associate members" of the Congress to claim more Congress representation in the Ministry. The alternative given by Patanik was to dissolve the coalition and seek a fresh mandate. The advice of Patnaik was not acceptable to Mahatab. The coalition started with the creation of factions inside the party. Mehtab's opposition to fight the Ganatantra Parishad and its leader Singh Deo was interpreted by the Patnaik faction as indicative of his lust for power at the cost of parties prospects.⁴⁸ Patnaik ultimately convinced the Congress High Command of the futility of the coalitional regime in view of promoting the state's development and future of the Congress Party in the state. Biju Patnaik was successful in unseating Banamali Patnaik, a close associate of Mahatab and himself became the president of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee. Consequent upon Biju Patnaik's rebellion against Mahatab the coalition government resigned on 21 February 1961 and the President's Rule was imposed.

In the mid-term election to the state Legislative Assembly in June 1961 the Congress Party under Biju Patnaik's dynamic leadership won 82 seats.⁴⁹ Mahatab remained apparently aloof from active politics during the election due to his opposition to Biju Patnaik's leadership. It was, however, alleged that he was instrumental in setting up Independent candidates in the election. Biju Patnaik had a comfortable majority support in the Assembly as the Chief Minister but was called upon to resign under the 'Kamraj Plan'⁵⁰ and he obliged by resigning on 1 October 1963. After Patnaik resigned to devote himself whole-heartedly to the organisational work of the party, Biren Mitra, the Deputy Chief Minister in his Cabinet succeeded him as the Chief Minister on 2 October 1963 and continued in the position till 20 February 1965. The first organised opposition in the Congress was manifested at the time of choosing a successor to Patnaik as Chief Minister. Pabitra Mohan Pradhan unsuccessfully contested for the leadership of the Congress Legislature Party against Biren Mitra.⁵¹ Mitra did not have a smooth sailing as the Chief Minister. The C.B.I. probe against Patnaik and Mitra badly affected the public image of the Congress Ministry. Two top Congress leaders, K. Kamraj and Atulya Ghosh asked Mitra to resign in 1965. Thereafter on the advice of the Central Party leadership Sadasiva Tripathy was chosen as the Chief Minister in February 1965.⁵² Through all odds, somehow he managed to remain in power as a Chief Minister till the Fourth General Elections of 1967.

By the time the elections took place in 1967 much change had taken place in Orissa politics. Apart from the general deterioration in the Congress position all over the country, some developments at the local level had the effect of eroding the strength of the Congress in Orissa.⁵³ The image of Biju Patnaik had

already been soiled, and an influencial section of the Congres led by Mahatab had left the party and set up an orgainsation called Jana Congress. Ever since 1961 Mahatab was looking for an opportunity to counter Patnaiks influence in state politics. The impending elections to the stae Legislative Assembly was though to be the main consideration for forming a regional party. Even after the defection of Mahatab group, the Congress factionalism had its manifestation between the two groups, one led by Sadasiva Tripathy, the Chief Minister and other group led by patnaik-Mitra combination. While the Tripathy group had the sympathy of the Congress High Command, the Patnaik group was in full control of the organization and the majority of the Legislators at the state level.⁵⁴ Though Tripathy had taken over the legislative leadership, for all practical purposes Patnaik and Mitra continued to manage the party affairs in the State.

The Jana Congress and the Swatantra Party fought the 1967 elections on the basis of a 21-point programme and entered into an electoral understanding. There was informal adjustment of seats between the P.S.P. and the Jana Congress in the Eastern region of the State. In the 1967 elections no party could secure an absolute majority of seats.⁵⁵ This resulted in the formation of the Swatantra-Jana Congress coalition Ministry headed by Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo, the leader of the Swatantra Party and Pabitra Mohan Pradhan of Jana Congress became the Deputy Chief Minister. The coalition could provide a fairy|stable government. The alliance in fact was a revival of the old Congress Ganatantra Parishad coalition that ruled the State from 1959 to 1961 as the coalition in both these cases were the result of coming to an understanding between Mahatab group and the Sing Deo group.⁵⁶ At the initial phase this coalition enjoyed the normal conditions of political stability under a parliamentary framework. The ministry made a good beginning with perfect understanding among coalition partners. But intra-party contradictions came to the surface after two years of its functioning. Till July 1969 the coalition government did not face any internal conflict and till August 1970 there was no serious crisis. The 1969 split in the Indian National Congress had serious repercussions on the continuance of the coalition government. While the Swatantra party was anxious to continue in power and to enhance its political stature, the Jana-Congress especially Mahatab and his followers were more interested in rejoining there parent party rather than in the continuance of the coalition. Earlier during the Presidential Election in August 1969 there was a difference of opinion in the choice of the candidates contesting the Presidential Office of the Indian Union. While the Swatantra Party supported the Independent candidate C.D. Deshmukh, the Jana Congress legislators voted in favour of V.V. Giri. The followers of Biju Patnaik voted for the official Congress candidate N.Sanjeeva

Raddy.⁵⁷ The subsequent events forced Biju Patnaik to leave the Congress(R) and form a regional political party -- The Utkal Congress.⁵⁸ The first and most important factor in the process of formation of the Utkal Congress was the imposition of choices by the central leadership which led to the allegation of 'bossism'.⁵⁹ Mahatab was interested to resign Congress after the exit of Patanik and his associates from the party. Mahatab initially could not convince his Jana Congress colleagues to decide to rejoin Congress, as there was opposition from Pabitra Mohan Pradhan and Surendranath Patnaik, respectively the Deputy Chief Minister and a Cabinet Minister in the Sing Deo Ministry. The Singh Deo-Mahatab rift was precipitated with the proposal for setting up of a Commission of inquiry to probe corruption charges against Mahatab. It was included in the agenda for discussion in a Cabinet Meeting to be held on 6 January 1971. With these developments the Jana Congress state level meeting on 4 January 1971 arrived on a consensus in favour of withdrawal from the coalition, although most of the members of the Ministerial wing were feeling uneasy.⁶⁰ In the first week of January the ministers belonging to the Jana Congress resigned resulting in the end of the coalition government.

The results of the mid-term elections in March 1971 gave the verdict in favour of a coalition Government. No single party was in position to form the Government.⁶¹ However, ultimately a coalition Government assumed office with the support of Swatantra, Utkal Congress and the Jharkhand Parties, headed by Biswanath Das.⁶² The Das Coalition Government lacked ideological cohesion. Contradictions and tentions among the coalition partners over many issues resulted in the collapse of the coalition. The defection of 6 legislators belonging to the Swatantra Party led by Gangadhar Pradhan, a Deputy Minister in the coalition and later the decision of the Utkal Congress to merge with Congress (R) led to the collapse of the multibalance coalition led by Biswanath Das on 9 June 1972. A Congress(R) government led by Nandini Satapathy assumed office on 14 June 1972 with an unprecedented support of 94 members in the House of 140.⁶³ The Satapathy Ministry was an invisible coalition with the support of M.L.A. s who won on Congress(R), P.S.P. Utkal Congress, Swatantra, Jharkhand and Congress(O) tickets and one independent legislator. The Congress(R) party in Orissa under Satapathy's leadership opposed a total merger of the Utkal Congress, resulting in the revival of the Utkal Congress Party. The period between 14 June 1972 and 1 March 1973 was doubly coalitional in the sense that there was an invisible coalitional government and the opposition parties also formed some sort of a coalition among themselves to oppose the Government.⁶⁴ In December 1972 the Utkal Congress decided in favour of the revival of the party and in response to that eleven members of the

erstwhile Utkal Congress resigned from the Congress party. In January 1973, five of the Congress members formed a separate block under the leadership of Mahtab and styled themselves as the "Independent Congress Block". The polarisation of political forces led to the formation of 'Pragati Legislature Party' with the coming together of three important political personalities, Mahtab,⁶⁵ Patanik⁶⁶ and Singh Deo. At a joint meeting on 8 February 1973, it was decided that the Pragati Legislature Party would function under the leadership of Biju Patnaik.⁶⁷ The Pragati Dal which was a federation of Utkal Congress, Swatantra and Independent Congress led by Mahtab ultimately was successful in engineering defection from the Congress(R) Legislature Party resulting in the collapse of the Satpathy Ministry on 1 March 1973. The Pragati Legislature Party which staked its claim to form the Minstry under the leadership of Biju Patnaik was denied the chance. However, consequent upon Satapathy's resignation as Chief Minister the State was placed under President's rule on the recommendation of the Governer paving the way for a mid-term poll to the State Assembly.

The second Government led by Nandini Satapathy was formed after the mid-term poll of February 1974.⁶⁸ The Satapathy ministry was supported by⁶⁹ Congress members in the House of 147. The 7 member C.P.I Legislature Party supported the Satapathy ministry but did not share political power. The Congress Party had an electoral understanding for adjustment of seats on the eve of the 1974 mid-term poll, though there were friendly contests in Nimapara and Bhubaneswar Assembly constituencies in Puri District. After the emergency was proclaimed there was a steady flow of opposition members to the side of the Congress and it swelled the Congress strength in the Assembly. The Satapathy Ministry collapsed because of the internal dissension in the ruling party. The ministry which was smoothly run for the first two years consolidated the position of the Chief Minister after the emergency was proclaimed, by the Central Government for the first time to counter the internal threats. Subsequently the intra-party factionalism came to the surface because of the virtual non-cooperation of the Chief Minister with the newly formed state unit of the Youth Congress, Constituted under the direct patronage of the Congress High Command. There was serious charges of political corruption against the Chief Minister. She was also accused of going for a confrontation with the centre and deviating from the 'national mainstream'. There was also criticism of her style of functioning as Chief Minister⁶⁹ and her increasing dependence on the C.P.I.⁷⁰ The anti-Satapathy faction in the Congress with the knowledge of the Congress High Command created a political situation which led to the resignation of the Chief Minister at the instance of the central party leadership on 16 December 1976. This led to the formation of the new Congress Ministry headed

by Binayak Acharya on 29 December, 1976 after a short spell of president's rule in the State. The Acharya Ministry had stayed for the shortest period of only 123 days to be precise. His party colleagues who brought him to power soon got disillusioned because of his inability to provide a bright image of the Congress Party Government in the Changed political scenario. The pro-Satapathy Congressmen continued to create hurdles for him. The Acharya Ministry came to an end as the Janata Government at the Centre had decided to dissolve the State Legislative Assembly in April 1977.⁷¹

FACTIONAL POLITICS IN ORISSA SINCE 1977:

The political situation in the country experienced a sudden change with the dissolution of the existing Fifth Lok Sabha and order for fresh elections. The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on January 17, 1977 suddenly announced her decision in an unscheduled broadcast of holding the elections to the Lok Sabha in March.⁷² The emergency rules and press censorship were relaxed. The Prominent opposition leaders, most of whom were under detention were ordered to be released. On 2 February 1977, Jagjivan Ram, a senior Cabinet Minister in Gandhis Cabinet resigned from the Cabinet and the Congress organisation. In February 1977 he formed the "Congress for democracy" alongwith H.N. Bahuguna, a former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and Nandini Satapathy, the former Chief Minister of Orissa, both of whom at one time were the close confidants of Gandhi.⁷³ Earlier steps were taken to unite all the major non-communists opposition parties and on 20 January, 1977 it was decided to form the Janata Party with the support of the four major National opposition parties Jan Sangh, Congress(O), Socialists Party and Bharatiya Lok Dal. This was possible because of the efforts of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, who earlier spearheaded his campaign for 'Total Revolution' in the country. He announced that the Janata party would be based on Gandhian ideology and all the four constituent parties would completely merge into one party after the elections. All the four constituent of the Janata Party decided to fight the elections under a common banner.

In Orissa the Janata Party fought the Lok Sabha Elections of March 1977 in alliance with the Congress for Democracy and the C.P.I.(M). In this election in Orissa the Janata led opposition could win 16 out of 21 seats to the Lok Sabha.⁷⁴ The four seats won by the Congress was from Koraput and Ganjam districts bordering Andhra Pradesh. The C.P.I.(M) nominee won from the prestigious Bhubaneswar constituency. The Congress for Democracy secured the Dhenkanal seat with its nominee Devendra Satapathy, husband of Nandini

Satapathy, defeating K.P.Singh Deo of the Congress by a big margin. The Janata victory was attributed to the dynamic leadership of Biju Patanik.⁷⁵ A section of the Congress leadership was willing to join the Janata party or extend its support, to an alternative Janata Party led ministry. This had not found favour with the state Janata Party leadership who preferred to seek a fresh mandate from the people in the backdrop of the massive support in the Lok Sabha Elections. The debacle of the Congress in the elections was largely due to the result of the cracks in the state organisation.⁷⁶ In most places, the Congress candidates did not take the local partymen and M.L.A. s into confidence, while the Janata Party candidates worked in close collaboration with the local party workers. The Congress Debacle was a threat to the Binayak Acharya Ministry. After his defeat from Bolangir Parliamentary Constituency, Ananga Udaya Singh Deo, the Minister of State for Forest, Fisheries and Animal Husbandry in the Acharya Ministry had resigned from the Council of Ministers. A section of Congressmen began demanding the resignation of the Chief Minister, Acharya and the P.C.C. president Chintamani Jena alleging that they had mismanaged the affairs of the party. It was alleged that Acharya acted more like a group leader and was responsible for the party functioning as a divided house in the legislature party, while the P.C.C. Chief played a similar role in the organisational sector.⁷⁷ The main slogan of the Janata-led opposition was: 'Defeat Indira and Save Democracy', The euphoria that characterised the formation of the Janata Government at the centre continued to influence the political scene in Orissa.

