Conclusion

The evolution of PD's thoughts and activities from 1920s till 1999 as discussed in the present monograph reveals how his eventful life passed through different political currents. This began with his involvement in national revolutionary movement, and culminated in the Gandhian way of peaceful rural reconstruction works. To put in Marxian terms, metamorphosis of PD's ideas and activities in different phases of his career had taken place through a dialectical process. After the Mechua Bazar episode (1929), as shown in part I of chapter II of this dissertation, as the pinnacle of his ideas and activities in the national revolutionary phase, the development of his left leaning and his role as a pivotal member of ST's group induced him to embrace the path of radical seizure of power through insurrection in the late 1940s. Though PD was not a theorist to design a system of ideas, the thread of his militant thinking and advocacy for immediate strike against the newly independent Indian state (refer to part II of chapter III for fuller discussion) was a key to throw light on this facet of left insurgency in contemporary Bengal. In Bengal left radicalism got crystallized over time by a section of radical minded youths committed to Marxist programme of armed revolution. But when this did not materialize excepting some sporadic futile attempts like Dum Dum Basirhat (act of RCPI splinter group) or Kakdwip (in which a group
of CPI activists were involved) it could end up being a discourse on failed radicals alone. However, PD’s story as transpired from detailed examination in this research was one of profound ideological transformation and decisive turning in his approach after the failure of Dum Dum-Basirhat uprising. Viewed from this angle, it was due to his outstanding ability to break through mental constraints without hesitation and refashion the form of his activism and offer a new orientation to radical thinking.

The long years of imprisonment could not restrict PD’s active mental faculty and reflective capacity. Analytical thinking ushered in remarkable transformation not only in his psyche, but it was also manifested in the changed course of his activities in the post-incarceration phase. This dissertation has sought to explain in chapter IV the circumstances in which PD consciously chose to withdraw from the course of radical politics and appreciated the relevance of Gandhi in the panorama of his revolutionary experience. The combination and permutation of these diverse factors set him to reconcile Marxian understanding with Gandhi’s ideas of non-violent struggle. Thus an eclectic perspective gradually emerged and it shaped his mindset since mid-1950s. This was meshed with his appraisal of changed circumstances after India’s independence when he realized the importance of working at the grass roots level with the masses. All these influenced his later switch-over to Gandhian path.
Thus, the failure of his radical political programme paved the way for a
deeper philosophy of social reconstruction.

This, however, did not imply that he was completely swayed by Gandhi’s
ideas. On the contrary, in *Gandhi Gabeshana* (i.e. *Research on Gandhi*),
he demonstrated exemplary open mind, sharp and impartial thinking
shorn of dogmatism. In this analytical writing, his disposition towards
socialism mingled with Gandhi’s ideas of non-violence and self-reliant
village. This proved that there were important continuities which existed
even after transformation of his ideas. Of course, this socialist vision was
not the doctrinaire type compared to what he