Factionalism in the Congress was evident when Gangadhar Mahapatra, a senior Congress leader and a close associate of Satapathy, while he was Chief Minister expressed his view, that Binayak Acharya and his supporters who had encouraged Congressmen to pull down the Satapathy Government must be held responsible for weakening the party.⁷⁸ After the poll debacle from Congressmen became active in trying to oust Acharya as Chief Minister. Some of the followers of J.B.Patnaik, including some Youth Congress functionalists were lobbying for Patnaik to take over from Acharya. The P.C.C. executive and the C.L.P. met on April 3, 1977 to discuss the election reverses. While the party functionalists tried to put the entire blame on Congressmen who were in the Government as well as the Youth Congress, the Congressmen in the Government held the organisational wing responsible for the poll debacle.⁷⁹ Some Congressmen felt that the causes of the present situation originated in the move during emergency to topple the Nandini Satapathy Ministry. Congressmen were encouraged to be indisciplined. A section of the organisational leaders who supported the move to oust Satapathy as Chief Minister and directly encouraged indisciplined in the party were amply rewarded with Ministerial berths in the Acharya Cabinet. While the

Congress was a divided house in Orissa, the union Cabinet had decided to dismiss the Congress Governments, which it felt had lost the representative character. The Acharya ministry in orissa along with Ministries in some other states were dissolved with the dissolution of the state Assemblies on 30 April 1977.

In Orissa fresh elections to the State Legislative Assembly were held on 10 June 1977. The Janata Party led by Biju Patnaik swept the polls.⁸⁰ This was an unprecedeted victory for any single party in any elections to the State Assembly. For the first time a non-Congress political party got an absolute majority in the State Assembly. One of the highlights of the election was the victory of Smt. Nandini Satapathy from the Dhenkanal Constituency, defeating Malati Choudhury. The latter who alongwith her husband Naba Krishna Choudhury, a former Chief Minister of the State had campaigned for the Janata Party during the Lok Sabha Elections of 1977, decided to oppose. Satapathy as allegedly she was one of the most oppressive Chief Ministers and was responsible for the excesses committed during Emergency in Orissa. This stand of Malati Choudhury created a problem for the Janata Party. Quite a few of the Janata Party leaders had extended indirectly their support to Choudhury, who filed her nomination as an Independent. A new dimention was added to this problem by Jayaprakash Narayan publicly supporting the candidature of Choudhury as against the official Janata candidate. There were many dissidents from both the Congress and Janata Parties who contested as Independents or on behalf of the Regional Parties.

The Janata Party assumed office with Nilamani Routray as Chief Minister on June 26, 1977. Despite the overwhelming majority the Janata Government in the State experienced factional rivalries. A section of the Janata Party leaders were of the opinion that the socialists and the R.S.S. elements in the party were trying to capture the organisation at the cost of the erstwhile BLD faction, which was popular due to its leader Biju Patnaik.⁸¹ The State unit of the party was led by Biswanath Pandit, as Chairman. Pandit belonged to the erstwhile socialist party and was elected from the Cuttack City Assembly Constituency.

Another interesting development was the inquiry against Nandini Satapathy for abusing her official position as Chief Minister of Orissa.

Satapathy's arrest on 17 September, 1977 was preceeded by raids on her residence and those of her relatives and close associates.⁸² The state Janata Party president commenting on her arrest said, "I have nothing to comment on Satapathy's arrest except to say that the law has taken its course".⁸³ The Janata Chief Minister, Mr. Routray was reported to have said that his government had

no intentions of withdrawing the cases against Satapathy.

The Janata Party at the centre was divided owing to differences between Charan Singh and Morarji Desai. This had an adverse impact on the Janata Ministry in the State. The Janata party was bifurcated into Janata (J.P.) led by Chandra Sekhar and Janata (Secular) led by Charan Singh. The ruling Janata Party under Nilamani Routray was identified with the Janata (S) and the Janata M.L.A.s under Prahallad Mallick had supported the Janata (J.P.). The Janata Legislature Party opposed to the Chief Minister's group met on 18 August, 1979 and elected Prahallad Mallick as its leader. The meeting was claimed to have been attended by 29 M.L.A.s This group felt that after the recent development in the Janata Party at the centre Routray failed to clarify his position and allegiance even after specific request by the Party President Chandra Sekhar. Instead of complying with the instruction of the party chief the Chief Minister dismissed two of his cabinet colleagues for no fault except their having agreed to convene such a party meeting. The party President expelled Routray from the Primary membership of the Party on 17 August 1979. Later Mallick staked his claim for the post of Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly as he commanded the support of more number of M.L.A.s in comparison with the Congress(I) in the state Legislative Assembly. On 18 August 1979 Routray had intimated to the speaker of the State Legislative Assembly that Sri Biswanath Pandit, Sri Prahallad Mallick, Sri Biswabhusan Harichandan, Nandini Satapathy, A.N. Singh Deo and Sri Bhagabata Behra were expelled from the Janata Legislature party for their anti-party activities detrimental to the cohesion of the party. The Chief Minister was of the opinion that if any breakaway group of the Janata Party legislators wanted to be in opposition they might be allowed to do so but he objected to using the name of "janata Legislature Party" by the break-away faction.

The Janata party Government at the centre led by Morarji Desai fell in July 1979 and thereafter a new Government of the Janata (S) came into being under the leadership of Charan Singh.⁸⁴ The Lok Dal was revived in September 1979 led by Charan Singh.⁸⁵ In Orissa the supporters of Biju Patnaik, who first joined the Pragati Legislature Party inside the Assembly later joined the Bharatiya Lok Dal. When the B.L.D. merged in Janata most of them joined the new party and when the Lok Dal was revived they expressed their confidence in Charan Singh's leadership.

The Routray ministry in Orissa, which identified itself with the Lok Dal at the all India level had to face factional rivalry when the Minstry was expanded. The Lok Dal legislators were unhappy over the inclusion of Brundaban Nayak

and Jagannath Mallick in the Cabinet. Nayak, who had defected from the Congress(I) (he was the leader of the Congress Legislature Party) to join the Lok Dal was given a Cabinet Ministership with important portfolios of Public Works and Rural Development Departments. Nayak as the leader of the opposition and subsequently as the leader of the Congress(I) Legislature Party was a strong critic of the Routray Government both inside and outside the House. Nayak was taken on the pretext that he would be very helpful to ensure the victory of the Party candidates from the Aska and Berhampur Parliamentary Constituencies. Both these seats were won by Congress (I) candidates in the 1977 elections to the Lok Sabha. The vocal faction of the Lok Dal, who were opposed to Nayak's inclusion in the party and the Cabinet pointed out that Biju Patnaik was defeated in one Parliamentary constituency and one Assembly constituency in Ganjam district in the 1971 mid-term poll as the nominee of the erstwhile Utkal Congress, despite the fact that Nayak was a prominent Utkal Congress leader of the District.⁸⁶ The dissidents argued that Nayak would be a liability rather than an asset to the party. Mallick's inclusion in the cabinet was also resented by a section of Lok Dal legislators and party rank and file.⁸⁷ Mallick was earlier asked to relinquish the post of the party Chief Whip in the Assembly when it was alleged that he was the brain behind a plot to oust the Routray Ministry. A meeting of the Adivasi and Harijan legislators of the party was organised with the knowledge of Mallick to form a Cabinet headed by a Harijan. In addition to all these factors, the refusal of two of the M.L.A.s to take oath as Ministers of State brought the discontentment to the surface. The Deputy Chairman of the State planning Board Chandra Madhab Misra, who was an aspirant for a Cabinet berth resigned from his post.

Since three out of four newly admitted Cabinet Ministers and three out of nine state Ministers were taken from the Cuttack district there was a large-scale resentment among the legislators of other districts.⁸⁸ Earlier when the Janata Ministry took office after the 1977 Assembly Elections there were many experienced legislators, who could not be accommodated within the Ministry. The ministerial berths were given on the basis of the quota of the different parties, who merged to form the Janata Party. The Janata M.L.A.s of the Ganjam district were not happy with the inclusion of Harihar Swain in the Council of Ministers.⁸⁹

The Lok Dal Government also faced opposition from its own M.L.A.s on the issue of the transfer and posting of some top bureaucrats. A large number of party legislators were opposed to the appointment of a senior officer as the secretary of Information and Public Relations Department, as they felt that he

had misused the mass media and tutored the press during the Emergency as the Chief Censor for Orissa.⁹⁰ The party M.L.A.s were also critical of the appointment of all non-Oriya officers in all the top positions of the Industries Department which they felt would stand on the way of speedy industrialisation of Orissa.⁹¹ Though the Janata Party had secured 110 seats in an Assembly of 147 members, the strength of the party had risen 117 with the joining of 7 Independent legislators. The change in the political complexion at the centre and the Presidential Proclamation of February 1980 put an end to the Routray Ministry in Orissa. The state legislative Assembly was dissolved after the spectacular victory of the Congress(I) under Smt. Gandhi's leadership in the mid-term poll of January 1980 to the Lok Sabha.⁹² Prior to the dissolution of the Assembly on 23 January 1980, Yashpal Kapoor, a close confidant of Smt. Gandhi visited Orissa, where he contacted the Chief Minister Routray and discussed regarding the prospects of forming a Congress Government through defection. He reportedly asked the Chief minister that he had to join the Congress with the Lok Dal Legislators in the Haryana style or else must be prepared to face dismissal. The state Legislative Assemblies were dissolved extending the same logic on which the Janata Ministry at the Centre had done after the 1977 Lok Sabha Elections. Biju Patnaik, the Chairman of the Orissa Unit of the Lok Dal criticised the decision of the Congress(I) Government. Patnaik saw in the decision of the Congress(I) Government a step aimed at demolishing the federal structure of India.

THE CONGRESS(I) GOVERNMENT AFTER 1980 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:

The Congress(I) Party led by Sri Janaki Ballav Patnaik swept the polls in the May 1980 Assembly Elections, which was a serious blow to the Janata (S) leadership.⁹³ J.B. Patnaik, who was a Cabinet Minister at the centre was unanimously elected as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party and took office on 9 June 1980 as Chief Minister.⁹⁴ He led a Council of Ministers with seven Cabinet Ministers, ten Ministers of State and one Deputy Minister. Patnaik took the credit of leading a stable Government in the state and enjoyed proximity with the central party leadership.⁹⁵ The Congress Party Government in the state, however, experienced factional rivalries. In the first two years that Patnaik had been in power, there were many a memoranda submitted to the party High Command, charging his government with corruption and inefficiency. Among the Congressmen who spearheaded the campaign included Bipin Das, then the Chief Whip of the party in the Assembly and Sheikh Matlub Ali, the

then Secretary of the Congress(I) Legislature Party along with many M.L.A.s of the ruling party. Among the charges leveled against Patnaik in the memorandum submitted in April 1982 there was an allegation that he was a sympathiser of the R.S.S.⁹⁶ The most controversial minister in Patnaik's ministry was Basant Kumar Biswal, known as the 'Super Chief Minister', He was given the important portfolios of Works, Mining and Geology, Housing and Urban Development though he was a Minister of state in the Patnaik Minister. He was criticised by senior Cabinet colleagues for his highhandedness and interference in the affairs of other departments. This led to a crisis in the cabinet in may 1982 with Raghunath Patnaik, then Finance Minister warning the Chief Minister that if Biswal did not mend his ways "I would have to think othersise"⁹⁷ Mr. Biswal, though a Minister of State, had been attending alomst all Cabinet meetings. Biswal had a meteoric rise in the party. He joined the Congress(I) shortly before 1980 Assembly Elections. He was immediately made the treasurer of the P.C.C.(I) and was taken as a member of its executive committee. His influence in the party and Government was due to his close association with J.B. Patnaik and his capacity to raise funds for the party. Biswal's interference in other departments was a cause of resentment among the ministers incharge of those departments. The ministers who felt domineered or slighted were Raghunath Patnaik(Finance), Upendra Dixit(Revenue), Gangadhar Mahapatra(Education) all of Cabinet Rank and Kishore Chandra Patel(Industries) and Harihar Karan (Health) both Ministers of State. The aggrieved ministers were understood to have formed a sort of informal group to resist Biswal's dominance in the J.B.Patnaik administration.⁹⁸ On the otherhand Biswal was complaining that it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to finance party activities in the absence of co-operation from other ministers, particularly Niranjan Patnaik, Minister of State for Irrigation and Power.

Another instance of the party's factionalism came to limelight when Hemananda Biswal, the Congress(I) M.L.A. and the Chairman of the Public Undertakings Committee, gave a report which created a sensation in Orissa. On March 30, 1983 when Biswal was disallowed from tabling his committee's report in the House, he read out the report in defiance of the Chair and later distributed copies of the report to the press. The findings of the committee contained some facts which contradicted the earlier statements of the Chief Minister on those issues. Hemananda Biswal, who was termed as a dissident said, "My personal feeling is that there was a conspiracy to block the presentation of the report in the House".⁹⁹ The P.U.C. report was virtually a stricture against the Chief Minister.

The dissident activities in the State inside the state Congress(I) resulted in open factionalism. The anti-Patnaik faction was led by the then Union Minister of state for Chemicals and Fertilizers, Mr. Ram Chandra Rath, one time close associate of the Chief Minister.¹⁰⁰ Rath and Patnaik had fallen apart because of the increasing importance given to Basanta Kumar Biswal in the party and Government. R.C. Rath had with him Kanhu Charan Lenka,¹⁰¹ the former Revenue Minister in the Patnaik cabinet and some other members. Their main allegation was that Patnaik's Government was not implementing the 20-point economic programme and that it was not competent enough to do so.¹⁰² The open identification of Central Minister with the dissident faction gave an impression that this faction had the support and sympathy of the Party High Command. The dissident activities compelled Patnaik to sack Bipin Das from the position of party Chief whip and Sheikh Matlub Ali from the Secretaryship of the Assembly Legislature Party. In the public meetings Rath accused the Patnaik minister for its inability to provide relief in the drought affected areas and alleged that the public distribution system in the state had completely broken down.

The factionalism in the Congress(I) took a definite shape with the joining of more M.L.A.s and Members of Parliament in the dissident group. The dissidents who were lying low for the time being because of the explanation that was called from the known dissidents by the A.I.C.C.(I), later concentrated their factional activities. The dissidents were encouraged after the debacle of the party in the Andhra and Karnataka Assembly Elections of 1983. The dissidents in Orissa got positive encouragement with the change of A.I.C.C.(I) General Secretary. G.K. Moopanar and Rajendra Kumari Bajpai were known for their pro-Patnaik attitude. The appointment of Chandulal Chandrakar, as the General Secretary of the A.I.C.C. (I) in charge of Orissa was a source of encouragement for the dissidents. The dissidents could manage the support of a substantial number of Adivasi Legislators. The dissidents in the party included K.C. Patnaik and Lalit Mohan Gandhi, who were sacked from the position of Minister of state after adverse court verdict. A number of prominent M.P.'s like Braja Mohan Mohanty, Laxman Mallick, Krupasindhu Bhoi and Syam Sundar Mahapatra helped the dissident faction directly or indirectly. In addition to the charges of R.S.S. connections and neglect in implementing the 20-point programme, the dissidents had listed many new allegations in their memorandum to the Prime Minister, which included the Chief Minister's bunglings on the Manibhadra dam issue, manipulations of the state Congress(I) organisational elections, castism in the party and many specific cases of impropriety and corruption.¹⁰³ Despite the Chief Minister's attempts to satisfy potential dissidents with Chair-

manships of government undertakings, the dissident activities continued in the party.

The factionalism in the Congress was curbed with the interference of the Central Leadership. The Chief Minister J.B.Patnaik and the P.C.C. (I) President Nityananda Misra earlier made an unsuccessful attempt to bring out a compromise. This was due to lack of positive support to the move by the two most powerful leaders from the state at the centre, Union Ministers R.C.Rath and K.P.Singh Deo. The Central leaders affected a compromise with a new formula called "assimilation". The dissidents also were frustrated because they found that the two Union ministers were unwilling to lead them openly. The Chief Minister, however, denied that there had ever been any dissident activity against him when he claimed, "Every time I meet Ram Chandra Rath and others who are called dissidents, I seek their help. Had there been dissident activity or what may critics used to say about me and my government been true, I would not have been able to survive and work for the people".¹⁰⁴ The dissidents, however, claimed that they have been completely isolated in the party's organisational elections and their constituencies were deprived of many developmental programmes.

Despite all factional rivalries the Patnaik Ministry completed its full term of five years. The dissidents were encouraged and helped by Radhanath Rath, a former minister and the Editor of the Premier Oriya Daily, 'The Samaj' by giving the dissidents viewpoint wide coverage and highlighting the failures of the Patnaik ministry. The ministerial wing got a favourable coverage in the oriya daily 'The Prajatantra' run by H.K.Mahtab, the veteran leader and mentor of the Chief Minister. A peculiar dimension of the factionalism in the Congress(I) party was that both these factions expressed their unquestioned loyalty to the then Prime Minister Gandhi. The Chief Minister knew that his continuance in the office depended not on his support-base in the State legislative Assembly but on the blessings of the Prime Minister. On the otherhand, the anti-Patnaik faction knew it very well that any change in the State leadership could be possible only with the intervention of the central leadership.

NEW DIMENSIONS OF FACTIONALISM AFTER 1984:

The Congress (I) swept the December 1984 elections to the Lok Sabha by capturing 20 seats out of 21 in the State. The Janata Party had retained its seat with the reelection of Biju Patnaik from the Kendrapara constituency. Earlier Ram Chandra Rath, resigned from the party after he was dropped from the new

central ministry headed by Rajiv Gandhi. He later joined the Janata Party to contest the Lok Sabha seats from Aska Constituency.¹⁰⁵ Following his resignation Ganyachand Bhuyan and Arjun Sethy two prominent M.P.s and K.C.Patnaik M.L.A.had also resigned from the Congress(I). Later Gantayat Swain M.L.A. and a follower of Rath resigned from the party. The Congress(I) victory in the State was attributed to the posthumous Indira wave and a sympathy for the new leadership.¹⁰⁶ In the subsequent election to the state Legislative Assembly the Congress(I) repeated its performances in the Assembly Elections of 1985. In Orissa Congress (I) nominations were denied to 43 sitting M.L.A.s among whom figured some Ministers in the J.B.Patnaik Ministry, under the new guidelines given by Rajiv Gandhi in selecting party nominees. After the comfortable victory in the Lok Sabha Elections the factionalism in the Congress(I) party in the state came to surface over the distribution of party tickets for the Assembly Elections. The factionalism was manifested in rival groups in the party trying to get the nomination for their close associates to increase their strength in the Legislative Assembly. Niranjan Patnaik and Basant Kumar Biswal, two ministers in the J.B.Patnaik ministry became the rival centres of power. However, both of them are known to be close confidants of the Chief Minister.

The J.B.Patnaik ministry that had assumed power after the 1985 Assembly elections is comparatively a cohesive team. The dissidents, ofcourse are those who were denied party tickets in the Assembly Elections. The Congress(I) party had electoral reverses in three by-elections to the State Legislative Assembly from Khurda, Keonjhar, and Kakatpur. In Khurda the Independent candidate Prasanna Kumar Patsani won against the Congress(I) nominee Baidyanath Mishra,¹⁰⁷ Subsequently in the by-election from the Kendrapara Parliamentary Constituency the Congress(I) candidate Basanta Kumar Biswal lost to the Janata party nominee Sarat Kumar Dev, a former leader of the opposition in the Orissa Legislative Assembly and a former Minister by a margin of about 40 thousand votes. This was considered to be a prestigious fight between Biju Patnaik, the leader of the opposition in the State Assembly, whose resignation from the Kendrapara State necessiaed the by-election and J.B. Patnaik, the Chief Minister. The defeat of Biswal was to some extent attributed to the internal sabotage by party colleagues. The allegations were against the supporters of the P.C.C. (I) president Nityananda Misra, who were known to be unhappy with both the Chief Minister and Biswal. There were also some senior Congress leaders who were happy with the electoral debacle of Biswal in the Kendrapara by-election.

The foregoing analysis proves that as in other parts of the country, in Orissa

also it has become a part and parcel of the democratic process. and its concomitant- the party Government. Factional politics acquires a predominant position when a political party comes to power with a slender majority and finds it difficult to maintain the political balance. In the game of power those who are deprived of it organise a dissident group so as to gain greater bargaining power. This process is common to the ruling parties both at the level of the centre as well as the states. Dissidentism or factionalism is not a peculiar phenomenon only of the ruling parties. Even opposition parties are also afflicted by the evils of dissidentism. But factionalism in the ruling party acquires more significance as this adversely affects the Government and may bring it down by ruining its stability. Factionalism at the state level parties may be a reflection of the factional politics of the respective parties at the central level. But the problem acquires a new dimension when it is deliberately promoted and nourished by the High Command of the ruling party at the centre as a counter-voiling force against the unbridled power of the Chief Ministers. Factional politics is symptomatic of democratic politics and will continue to exist as long as democracy exists.

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4. Rai Sahib Jadu Nath Mahapatra, *ORISSA IN 1936-37 to 1938-39*, Government Press, Cuttack, Orissa, 1941. p.1.
5. The districts are Bolangir, Balasore, Phulbani, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Ganjam, Kalahandi, Keonjhar, Koraput, Mayurbhanj, Puri, Sambalpur and Sundargarh.
6. See Paul R. Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State ... The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*, Bombay, 1966. p.56.
7. Harold D. Lasswell, in R.A. Saligman and Alvin Johnson (Eds.) *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Volume VI, Macmillan Company. New York, 1962. p.49.
8. Horst Hartmann, *Political Parties in India*, Menakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1977. p.46
9. Lasswell, op. cit. p.51.
10. J.P. Nettl, *Political Mobilization: A Sociological Analysis of Methods and Concepts*, Faber and Faber Ltd. London, 1967. PP. 319-320.
11. Robert I. Crane, 'Leadership of the Congress Party' in Richard L.Park and Irene Tinker (Eds.) *'Leadership and Political Institutions in India'*, (Princeton N.J. 1959) P. 181.
12. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the only leader who had the Charisma to match with that of Jawaharlal Nehru. Although the two main political actors disagreed on many points, the death of Gandhi made them to work unitedly.
13. Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*, Orient Longman Ltd. New Delhi 1970. p.153 (Footnotes).

14. Rajni Kothari, The Congress "System" in India, *Asian Survey*, Berkeley, December 1964, PP. 1161-73.
15. See: W.H. Morris-Jones, 'Parliament and Dominant Party: Indian Experience, *Parliamentary Affairs*. 1964.
16. Craig Baxter, The Rise and Fall of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal in Uttar Pradesh, in Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field (Eds.) *Electoral Politics in the Indian States, Party Systems and Cleavages*, Volume IV, Manohar Book Service, Delhi, 1975. p. 114.
17. Rajni Kothari, Political Consensus in India: Decline and Reconstruction, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. IV, No. 41 October 11, 1969. P. 1637.
18. Bangla Congress in West Bengal and Jana Congress in Orissa.
19. The faction-ridden states like Punjab, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.
20. Coalition Governments were formed in the state of Punjab, Haryana, U.P., M.P. Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal and Krrala.
21. Rajni Kothari (1970) op. cit. p. 181.
22. Owing to the split in the Congress Party in 1969 the drama of invisible co-alition system took place at the centre as well.
23. Though the Gandhians accepted Gopabandhu Das as their leader they later shifted their loyalty. The differences between the Gandhians and the Swaracists came to surface with the death of Gopabandhu Das, whose charisma united them for the time being. This conflict was manifested in the election to the presidency of the Pradesh Congress Committee with Mohtab defeating Nilakantha Das by one vote.
24. F.G. Bailey, *Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1963. p. 168.
25. Ibid. P. 169.
26. The Gandhian group was led by comparatively young and mostly non-Brahmin leaders like Hare Krishna Mahtab, Naba Krishna Choudhury, Nityananda Kanungo, Jadumani Mangaraj and Raja Kishore Bose.
27. Prominent Swarajists were Nilakantha Das, Godavarish Mishra, Lingaraj Mishra, Krupasindhu Mishra and Acharya Hari Hara Das,
28. The old Ruling Chiefs met in 1903 at Rambha in Ganjam District then under Madras Presidency and decided to put up concerted efforts for amalgamation of Oriya-speaking tracts lying scattered in different provinces. This led to the formation of Utkal Sammilani or Utkal Union Conference.
29. Quoted by P.S.N. Patro in 'Krushna Chandra Gajapati Narayan Deo, The Maharaja of Parlakhemundi, Gyana Prakashini, Berhampur, 1981 p. 84.
30. Shreeram Chandra Dash, *States of Our Union*, ORISSA, Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, September 1970. p. 26.
31. Rai Sahib Jadu Nath Mahapatra, op. cit. p. 10.
32. The other Ministers sworn in on 1 April 1937 along with the Prime Minister were Manadhata Gorachand Patnaik and Mohammed Latifur Rehman.
33. The other Ministers were Nityananda Kanungo and Bodhram Dube. The four Parliamentary Secretaries were Jadumani Mangaraj, Jangannath Mishra, Raja Krishan Bose and Radha Krishna Biswasray, who were appointed to assist the ministers in discharge of their functions.

34. K. Banerjee, *Regional Political Parties in India*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1984. p.52.
35. Under section 93 of the Government of India Act 1935.
36. The other Ministers were Godavarish Mishra and Sobhan Khan.
37. Hartmann, op. cit. p. 1
38. Though Naba Krishna Choudhury remained in Office for a period of Six years i.e. from May 1950 to October 1956, it is to be divided into two periods: First, from May 1950 to December 1951, when the General Elections to the Assembly was held and from March 1952 (When Choudhury formed the new Ministry after the Elections) to October 1956.
39. B.C. Das, 'The Dynamics of Factional Conflict: A Study of the Dimensions of Electoral Conflict in an Assembly Constituency in Orissa, *The Indian Political Science Review*, vol. XI, January 1977, No. 1. p. 60.
40. Manoranjan Mohanty and L.N. Misra, Orissa: Politics of Political Stagnation, in Iqbal Narain (Ed.), *State Politics in India*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1976. p. 260.
41. The Mudholkar and Sarjoo Prasad Commissions against Hare Krishna Mehtab, Khanna Commission of Enquiry against Biju Patnaik, Biren Mitra and other Ministers, and Mitter Commission of Enquiry against R.N. Sing Deo and other Ministers were set up under the commission of Inquiry Act., 1952.
42. Though Mahtab was elected to the Parliament in 1952 he was not included in the Union Cabinet. He was appointed as the Secretary General of the Congress Parliamentary Party.
43. In the 1952 elections the Congress Secured 67 seats followed by Ganatantra Parishad 31, Socialist-10, C.P.I.-7. F.B.(M)-1 and 24 Independents. The Congress Ministry was formed with the help of few Independent M.L.A.'s.
44. Sukadev Nanda, *Coalitional Politics in Orissa*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1979. p. 60.
45. Mahatab was Governer of Bombay for one year (1955-56). While he was in Bombay he made a bid to come back to the State Politics with the help of his young lieutenants.
46. In a House of 140 the Congress secured 56 seats as against 53 seats secured by the Ganatantra Parishad (Regional Party). The C.P.I. secured 9 seats and the P.S.P.-11 seats. 11 Independents were also elected.
47. The earlier arrangement was weak and unstable and the Jharkhand members on whose support the Congress formed the Government became very expensive and the political situation in the State further deteriorated. The Government somehow successfully faced a no-confidence motion but ultimately resigned.
48. Sukadev Nanda op. cit. p. 66.
49. The Ganatantra Parishad came Second with 37 seats followed by 10 from the P.S.P. and 4 from C.P.I. and an Independent candidate was also elected.
50. The Kamraj Plan envisage that the top Congress leaders of the Governmental wing must resign and devote to the organisational work. The plan was mooted by K.Kamraj, the erstwhile Chief Minister of Madras. This proposal was conceived in a different form by Biju Patnaik. Brecher believes that this was the idea of Biju Patnaik. See Michael Brecher, *Succession in India- A Study of Decission Making*, Oxford University Press, London. 1966. p. 16.
51. Mitra got 68 votes as against 15 polled by Pradhan.
52. Biju Patnaik and Biren Mitra were known to be unhappy over the selection of Sadasiva Tripathy to Succeed Mitra as Chief Minister However, Tripathy, the Revenue Minister in the Mitra Cabinet won the leadership fight representing Biju faction defeating P.M. Pradhan, sponsored

by Mahatab group by 66 to 15 votes.

53. Amal Roy, Sub-Regional Politics and Elections in Orissa, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volum X, No. 49, December 7, 1974 P. 2034.

54. B.K. Patnaik, *The Politics of Floor-Crossing in Orissa*, Santosh Publications, Cuttack, 1985. p.109.

55. The party-wise break up in the Assembly after 1967 election was Congress-31, Swatantra-49, Jana-Congress-26. P.S.P. -21, C.P.I. -7, C.P.I. (M)-1, S.S.P.-2 and Others-3.

56. The dissident Mahatab group in the Congress formed the Jana Congress while the erstwhile Ganatantra Parishad merged in the Swatantra Party to have an All- India Character as early as 1962.

57. In Orissa Giri got 67 votes, Deshmukh 46 votes and Reddy 15 votes

58. For details see, Prakash Sarangi, Internal Challenge to the 'Congress System': The case of the Utkal Congress, Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 40, September 1979, No.3 pp. 433 to 452.

59. The immediate cause of dissention was that Mr. Patnaik was denied a party nomination for the Rajya Sabha election in April 1970, despite the support of the Congress M.L.A.s in the State. The C.P.B.approved the candidature of N. Patro. On the otherhand T. Sanganna was sponsored by the P.C.C. in definance of the party directive. Both Patro and Sanganna lost in the election. In this election P.K.Deo of Swatantra, Surajmala Saha of Jana Congress and B.K. Mohanty of Congress (O) won.

60. Earlier Mahatab resigned his primary membership of the Jana Congress of 6 August 1970 and resigned his assembly seat. He became a virulent critic of the coalition he massterminded and pleaded for the dissolution of the Assembly to be followed by fresh election.

61. The party-wise strength in the Assembly after 1971 election was Congress(R)-51, Congress(O) -1, Utkal Congress-33, Swatantra-36, P.S.P.-4,C.P.I.-4, Jarkhand-4, C.P.I.(M)-2, Jana Congress-1 and Independents-4.

62. Biswanath Das was not a member of the Assembly but subsequently got elected from Rourkela Constituency in a by-election in September 1971. Das who did not belong to any party of the coaaliotion was persuaded to lead the front.

63. Satapathy, who was a Union Minister for State for Information and Broadcasting was sent to Orissa to lead the Government. She was subsequently elected to the State Assembly in a by-election in November 1972 from Cuttack city Constituency defeating Biren Mitra.

64. Sukhadev Nanda, op. cit. p. 95.

65. Mahatab was expelled from the Congress(R) in January 1973.

66. Patanik alongwith his close associates were not admitted to the Congress(R). The other five Pratap Chandra Mohanty, Prahallad Mallik, Rama Krishna Patnaik, Sarat Kumar Kar and Brundaban Nayak were Cabinet Minsters in the Biswanath Das Ministry.

67. Patnaik who lost in 1971 mid-term poll in one Lok Sabha constituency and four Assembly Constituencies was subsequently elected to the stae Assembly in a by-election from the Raj nagar Constituency in Cuttack district, vacated by his party colleague.

68. The party-wise strength in the 147- members Assembly after 1974 mid-term poll was Congress- 69, Utkal Congress-35, Jana Congress-1, Swatantra-21, S.P.I. -2, C.P.I.-7, C.P.I.(M)-3, Independents-8. Later the Congess won the Chilka Assembly Seat.

69. Her party men accused her of using emergency measures against the political opponents inside

the party.

70. Satapathy was the Communist before she joined the Indian National Congress in 1962.

71. The Janata Government at the centre decided to dissolve the State legislative Assemblies of those states were the ruling party had lost the mandate of the people.

72. The Lok Sabha was dissolved on January 18, 1977. Originally this could have functioned upto March, 1978 by virtue of one-year's extension granted by passing a bill for extending the term of the Lok Sabha from five years to six years.

73. K.R.Ganesh, a former Union Minister also joined them.

74. The Janata got 14, the C.F.O. 1, the C.P.I(M)-1, the Congress-4, and P.K.Dev won as an Independent with the support of the Congress.

75. Patnaik later joined the Morarji Cabinet at the centre as Minister for Steel, Mines and Coal.

76. Among the prominent Congress candidates who lost the election included J.B. Patnaik, Union Minister of State of Defence from Cuttack and C.P.Majhi, Union Deputy Minister from Mayurbhanj (S.T.) constituency.

77. *Link*, March 27, 1977.

78. *Link*, April 3, 1977.

79. *Link*, April, 10, 1977.

80. Out of 147 seats the Janata Party secured 110, Congress-26, C.P.I.-1, C.P.I.(M)-1 and Independents -9.

81. *Link*, September 11, 1977, p. 21.

82. She was arrested under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

83. *INDIA TODAY*, Octover 1-15, 1977. p.22.

84. Biju Patnaik and Rabi Ray from Orissa were taken as Cabinet Ministers in the Charan Singh Ministry

85. The erstwhile Bharatiya Kranti Dal of 1967 had merged with the Bharatiya Lok Dal in 1974 and then into the Janata Party in 1977.

86. Biju Patnaik lost the Bhanjanagar Lok Sabha seat to the C. P.I. candidate Dutikrishna Panda and the Assembly seat from Bhanjanagar to Somanath Rath, who was the Congress candidate.

87. Prominent Legislators who opposed his inclusion in the Cabinet were Ashok Das, H.N. Mallick, Umesh Swain and Nalini Mohanty.

88. *Link*, November 11, 1979.

89. The Ganjam M.L.A.s demanded that they have got a legitimate claim to get a cabinet rank, while Swain was taken as a Minister of State.

90. *Link*, 18 November, 1979.

91. Ashok Das and some M.L.A.s expressed their strong resentment to the Chief Minister and the party President of the state Janata Unit.

92. Out of 21 seats the Congress(I) secured 19 seats and the Lok Dal won one seat. Later the Keonjhar seat was also secured by the Congress (I) in a by-election.

93. Out of 147 Constituencies elections were held in 146 and the Congress(I) got a record number of 121 seats followed by Janata(S) -11, Janata (J.P.)-3, C.P.I.-4, Congress(U)-2, and Independents-4. Later the Janata (S) and Congress (I) won one seat and two seats respectively in by-elections.

94. He was subsequently elected from Athgarh constituency of Cuttack district in a by-election vacated by Sri Rasananda Sahu.
95. He himself is a member of the Congress Working Committee.
96. Though Patnaik had denied this allegation, this link had been attributed to his close relationship with H.K.Mahatab, who himself had admitted that he was a member of the R.S.S. even while he was a member of the Congress Working Committee in the 1960's. Patnaik was earlier the editor of the Oriya daily Prajatantra Published under the patronage of Mahtab.
97. For details see: Orissa's Corrupt Politicians, *SUNDAY*, An Anand Bazar Publication, 12-18 September 1982, pp.22-25.
98. *SUNDAY*, An Ananda Bazar Publication, 9-15 October 1983, p.53.
99. *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), 7 April 1983, p.7.
100. Rath was a close associate of J.B. Patnaik, who was instrumental in bringing him (Rath) to political limelight first as President of the State Youth Congress, then as President of All India Youth Congress. Rath won in 1977 and 1980 Lok Sabha Elections from Aska constituency of Ganjam District. He was included in the Union Council of Ministers probably to maintain a balance in the factional politics in the State.
101. Lenka was sacked from the Cabinet earlier for his differences with the Chief Minister.
102. *The Telegraph* (Calcutta) 18 December, 1982, p. 5.
103. See, *Sunday*, An Ananda Bazar Publication, 13-19 March 1983. P.54
104. *India To-Day*, (New Delhi), November 30, 1983. P.45.
105. Rath lost to the Congress(I) candidate Somanath Rath, who was a former Minister and Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly in the Parliamentary Election.
106. Coincidentally Smt. Gandhi addressed the last public meeting of her life at the State Capital Bhubaneswar and some of the extracts of her last speech became a source material for election propaganda throughout the country.
107. Patsani, who was a close associate of the Chief Minister resigned from the party and contested as an Independent when he was denied the Congress(I) ticket from Khurda, the seat vacated by the Chief Minister consequent upon his election to the State Legislative Assembly from Khurda and Athagarh constituencies.

EMERGING TRENDS IN STATE POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL

**New Experiment in Alternative strategy for structural
Changes in Society, Economy and Politics**

Of the many problems with which a federal polity like India is confronted, one of the most crucial is: how can the country formulate a national development plan which tries to obtain the maximum advantage from having a large area under one government but which, at the same time, is sufficiently firmly rooted in the diverse regions and areas of the country, taking note of both their potentialities and the needs and aspirations of the people belonging to them?

In other words, like the problem of reconciling economic growth with reduction in inequalities among different classes of citizens, there is also the problem of ensuring a rapid rate of economic growth and, at the same time, preventing an accentuation of inequalities among different regions and States.

In the alternating currents of the political dynamics after the mid-sixties, federal process in India has had a chequered history, corresponding to the ebb and flow and the cross-currents of the political forces in the country. However, the general trend and pattern have been rather clear: while a continuous process of increasing erosion of the federal process in the name of national unity and development-imperatives has been clearly discernible, at the political and constitutional levels, there have been countervailing pressures and demands in favour of decentralization and greater autonomy for the States, and the momentum has increased significantly during the last few years. Experience during the last decade has conclusively demonstrated that a highly centralized leadership and decision-making structure cannot adequately meet the challenges of development, especially in view of the large size of the country, regional-linguistic and cultural diversities, and the magnitude of the problems. In the context of the bewildering variety of local situations and the volatile nature of the political process, there is a slowly emerging awareness, particularly in the Eastern and Southern regions, for a decentralized, regional development process

that will require far greater autonomy in administrative and financial matters than at present. West Bengal, with its unique regional personality and a different level of political culture and a different pattern of leadership and social class structure, has already given the initial lead and the 'push' to the drive for political, administrative and financial decentralization in the present centralized federal set-up in India, and this lead is being more and more appreciated and recognized in other parts of the country. Whatever success has so far been achieved by the new Panchayati Raj experiment in West Bengal during the 1978-86 period will go immensely to consolidate and confirm the growing belief that the planning process towards development can be leavened only by active popular participation at the regional level by utilising the instrumentalities of local self-government and by ensuring the active leadership of the State-level administration. A prominent American scholar has admitted that the West Bengal experiment, if successful, could be a precursor for a new India, a grand design for social transformation, and a path-setting psychological breakthrough that could have far-reaching consequences for the rest of India.¹ This could, in the long run, herald an alternative strategy for structural change. There are signs of durable changes in West Bengal rural areas and countryside through a genuine system of democratic decentralization that has opened up new vista of possibilities for other States.

The basic assumption is that the environment of the Indian political system will permit nothing but decentralization. Political process in India has so substantially changed in its character that any attempt to perpetuate centralization will only accentuate and aggravate systemic crisis and will threaten its stability. Centralization of authority and resources cannot be the answer to India's gigantic problems. Political decentralization is an absolute necessity in India today. Since the constituent States are charged with heavy responsibilities for plan-implementation and development administration at their levels, their willing partnership and autonomous enterprise, rather than a paramount, paternalistic position of the Centre, should be the condition-precedent for such discharge of responsibilities.

Keeping in mind the above facts, the present paper will seek to outline the changing dimensions and the emerging trends in the political process in West Bengal during the last decade in the face of the committed goals of economic development and social change albeit within the structural and ideological constraints of the Indian political system and the reality of the planning process and financial resource-maldistribution.

II

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the subject, it will perhaps be relevant at this stage to make one or two observations on the approach to and the framework of analysis of state politics in contemporary India. Even admitting that "the question of developing a theoretical framework for the study of state politics in the specific Indian context is an intriguing one".² One has to engage in the difficult task of devising a relevant and appropriate tool for analysis, because the need for such study has never been so critically important as at the present moment. It is no use debating whether the systemic framework or the functional school of comparative analysis as employed in the study of American States could be applied in the complex and disparate socio-cultural conditions in India where infrastructural diversities in terms of region, communities, caste and religion, and appalling inequality in respect of the levels of literacy, urbanization, industrialization and economic viability may not yield just one uniform pattern but a multiplicity of patterns of state politics. It is also no use arguing that since the machinery of government at the Centre and in the States is basically identical, the States should be studied as mere constituent units or subsystems within the larger political system of India, not only because diversities of political culture and the level of political mobilization do not simply permit such an archaic notion, but for the more compelling reality that the States do show considerable differences and variations in their internal governmental arrangements, especially at the lower levels of government, district downwards, and that the traditional governmental and administrative structures and processes are in a continuous state of readjustments and readaptations.³ Whether we have adequate data and information for depicting a "full-blooded and life-size portrait of state politics" and for "judicious blending of the historical and legal-institutional methods on the one hand and behavioural and comparative methods on the other",⁴ or even for the comprehensive analytic framework or the 'political aerial survey' suggested by Iqbal Narain or Myron Weiner,⁵ is still a matter of controversy. For the purpose of the present paper, the basic premise has been that the real character of the Indian political system and the nature of its functioning can be clearly revealed only by an indepth analysis of state politics, and that the primary emphasis on state politics cannot be avoided even if one does not intend "to get lost in the *esoteric* details of its constituents"⁶ (italics mine). The present study is further is predicated upon the newly emerging awareness that the analysis of the Indian federal process in terms of just two levels of government, Centre and States, may not adequately-or satisfactorily reflect the sociocultural diversities of the regions and sub-regional

entities, and that it may be necessary "to reorient the federal arrangement towards a more direct relationship with distinctly identifiable socio-cultural areas presenting specific economic problems", and that it might be more advantageous to concentrate on the development and activation of the third level of the federal system, the local or the sub-regional level".⁷ The underlying assumption is that it will revitalise the democratic process by ensuring effective participation and representation of constituent units, strengthen the States themselves, and contribute to national integration in a more meaningful sense.

III

When Sanjiva Reddy, former President of India, chose the scholarly platform of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Memorial Lecture in new Delhi on October 31, 1981, for ventilating his strong feelings in favour of greater autonomy for States and greater decentralization while speaking on 'Integration of India', it was, indeed, curiously symbolic of this rather bewildering process, for, as he himself said, a reaction to the demand for greater autonomy sometimes produced the contrary emphasis on the need for a strong Centre. The reverse, in our opinion, is also true. The States, Reddy pointed out, "have increasingly become dissatisfied with their positions in the Indian federal system"; because they felt that the responsibility cast on them by the Constitution for social services and agricultural development was not matched by corresponding allocation of financial resources. Yet the political and administrative authorities at the State level were better informed and would react and respond more readily and more effectively to a situation than the remotely situated Central authority which could not claim a different or more efficient machinery than what was available to the States. While experience dictated that a central authority "cannot claim greater competence, wisdom and objectivity, or greater immunity from extraneous influence", prudence required that the demand for greater autonomy should not be neglected on the time-worn plea that it was a threat to the country's integrity.⁸ In a similar vein, Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal, while responding to a journalist's questions in a press interview, asserted that the unity of the country could be strengthened only by sharing of power between the Centre and the States, and that a strong Centre was only possible when the States were strong and viable. This, in his opinion, called for a change in the existing power-balance between the Centre and the States.⁹ It may be recalled that Basu had earlier, in a meeting of the National Development Council in New Delhi, on March 14, 1982, lashed out at the Centre for its by-passing the Council in respect of the I.M.F. loan, and had said that the decisionmaking process in the country

was in jeopardy.¹⁰

The experience of the Government of West Bengal comes as a convenient example. While the first Left Front government (1977-82) had experienced a bitter confrontation with the Centre over various issues, the present Government, in its second term after the election of 1982, has been gradually reconciling itself to the fact that it has to adjust to the overall policy framework of the Centre as long as the existing federal structure under the Constitution remained unchanged. That pragmatism and the reality of the given situation, rather than rigid and doctrinaire ideological considerations which demand an overhaul of the social-class structure, should govern the policy of the State Government, was borne out by two conflict-situations : one relating to the overdrafts issue, and the other concerning the size of the the allocations for West Bengal's Plan for that year(1982). The restrictions imposed by the Reserve Bank of India on such overdrafts in future had doubtless put West Bengal in a very difficult situation with regard to resource-mobilization for the development plan. The West Bengal Government argued that with the present structure of the Centre-State finances and with the expanding role of the State governments in social development expenditure, overdrafts were rather unavoidable. It also claimed parity of treatment with the Central Government in this matter because the latter can freely incur such debts which the Reserve Bank would finance. The eminent economist, Bhabatosh Dutta, conceded that the strain on West Bengal's economy would be severe, and asserted that "inflationary forces have emerged in India more from Central deficits than from the net total deficits of the States",¹¹ The wrangling took a serious turn and might have degenerated into an open confrontation had the late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, not intervened with a grant of additional funds. Lately, the Centre's reluctance to sanction the West Bengal Government's case for opening of new industries in Haldia and other places has forced the Left government to shun its ideological stance and approach private industrialists for the opening of these industries, which has been readily responded to. The whole episode exposes the near-crisis situation that might further jeopardise the delicately poised federal process.

IV

Parliamentary democracy, predominantly on the British model, was adopted in India not so much for the familiarity of the western educated elites who played the most visible role in articulating the goals of the national movement, but seemed to serve the interests of the dominant classes of big business and educated elite who dominated the Congress party to whom power was trans-

ferred more by way of negotiated compromise settlement than through genuinely revolutionary liberation struggle. Together with a highly centralized federal structure that at least constitutionally provided for a diffusion of governmental power in the notable fields of agriculture, education and health in order to serve the interests of the dominant agrarian classes at the state and regional level, it provided the institutional framework for India's development effort. Broadly speaking, although there was no decisive classrule in India, the federal and bourgeois parliamentary democratic structure that characterised the Indian political system upto the 1970's, enable the national government to excercise strong rule on behalf of the alliance of the dominant classes.

Political democracy in India was desired and adopted as the principal means for carrying out or ushering in social and economic revolution. But it is sad to note that political revolution - if we may use the word 'revolution' - that was climaxed by the achievement of independence, territorial integration, adoption of a democratic constitution with basis guarantees of civil liberties, universal suffrage and an unbroken electoral experience, has not been followed by a genuine social and economic revolution that was promised by the leadership. The social and economic goals have remained a mirage even to this day. Results of planning did not come up to expectations. Wherever development in the field of industry was achieved was not evenly distributed. While the development plans benefitted the bureaucratic, professional and the entrepreneurial class, the overwhelming majority of poor farmers and landless peasants in the rural areas was left untouched. Economic inequality increased rather than decreased, despite the decade of development and the Green Revolution.¹² In the selectively modified capitalist strategy of development, the programmes with significant redistributive potential, like land redistribution, public employment projects, progressive taxation measures, efforts to curb the growth of large business empires were either lacking or not pushed through vigorously.¹³ As the Draft five Year Plan (1978-83) had admitted, "We must face the fact that the most important objectives of planning have not been achieved, the most cherished goals seem to be almost as distant today as when we set out on the road to planned development".¹⁴

It has now been realized that the burden of plan implementation on the state governments-wise be greatly increased and that the most radical restructuring would be needed in the fields of agriculture and rural development administration. This also required a much greater level of organization and public co-operation. In India, the three tier Panchayati Raj institutions were expected to create a congenial psychological climate and filed for the growth of par-

ticipatory democracy and community feeling in the lowest area of planning and development. As an improvement in the process of economic development, the utilization of local resources and manpower through local institutions for the execution of plans was visualised. As a part of the process of democratic decentralization, they were meant to awaken the people's consciousness and afford new springs of inspiration and support for the development activites. The critical question was whether economic planning on a national scale was compatible with local autonomy. This dilemma was sought to be resolved by associating the Panchayati Raj bodies with the process plan formulation, so that the local demands could be devetailed into the national plans and the state and national plans might be based on local resources and requirements. However, while plan formulation at local levels did ensure great plan perspective, it raised tremendous problems of coordination at the numerous village, block and district levels. Economic planning is basically a centralized process and the concept of undertaking economic plan and its execution through panchayati Raj bodies at the village, block and district levels, democratically elected, has tremendous appeal as an administrative and political innovation seeking to combine rapid economic development with a strong democratic foundation at the base for a democratic superstructure of a parliamentary democracy at the top.

It is an unfortunate commentary on the Indian federal system that as a consequence of the interplay of politics, planning and finance, the federal structure and the federal process have never really operated, and central dominance over the states in decision-making and policy formulation has been the most conspicuous factor in inter-governmental relations upto this date.¹⁵ The balance of power in the Indian federal framework has all along been positively and manifestly tilted in favour of the 'Union' rather than the 'units' and the constitution itself, as originally enacted, contains enough built-in mechanism for centralization to vitiate and destroy the autonomy of the states even in normal times. Several formidable extra-constitutional Socio-political forces have supplemented and strengthened this process of concentration of power authority at the centre.¹⁶ Since the basic character of the Indian society and economy had not changed and the entrenched position of the dominant classes had shown no signs of abatement or decline, it was perhaps logical to assume that the federal process would not genuinely work in response to some superficial changes in the superstructure. The result has been very disastrous for the all round development of the political system and for the intended congruence of growth and equality that is the core of the Indian problem.

V

In the current debate over decentralization and development, the West Bengal scenario in contemporary India presents a great opportunity and a challenge for the government and the people. This culturally rich and politically mature but unstable constituent state of the Indian Union has long suffered the callous negligence and agonising discrimination in the hands of the national leadership and the state bureaucracy, and could never tide over the traumatic effects of partition in 1947 with its concomitant holocaust of communal riots. Its economy was in total shambles and could not cope with the challenges of overpopulation, underdevelopment, educated unemployment and refugee resettlement and rehabilitation. But this could not dampen or defuse its politics: and in consequence of its colonial history and post-independence experience, West Bengal has always been a critical factor in the processes of political mobilisation, social change, economic recovery and cultural regeneration of the country and its people. The Congress party, which had controlled the government of West Bengal from 1952 to 1967 and again from 1971 to 1977 by virtue of its alliance with big business and the wealthy rural elite, and which was always dominated and controlled by the central leadership in the party, could not bring about rapid social and economic change in the state. Two brief interludes of governance by coalitions of left parties, in 1967 and 1969, not only demonstrated the contrasting styles of management of public affairs, but prepared the foundation for a massive comeback for the more homogenous Left Front, in the historic elections of 1977 when India witnessed a veritable ballot box revolution in resolving the democracy dictatorship debate. The reformation of the democratic process made its impact felt the most on the growing movement for decentralization in the highly centralized political system in India, and at a time when the Panchayati Raj institutions had been reeling under the pressure of central control, inadequate resources, elite domination and total isolation from the people, the Asoka Mehta Committee was appointed by the ruling Janata party in 1978 to learn from past experience and sketch new perspectives for structural reform in the pattern of grass roots democracy in the country.

But even before the Mehta Committee could finalise and bring out its report, the Left Front Government of West Bengal announced its dramatic new policy and commitment to receive the old moribund Panchayati Raj institutions for the purpose of mobilising majorities of cultivators in the village to effect peaceful changes in land-holding relationships and agrarian reform. In the first ever party based Panchayati elections in India, in June 1978, the Left Front swept the polls. About 25 millions of eligible rural voters elected about 56,000

Panchayat functionaries in 30,000 rural constituencies became the focal point of rural development, with a super mix of regulatory municipal administrative development functions. The second Panchayat elections, held on May 31, 1983, have consolidated the process and have established beyond doubt that the Panchayats have come to stay in West Bengal in the structural functional design in which they have worked so far. The Left front once again swept the polls, although with a reduced majority, and the Congress(I) emerged as a strong opposition in a somewhat polarised electoral battle. The coming years may witness a more vigorous, more alert and responsible, and positively more effective Panchayat administration in West Bengal. The West Bengal Panchayat Minister has already hinted at further structural and procedural modifications in the existing laws and rules to make these new Panchayat institutions more effective, and to ensure greater functional devolution and financial self-sufficiency.

Before the Panchayat elections of 1978, the leadership role in comprehensive and integrated rural development in West Bengal had belonged to the statutory organization, CADC (Comprehensive Area Development Corporation) which was supposed to be the major focus of developmental activities. But, with the shift in the public policy and the emergence of Panchayat as the people's organization, the role of CADC became secondary and supplementary or complementary without being in the least insignificant. As rural Bengal, like the rest of rural India, is unorganized and undermanaged, the CADC had contributed in a large measure to overcoming the big organizational gap and to make planning really effective with the experts available to it for the better utilization of resources, both human and material. The CADC is now expected to project itself as a model for rural development, operating in a few selected areas,²¹ project areas to be more specific, with its experts drawn from different disciplines, to implement comprehensive area development programmes with the assistance of the Panchayat institutions. The assumption is that the newly emerged and enthused Panchayat leadership, young, dedicated and drawn from the rural people and their families, with their intimate knowledge of the area and its problems, and of the software technology of the CADC personnel, would make the process of rural development faster and more productive. In the new revitalized programme, land reforms have gained ascendancy over the erstwhile predominance of technology. The old cost-benefit analysis of economic evaluation has been abandoned and the importance of the human component in the development programmes underlined. Emphasis is now placed on the basic minimum needs food, shelter, health, education and work for poorest of the poor.

While the West Bengal government claims that the Panchayat system has already taken deep roots in the State, complaints of rank partisanship levelled by opposition parties have given way to sober appreciation of the hard and efficient work put in by the Panchayats under the close surveillance of the awakened and politicised rural poor. Even the foreign based relief organizations are now praising the role of the Panchayats in organizing and conducting relief and reconstruction programmes. By their creditable handling of three successive natural disasters in West Bengal, namely, the devastating flood in ten districts in Sept-Oct 1978, followed by a severe draught in 1979, and another flood in August 1980, the Panchayats earned unstinted praise and appreciation from all quarters.

The main directions of West Bengal governments policy and working in the field of Panchayats have been three fold namely, (a) acceleration of organizational development, (b) development of human resources in all aspects, and (c) effective implementation of various rural development programmes by three tier of Panchayat bodies. The area of activities of these three tier could be broadly classified into several categories: but the one area of operation and activity that has virtually revolutionised the entire Panchayat experiment in West Bengal and promised far reaching changes in the socio-economic base and the class structure of rural Bengal, relates to basic institutional reform in land-relation through distribution of vested lands to the landless agricultural workers, and recording and registration of share-croppers and allottees of vested land, popularly known as 'Operation Barga.' This Grand Strategy was intended to "mobilise majorities of cultivators in villages to effect peaceful change in landholding relationship", and was seen as a realistic opportunity for "bringing about genuine reform of local governments in West Bengal.¹⁷ Land reform has infused a new dynamism in the West Bengal villages, and even critics of self front government admit that it has "succeeded in creating an awarness among the rural poor of what is rightfully due to them", and that "this by itself represents a remarkable achievement towards altering the power structure in the countryside".¹⁸ However, at this point, it is pertinent to point out that while the objectives of decentralization and democratization have been largely realised, much remains to be done in respect of the crucial goals of self reliance and social transformation. In the present context the constraint, in the resource capacity of the state and the continuing class character of the Indian society, these are difficult tasks, and the slightest signs of complacency and self satisfaction will prove suicidal. Much of the earlier euphoria has undoubtedly been on the wane, but there are unmistakable signs that old agrarian relations are breaking up and the face of rural Bengal is changing.¹⁹

A new dimension to democratic decentralization has recently been added by the West Bengal government through the application of grassroots planning. The government has drawn up a detailed, and *prima facie* attractive scheme for district development with popular participation ensured by making Zila Parishad and Panchayat chiefs Chairman of district and block level planning committees. The annual need for the districts would decide the physical targets and the financial resources, and the State Planning Board would ensure that financial and material balance was maintained in formulating the plans. It operated successfully and kept above partisan political considerations, this concept can make economic planning more meaningful to the average citizen. Said to be the first of its kind in the country, the scheme is meant to decentralize the planning process as well as to coordinate the activities of various government departments and the Panchayats, and thereby to have far reaching consequences for the rural economy.

Democratic decentralization and participatory democracy were further given a shot in the arm by holding the election to the Culcutta Corporation in 1985, in which the Left Front obtained the majority with Congress (I) coming a close second and emerging as a formidable opposition.

VI

The impact of these socio-economic changes during the last one decade on the political process of West Bengal is now clearly felt. There is now a distinct polarisation of political forces in the state, with the CPI(M) as the leader of the Left Front, and the Congress (I) representing the two poles sharply distinguished by ideology. The Left Front, and for that matter, the Marxists, have become impregnably entrenched in both the rural and the urban areas, so that one can safely forecast a long spell of left rule in this state. For the Congress(I), surely handicapped by organizational bankruptcy and interminable factional conflicts, sometimes violent, it is now a herculean task to wrest political power from the Marxists, and in a desperate bid to win back the sympathy and support of the electorate, especially the urban voters, it is even trying to make common cause with the left in an effort to secure more Central assistance for the development of the neglected state. It is sometimes trying to talk in the language and idiom of the left, but this cannot deceive the conscious and articulate electorate which is far too mature and well informed to be swayed by political gimmicks. On its part, the Left Front, at least during its second spell of governance, has tried to learn from past mistakes, and has displayed a commendable sense of realism and pragmatism in the task of reconstruction of the economy of West Bengal.

This has sometimes caused acute resentment among the activist cadre which bears far more radical line of action. But one cannot fault the left front, especially the CPI(M) on this score. It is only by a long period of political consolidation that the left front can hope to create any reasonable impact on the left democratic forces in other parts of India. But as far as the present position is concerned, no one can question the claim of the left front government that they have stood by and strengthened secularism, national integrity, peace, democracy and socialism. Casteism, communalism and parochialism have the least impact on the political process.

A recent West Bengal government publication made the following assertion: "Left movement in West Bengal has now come to maturity ... On its success will depend the success of an anti feudal and anti imperialist revolution through which India is passing. Revolutions have taken different forms in different countries. In India, the struggle for peace and socialism is taking an indigenus form. Perhaps West Bengal is starting point."²⁰ Whether or not one agrees with this assertion, it cannot be denied that state politics in West Bengal has assumed a left orientation. The lesson is very clear. Like the Swiss Cantons and the Soviet Republics, but unlike the American states, the states in India are historical entities, keeping in mind their linguistic and cultural diversities. the reality

that despite the built-in and externally augmented centralization, regional disparity has only been heightened in respect of urbanization, industrialization, economic development and educational attainments. It is not only the left parties, as well as a cross section of the masses of people, which believe that a broad autonomy will conform to the democratic development of the country and of its constituent units, and that a much stronger political and economic basis for this autonomy should be provided in the shape of a redistribution of power, spheres of competence and functions a greater share of revenues and the right to a more independent economic policy in conformity to their local needs, situations, infrastructural limitations and capabilities. There are clear signs of a growing regional strength converging in a new kind of federal process tilted in favour of the states and wider dispersion of power among the regions and local authorities need not imply a weak centre or political fragmentation. Autonomy could generate greater consciousness and initiative and responsibility for a competitive and cooperative functioning of the system as a whole. If at all the evils of uneven capitalist development are to be overcome, the initiative has to be taken by the villages and then passed on to towns and cities and the consciousness of the toiling masses has to be aroused. Dispersal of power centres is the needed counterdole to the overcentralization of political and economic power necessitated by capitalist development in industry

and agriculture during the last three decades.²¹

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B. Mukherjee

THE EIGHT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN WESTBENGAL

A swing towards Right

Electoral behaviour in any political system identifies the nature of the political culture underlying the system. It is because in a modern democracy, election - mechanism is the only legitimate device to aggregate popular preferences of the society organised politically, so as to lend a cloak of legitimacy to the formal decision makers that knit up the political powerstructure based upon maximum consensus with minimal sacrifice of individual choice. Since articulated popular preferences largely reveal the political understanding, political mood and political belief-pattern of the demos, electoral politics and voting behaviour may very well be taken as the indicator of the political ethos prevalent in the current political arrangement. This is what is our experience in West Bengal during the last parliamentary Elections. That the state of west Bengal is "the Left Fortress" in this subcontinent is the scholarly opinion¹ and that the Left Front is the dominating force in state politics with the CPI(M) as the pivot at least since 1977 is also a stable political reality. But despite such theoretical as well as practical contention, the poll results of the 1984 Parliamentary Elections mirrored a tilt of the political mood of the state to the opposite direction - a tilt though not ruinous but alarming for the Left Front. This was the spectacular improvement in the poll results on the part of the Congress(I). An obvious question may arise, what are the specific variables that brought forth a rightist swing within a left-bent political framework ? This paper is an humble attempt to find out an answer to such a riddle.

Electoral profile upto 1984 :

History tells us that West Bengal inherited a left-tradition from pre-Independence Bengal when as early as 1920's the middle class intellectuals in the main in Calcutta played the leading role in the formation of the Communist Party of India along with Bombay, Lahore and Madras (all were independent of each other).² This radical bent of Bengali political culture may be traced back in the legacy of the Bengal Renaissance that ushered in an era of unrestrained

intellectual outlook in the Bengali social ethos for the emancipation of human soul from the shackles of the worn-out ideas and exploitation created by man over man which in turn injected a spirit of revolt, ever-questioning, non-compromising and protesting attitude to the political thought process of the sons of the soil. That is why Bengal witnessed a number of sporadic outbursts of revolutionary nature against sectional exploitation since the battle of plassey³ and the essence of Bengal's freedom movement took to the opposite cult of "saintly idiom" of Gandhite politics in the form of extremism⁴ which in due course was crystallized into "militant nationalism".

Despite such militant background since Independence upto 1966 the newly created state West Bengal was under, to borrow Rajni Kothari's language, "one-party dominant system" as was in the rest of India, the one-party being the Congress and left parties were just "veto groups" having no political strength to offer a viable electoral challenge to the Congress.

The left-bent culture of West Bengal politics became visible during the Fourth General Elections 1967, when after one and a half decade of electoral involvement, the left-parties came to legitimate state-power by bringing to an end to the mono-dominance of the Congress Party.⁵ In the Parliamentary poll of the year also the reflection of the changed political mood of the state revealed through the Assembly Election was felt as the left-strength in the Parliament from the state became almost equal to that of the Congress.⁶ It is this year- 1967 that "ushered in a period of a steep downhill journey for the Congress Party in West Bengal till 1982".⁷

The uninterrupted Left-Front domination in State politics with a combination of more ideologically congenial front partners⁸ under the leadership of radical Communist Party- the CPI(M) had a spectacular head-starting in 1977 when in the Assembly poll the Left Front secured 46% of the popular votes with 230 seats in the 294-member Assembly, the CPI (M) itself won 178 seats with 35.91% of the valid votes. The Congress had to remain content with only 20 seats (23.4% of votes) and the Janata was with 29 seats. This overwhelming electoral victory of the Left Front in the 1977 elections served as a powerful cementing factor of the Left politics in the state and absolute majority of the CPI(M) brought to the party enough leverage that settled down its captaincy in the Front for the future years. Without entering into the analysis of the factors that contributed to this tremendous electoral success of the Left Front (as these will be discussed later), this much may be said that the onward electoral journey of the Left Front has maintained its pace in 1982 Assembly poll also when its prize was 238 seats out of total 294 and 52.6% of the popular votes.

In the Lok Sabha hustings also, in 1977 the Janata-CFD-LF coalition captured 39 seats including 2 independents supported by the LF out of a total 42 while Congress had to remain satisfied with only 3 seats (29.37% of popular votes) and its election ally CPI contesting in 8 seats drew a complete blank. 1980 Lok Sabha Elections however, improved congress's position somewhat by securing 36.5% of the popular votes, but the number of seats gained was only 4. The Left Front on the other hand bagged the rest of the seats drawing over 52% of the valid votes. It was really interesting to notice that the Janata that had swept the whole of India in 1977 Parliamentary poll and secured 20.55% of votes with 11 seats from this state, slumped to were 5% in 1980 Lok Sabha hustings with no seat at all.

All these data create an impression that the Left Front is now a formidable unresistable political force in West Bengal. But the results of the 1984 Parliamentary Elections as analysed below make one think twice to arrive at such a conclusion.

II

Analysis of the 1984 poll Results:

Before probing into the actual analysis of election results one point deserves attention, that is advance acceptance of congress (I) victory at the centre by the Communist Parties. They understood that the United Opposition strategy would turn into a mess and there was not even a farfetched chance of alternative government by the opposition Alliance at the centre. If at all they succeed, it would be transitory as they had neither any credible alternative programme nor a credible leadership. For themselves it was impossible to from the government at the centre even if all candidates fielded by them would return. So what was expedient was to safeguard their existing political influence and that would be possible if they accept the Congress(I) government at the centre and not the Opposition Alliance. That is why even before election the CPI and CPI(M) both pragmatically adopted steps to redefine their equation with the Congress(I) government at the centre and opted out of any joint opposition effort immediately after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination. Although this decision was centrally adopted, its impact was most for West Bengal since it was the Communists' stronghold. Such advance acceptance of unpreventable victory of the Congress(I) was also expressed in the Left Front manifesto. This was really unique in the electoral scene of 1984 India.

Let us now turn to the results of 1984 elections. In this poll, there was a

record voter-turn out in this state since our Independence. The poll percentage was 78, while in 1977 it was 58.44 and in 1980 it rose to 70.66 (in Lok Sabha elections). In 1982 Assembly Elections the percentage rose to 77. These indicate a steady rise in the people's participation in the electoral process.

Table-1 shows that there was a clear polarization between Congress(I) and the Left Front. Although altogether 248 candidates including 9 women contested in the 1984 fray of which the congress(I) and the Left Front contested in all 42 seats, Muslim League fought in 12, Bharatiya Janata Party in 9 the SUC in 8, Congress(s) in 3, one each from Janata and DMKP with 130 independent candidates, virtually all candidates other than those put by the Congress(I) and the Left Front staged a dismal performance most of them even failing to save their deposits. While in 1980 the Congress(I) and the Front together secured 90% of the total valid votes, the percentage has gone over 97 in 1984.

When in the whole country the results of 1984 polls revealed almost a sweeping majority for the Congress(I), the State of West Bengal did not follow the all-India electoral pattern. In this state of highly polarized politics, Left Front still retained the majority of seats by securing 26 of the total 42 seats, while the Congress(I) secured 16. The break-up of the 42 seats with percentage of popular votes is given in Table 3. If we compare Table 1 and Table 3, the poor performance of the LF inspite of its majority of seats is crystal clear. While in 1977 the Left Front (along with Janata and CFD) bagged 39 seats and 38 in 1980 fighting alone, the number has been curtailed by 12. The 12 extra seats which the Congress(I) managed to gain in 1984 over its 1980 achievements totalling to 16 - a fourfold increase, are largely at the cost of the CPI (M) the giant partner of the Front. The CPI(M) has to concede 10 sitting seats, Forward Block and RSP one each. With this the CPI(M)'s total tally in West Bengal comes to 18 against 28 in 1980, the RSP's tally is 3 compared to 4 and Forward Block's is 2 against 3 in the Seventh Lok Sabha Elections. Only the CPI has retained all its 3 seats.

TABLE -I Parliamentary Elections in West Bengal(Since 1977) Total Seats-42

Party	1977			1980			1984		
	Seats	% of votes	% of seats	Seats	% of Votes	% of seats	Seats	% of Votes	% of Seats
Left Front	39*	54.10	92.85	38	53.3	80.90	26	48.43	61.89
Congress(I)	3**	29.37	7.14	4	36.6	9.52	16	48.16	38.09

* Janata -CFD - LF coalition including two independent candidates supported

by LF.

** Congress- CPI Alliance. Congress contested for 34 seats while CPI contested for 8.

TABLE - 2 *Assembly Elections in West Bengal (since 1977) Total Seats - 294.*

Party	1977			1982		
	Seats Won	% of Votes	% of seats	Seats Won	% of Votes	% of Seats
Left Front	230	45.28	78.23	238	52.6	80.95
Congress (I)	20	23.20	6.80	49	35.67	16.66

Percentages cannot be added upto 100 as we have left out independents and parties other than the Congress (I) and Left Front Constituents.

TABLE - 3 *Break-up of the poll-results of the 1984 Parliamentary Elections from the State of West Bengal. Total Seats - 42.*

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Votes	% of seats
Congress(I)	42	16	48.16	38.09
CPI(M)	31	18	37.30	42.85
CPI	3	3	3.93	7.14
Forward Block	4	2	4.00	4.76
Revolutionary Socialist Party	4	3	3.20	7.14

Not only in terms of number of seats, that the Front has been badly mauled by the Congress (I) is also revealed from pitifully small margins of LF victories and large margins of their defeat. As a result the share of the Congress(I) in the total popular votes has increased considerably. LF has bagged 1,22,96,816 votes i.e. 48.43% of the total votes cast, while the Congress(I) has obtained 1,22,27,863 votes i.e. 48.16%. That is to say Congress (I) has trailed the LF only by a mere 0.27% and has improved its percentage in valid votes by 11.66% over its 1980 achievements. In the 1980 elections, the Front secured a total of over 11 millions votes compared to 7.5 million votes of the Congress(I). In terms of total number of votes, Congress(I) 's votes have been increased by 32 lakhs, while Front's votes have increased by 5 lakhs only but its percentage share has reduced by more than 4%.

If we consider the performance of individual constituents of the LF, it is evident that the CPI(M) which had obtained 39.91% of popular votes in 1980, secured 37.3% of the votes in 1984; the Forward Bloc polled 4% as against 4.56% in the 1980. RSP recorded a poll of 3.2% as against 5.24% in the previous elections.

If we analyse majority votes since 1980, shrinking of Front's support is revealed. In 1980, 33 of their candidates secured clear majority (50% or more); in 1982 (if Assembly results are aggregated into Parliamentary constituencies) it declined to 25; in 1984, it has shrunken to 16. For the first time since 1980, in 1984 the Front polled below 40% in two seats (Calcutta North West and North East). For Congress (I) while in 1980 only one candidate received majority, in 1984 the figure is 12. In 1982 it polled over 40% in only 27 seats, in 1984 the figure is 41.

In terms of percentage of seats won in the Lok Sabha elections, table 1 shows a steep decline from 92.85% in 1977 and 80.90% in 1980 to 61.89% in 1984.

The above discussion surely indicates a clear trend of recovery on the part of the Congress(I) and it can hardly be accepted as a chance phenomenon. To an unbiased observer such trend would be evident since 1978 Panchayat elections, 1980 Lok Sabha pools, Assembly elections of 1982 and by elections to the Assembly and 1983 Panchayat elections.

In the 1978 Panchayat elections, the Congress(I)'s performance was dismal as it could win only 4536 gram panchayat seats, 623 panchayat samiti seats, and only 22 zilla parishad seats. In 1983 its strength increased more than threefold in the gram panchayats(14, 461) and the Panchayat samities (2163) and more than fivefold in the Zilla Parishad(119). In terms of percentage, in 1983 the Congress (I)'s share was 31.75 compared with its tally of 9.27% in 1978, while the Left Front's share in 1983 slashed down to 61.13% from 69.87% in 1978. Of the extra 22.48% votes in 1983 that Congress(I) gained, 13.59% were obtained from non-left parties and independents while 8.89% were snatched away from LF.8 Thus Panchayat Elections of 1983 revealed that the Congress(I) captured not only entire non-left vote but also a portion of left vote.

This swing to the Congress (I) is also evident from Assembly voting. Between 1977 and 1980, the Congress(I) remained almost moribund. But during that period the non-left vote in the state was considerable. In 1977 Lok Sabha Poll, the Congress secured 29% and the Janata 21% of the votes polled. In the Assembly election of that year, congress secured 23% and Janata 20%. These two parties claimed almost the whole of the non-left vote in the state. In 1980

Parliamentary voting, the Janata party being faded away from the West Bengal electoral scene, the newly formed Congress(I) although could not capture the entire non-left vote, but polled creditable 36% votes. In 1984 elections, as this party has secured over 48% votes equalling the Party's best ever performance in 1957 (here again 1972 results are not taken into consideration because of reasons stated in Reference No.7), it may be said that the Party has won the entire non-left vote in this state. In 1982 Assembly elections, the Congress(I) improved its strength from a paltry 20 in the previous Assembly election to 49. Despite of LF's victory, its percentage in total valid votes came down to 52.6% from 53.3% in 1980. In 1984 Poll as Front's share has dropped to 48%, it appears that Congress(I) have won over not only the entire non-left but seems to have captured a small part of the left vote as well.

In the two by-elections also the same picture is revealed. At Belgachia West Constituency the Congress (I) obtained 51.6% corresponding to 47.6% votes bagged by the CPI(M), the margin increased by 3.5% in favour of the Congress (I). In Shibpur by-election, LF retained the seat but at the cost of slashing down the margin by 17,500 votes.

Thus the Panchayat elections, Assembly elections and by-elections since 1978 demonstrate the remarkable staying power of the Congress(I). Since inception, despite their ad-hoc organization, lack of democratic structure or mass base, chronic factionalism, absence of credible leadership and being opposed by well-knit disciplined organization with articulate leadership, convincing ideology, devoted cadre and above all command over power-machine for a long-term, that they could throw a formidable challenge to the Left block in 1984 elections is a reality which fingerpoints that there is some realizable change in the left-bent political scale of the state. Their success in making inroads in the impregnable fortress of the left can be attributed both to positive and negative factors.

III

Negative Factors: Erosion of support base of the Left Front :

Many important left leaders and political observers are reluctant to accept the contention of the erosion of their support base. But it is a reality and multidimensional.

For electoral success in West Bengal since mid-60s the left parties should be indebted to Congress itself to a great extent. Actually Congress's style of functioning as an organization without ideology centering round some in-

dividual leaders who could command anything but respect and spontaneous support (Dr.B.C. Ray was the solitary exception) prevented it from becoming a mass-base organization and articulating masses into different social segments to create a "flow-effect" of their sectional demands on the system's decision-making process. This alienated the party from the average electorate. With this was coupled their failure in the government to tackle the grave economic recession that West Bengal had to face in the mid-60s both in the food front as well as the labour front. Congress's operationalism gave birth to "dada" politics that is centering round some local notables who had the potentiality to distribute spoils. Thus the Congress created a very poor profile of itself as corrupt, indifferent to masses, "lacking in integrity, weak, incompetent, indecisive and lacking in education".⁹ The left parties exploited this popular reaction and by organisedly working through "mediated mechanisms" like trade unions, peasant organizations, student unions, professional organisation, mahila samity and others created a potential support-base particularly among rural poor, industrial workers, students and urban middle class (this class of course was their ally from the very beginning). This helped them to capture power since 1977. But the different election results since 1978 as discussed above and particularly those of 1984 betray their declining influence even among their natural allies.

Setback in the Rural sector :

The Front even before its formal accession to power had consciously made in-roads in the traditional power-base of the Congress in the rural areas. After its being in power, by adopting measures like operation Barga, stipulation of a minimum wage for farm labourers, redistribution of land programmes like "food for work" etc. the Front really meant to disrupt social and economic dependence of the rural poor over the local affluent and influential class. This enabled the Front to secure high Percentage of rural votes than the Congress(I) from all rural constituencies in 1980 except Malda when Front's rural percentage of votes was 52.98 corresponding to 37.17 of the Congress. In 1982 Assembly elections the rural average for the LF came down to 50.8% while that of the Congress (I) rose to 42.46%. In 1984 Lok Sabha poll, LF's electoral strength had declined in almost all rural constituencies (except Bolpur) varying from 0.52% (Jhargram) to 10.27% (Uluberia) thereby total rural average has been slashed down for the LF to 49.69%. While the Congress(I) has improved its position over that in 1982 by 3.62%. That there was a swing in rural vote which was vaguely persaged in the last Panchayat elections is evident particularly from the electoral results of mathurapur and Contai constituencies which are predominantly rural and held by left earlier. In both seats, the Congress(I) has returned this time. Even in the

rural seats where the Congress (I) lost, increase in Congress(I) vote is phenomenal. Tamluk, for example, where the Congress(I) fielded a "weak candidate". CPI (M)'s vote rose only by about 6000.

The reasons for the electoral set back of the LF in the rural areas are to be traced largely in the people's reaction against operation Barga and Panchayati administration. Operation Barga initially had been hailed because its purpose was to confer legal rights to landless peasants and share croppers. But soon it gave birth to manifold problems. Multiple recording is one such problem under which the same plot under cultivation of genuine record holder was registered in the name of two or more persons. The problem was more acute in the double-cropped areas where landlords usually employ different sharecroppers for the two crops in the same plot. In many cases, peasants complained that the lands where they worked as share croppers for generations had been taken away and given to others mainly in partisan spirit.¹⁰ All these increased in fighting among the poor peasants, led to further fragmentation of lands and worsened the condition of the rural poor. In many case persons who had been sharecroppers turned into agricultural labour to work on the same plot.

Loss of confidence in the LF in the rural sector may partly be attributed to the maladministration, corruption, misappropriation of public money by the Panchayat Pradhans, partisanship and sectarianism in providing relief jobs and indifference to the local people by the panchayats, The FB (M) Minister Ram Chattarjee at Chandernagore Party Conference pointed out, "Many of the functionaries at the panchayat level turned into high brows. Some Panchayats were bereft of good and honest workers with the result that a section of the rural people were not well disposed towards them. Our attitude has not been Communist-like".¹¹

The bulk of the small and middle peasantry were antagonised to the LF because of local LF cadres who gave a mandate that if anyone would be found to retain more than one acre of land, the excess land would be seized and distributed among the landless and sharecroppers. This impelled many small and middle peasants to sell their lands to local traders and shopkeepers. On the other hand, it was alleged that the LF made conscious efforts not to alienate the rich farmers or jotedars. The State Government's refusal to collect levy rice from big growers is one such pointer.¹²

Along with these, there were arrogance, highhandedness and excesses of the local rural cadres which in many cases took to the form of imposition of undue punitive measures or social boycott which made the rural people disenchanted about the LF. Senior CPI(M) leader, Benoy Chaudhury himself

highlighted these points at the Front meetings that alienated a bulk of middle and small peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers from the Front.¹³

Setback among Urban-Industrial Workers :

Urban industrial workers are ideologically expected to be natural allies of the LF. But that there was an erosion of support base among this sector for the LF was evidenced from voting behaviour in the urban-industrial constituencies. While Congress (I) votes increased in all such constituencies, that of LF noticeably declined in many. Voting turn out percentage for LF in these areas has been declined to 44.41 from 47.96 in 1980 and 52.83 in 1982 (Assembly Election) compared to Congress(I)'s spectacular improvement from 37.78 in 1980, 42.32 in 1982 to 51.81 in 1984. Specially in Barrackpore, Calcutta Northwest, Northeast and South, Dum Dum, Howrah, Hooghly and Jadavpur the Congress(I) polled more than 50% of the total votes cast. In these areas there are clusters of closed and sick factories which rendered a large body of labourers jobless. One of the 18-point programmes over which in 1982 Assembly elections, the LF got overwhelming mandate was the re-opening of those closed industries. But over this vital issue the LF did nothing except calling bandhs. It was partly because of the psychology of "playing safe" and to maintain the status quo to be in power that the left trade union had been discouraged to go far for effective movement. The much complained "non-performance image" of the government was prominent in the industrial sector where LF failed to generate employment facilities in a state where the figure of registered unemployed is highest in India. Between 1977 and 1982 only 83,111 jobs were created when the employment requirement in the state was more than 3 million.¹⁴ Erratic power-cuts, rise in the loss of mandays because of prolonged strikes particularly in the two most labour absorbing industries in the state jute and hosiery industries, little enthusiasm showed to the industrialists by the government in making new investments led the level of employment in the private sector to go down. Inadequate Central assistance in the face of chronic economic problem of the state created mainly to meet the massive refugee problem since partition prevented the government in creating adequate job opportunities in its sector. All these irked the industrial voters, particularly the non-Bengali working class voted overwhelmingly for the Congress(I). In the two urban and semi-urban industrial Assembly segments of Durgapur, it was reported by a CITU source that unlike the previous years, the election campaign of the CPI (M) was run with the help of contractor-workers and not by the regular workers because not a single new industrial unit was set up there by the Front Government during the last seven years and in these two segments (Durgapur I

and II), the Congress(I) got a majority of about 16,000 votes. In Asansol Constituency, where all the seven Assembly segments are prevalently urban and semi-urban industrial pockets, it was easy for the Congress(I) to win the seat by about 86,000 votes.

Setback among Urban Middle Class:

In early 1920s as stated earlier, the urban middle class in Calcutta hailed Communist ideology first in India and formed the Communist Party. Since then the urban middle-class intelligentsia have been considered as bannerholder of Leftism in West Bengal. Perhaps the LF Government took them for granted and did not care to serve them with minimum civic amenities. Deterioration of infra-structural facilities in the form of acute power-crisis, poor hospital facilities, alarming roadcondition inhuman transport arrangement etc. arising out of non-performance of the government pinched the urban people at every step which made them hostile to the LF. Jyoti Basu himself said "I have a feeling that in the urban areas we really could not do much compared to what we did in the country side ... we could have saved a little more in the urban areas if the people were satisfied with us, but they were not".¹⁵ In addition, some vital policy-decisions which became controversial even among the Front partners, like the Government's education policy at the primary level leading to elimination of English, withdrawal of "Sahaj Path", introduction of automatic promotion all irked the urban educated middle class. Moreover, as the CPI leaders pointed out.¹⁶ That a nationalist wave blew strongly in the State's urban areas following the P.M.'s murder. The Bengali middle class by tradition is nationalist minded. Front's physical incompetence to offer an alternative stable government alienated them from the Front.

Setback among the Youth:

Since the very inception of the left politics in the state, its revolutionary zeal attracted students and young ones because youth in the period for adventurism, radicalism and risk-bearing. But the 1984 electoral profile presented a different picture when large numbe of first-time voters who were mainly post-Independence products rallied almost spontaneously behind the Congress. They have grown under a left regime when leftism for obvious reasons has to sever at least to some extent its revolutionary fervour and is associated with many failures particularly in creating employment opportunity. In such context the left parties failed to hold out any promise to the new generation. Hence this younger section is frustrated and more disillusioned than their elders. Moreover, they are not troubled by memories of the sufferings due to partition in 1947 or of the reign of terror created by local toughs with Congress patronage in the late

60s or early 70s. All these gradually engulfed their distance from the left block which found clearest expression in 1984 elections.

The long discussion makes it crystal clear that there was a gradual anti-left gale among the west Bengal electorate which the Front could not gauge in time. The erosion of the Front's support even among its traditional allies was evident long before the Lok Sabha poll mainly because of its non-performance. Jyoti Basu himself acknowledged it at the Front meeting.¹⁷ Forward block and RSP two major constituents of the LF observed, "It is our poor-image- of non-performance which hurt us badly. The voting trend in this election here is certainly anti-left."¹⁸ The Central Committee of the CPI (M) also pinpointed the non-performance factor particularly in the departments of education, power and transport as the main reason for the debacle. But the Front leaders deliberately kept their eyes shut to this non-performance phenomenon.

Electorate disenchantment with the LF was also partly due to organisational lapses as pointed out by almost all Front partners. Organizational lapses gave birth to complacency, overestimation, haughtiness, arrogance and intolerance of constructive criticism both among leaders and more among the cadres. It is widely alleged that apart from the controversial "lease-document" issue that made the former refugees in the jadavpur area hostile to the Front, the arrogance and high browning of the CPI (M) candidate was mainly responsible for his defeat.

Organizational lapses breeding individualism, indiscipline and groupism also gave birth to intra-Front rifts, mainly between CPI(M) and Forward Block and RSP complained that defeat of their veteran party candidate Mr. Tridib Chaudhury was mainly because of the violent clash between their party and the CPI (M) at Murshidabad immediately preceding election. Such intra-Front rifts diminished electoral credibility of the Front to the masses.

The worst manifestation of organizational lapses was revealed through the loss of mass-contact. The FB(M) at their State party Conference openly alleged, "The Ministers belonging to the big four parties of the Front and the Constituents had lost touch with the people and failed to redress their grievances." Samar Mukherjee, a front-ranking CPI(M) leader also opined, "losing of living mass-contact, which is the gravest danger for a Communist Party as pointed out by Lenin, is the most vital reason for the present debacle"¹⁹ It was a fact. The left parties after being saddled with power at various levels of administration developed a bureaucratic attitude that led them to have been distancing themselves from the people and made them virtually inaccessible not only to the people at large but to the lower level party workers and close sympathizers also.

The Left Front's primary explanation for public disenchantment was inability of the government to give a better account of itself with "limited powers" within the framework of the "bourgeois government", and "Constitutional limitations". But this "limited power thesis" had been rejected by the electorate.

In fact, long cushioning with power gives birth to some typical vices that do not spare even a revolutionary party. These rob them off their revolutionary fervour and radical halo and develop in them a pro-establishment attitude so typical with a bourgeois party in power. The result is what should be that is erosion of support base and electoral low profile as it happened in case of our LF in the last Parliamentary elections.

IV

Positive Factors : Sympathy-wave and Craze for National Stability:

In the above section, the factor which has been taken into consideration, that is erosion of support-base for the LF (for various reasons) has been treated as a negative factor because it drifted away a large section of the masses of this State from the LF and drew them nearer to the only available alternative- the Congress(I) in his highly polarized state. But this was not all. More positive reasons were there that created a swing in favour of the Congress(I). Broadly they be classified into two: Sympathy wave and craving for national stability.

Sympathy Wave:

The background with which the Eighth Parliamentary Elections took place was blood-bathed. The brutal assassination of the Prime Minister by her own security guards and its aftermath in the form of rampant communal violence and carnage of the members of that particular community which the murderers belonged to under the captaincy of the Congress(I) toughs created a two-way emotional razor which led our system, at least for the time being to the brink of virtual collapse. The ruling party tendered a pre-mature election-call at the earliest possible moment to capitalize the tragic end of their leader. The nation-wide spontaneous sympathy created the most opportune moment for the party and the elections were to be completed before this sympathy wave would die down. Thus providence created a plus-point for the Congress(I). To many, Congress(I)'s electoral success in this state, as it was in most of the states, was mainly due to this sympathy wave. Particularly the State Committee of the CPI(M) and

its secretary Saroj Mukherjee observed that sympathy -wave got precedence over political considerations in the minds of the voters and did bring a qualitative change in the pre-election mood of the voters.²⁰ Other major constituents like FB and RSP of course did not share this view.

But if with a clean slate we try to make a contentanalysis of the pre-election politics of the state, it appears that the two-edged emotional razor (as discussed earlier) was blunt if not non-functioning in this state. There was not a single serious incident in this state taking a premium on life of any community. On the other hand, the sympathy wave for the P.M. was with much lower magnitude. Although some political observers before elections opined that the sympathy-wave for Indira had been broken on the Bihar-West Bengal border, such formulation was belied by the massive turn-outs at Rajiv Gandhi's election meetings in Calcutta, Howrah and even in backward Canning. The Front leadership failed to assess the magnitude of the sympathy wave, if it was as alleged by them later, brought massacre for the Front. The wave was certainly there in West Bengal with the rest of the country and added to the electoral strength of the Congress(I). But it connot be denied that the gush that turned the wave into a 'tornado' and flooded other parts of this sub-continent was not so potential in West Bengal. Otherwise in this state also the Congress(I) would have come out with impetuous victory.

Craze for National Unity and Stability :

The most positive factor contributing to the Congress(I)'s electoral success in this state was an all India phenomenon. It was the craving for national Unity and a stable government. The glory out bursts after the 31st October creating utter distrust and suspicion among different communities were unquestionably ominous that brought forth some frenzied moments of decadence for the nation as a whole. The whole nation was almost gasping at this suffocating atmosphere which cut across their age-old tradition that had always searched for unity in diversity, integrity in diffusion, harmony in chaos and stability in the wake of collapse. It is our traditional heritage that whenever there has been least possibility of endangering our national unity and stability Indian society and polity have channelised it in a democratic way without resorting to any extra-constitutional means like military take-over or authoritarian regime as experienced by our next door neighbours. This was the perspective why the craving for unity and stability became the sole issue during the Eighth Parliamentary Elections when both the ruling party as well as the opposition emphasised this one and the same fundamental theme.

So far the State of West Bengal was concerned, the Congress (I) and the

LF both in their campaigning highlighted this issue, of course each in its own way. The Congress(I), however, was in a privileged position as they categorically almost in every election-rally got a chance to condemn the CPI(M) for its support to the controversial Anandpur Sahib Resolution which, it was alleged, fomented secessionist and extremist forces. This issue was singularly touchy for West Bengal as the nightmare of the bloody communal violence on the eve of the Independence still haunted the masses. With the rest of the country West Bengal also pined for a strong and stable national government which could prevent the country from further fragmentation. But how to get it? They knew that if Left candidates fielded in the fray throughout the whole country were all returned, it would not be possible for them to form a purely left government at the centre. If at all they want to shape a government, they would have to enter into some kind of coalition with other anti-Congress parties. But the past experience of the masses with the Janata Government tutored them about the fatality of an United Government at the centre. Following the process of elimination, they developed a deeprooted conviction that the Congress(I) alone that had fielded its candidates in all constituencies of the country would be able to offer a strong and viable government which was of dire necessity. The CPI state Committee very correctly assessed this point.²¹ It is this confidence of the masses in the Congress(I) about their capability to ensure unity and stability in the country that served as the most important positive factor for electoral success of that party.

To conclude this may be submitted that all these positive and negative factors worked jointly that produce the "rightist" swing in the electoral scene of West Bengal. But while the negative factor correctly accounts for erosion of Left support to some extent, the positive factors, particularly the craving for national unity created the tilt for which the Congress(I) could improve its position so spectacularly. Inspite of its gradual improvement since 1980, we are not sure whether in the absence of this national-unity-factor which was so platantly indispensable not from narrow provincial interest but from broader national perspective, the Congress(I)'s recovery would be of so rapid pace as revealed in 1984 poll results. That the poll prospect of the Congress (I) in 1984 although improved in West Bengal was not as glaring as it was in most of the states and that in spite of the psychological drifting of the masses the Left Front with all their deficiencies and lacunae could emerge as the determining force in politics even in 1984, once again confirmed left-oriented political culture of the state. What has been generally conceived as "swing to the right" particularly after the 1984 poll in the political culture of the State of West Bengal, may be the product of certain temporary factors and it may be ephemeral.

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6. Out of total 40 seats from the state, Congress bagged 14, CPI 5, CPM 5, PSP 1, SSP 1, Others 2 and Independent 12.
7. The result of the Congress in this election was understandably incoherent with its performance in the previous year's Assembly poll when it had received 105 seats and 28.20% of popular votes and the CPI(M) emerged as the single largest party with 111 seats and 31.98% of popular votes; the United Front as a whole 148 seats out of a total of 277.
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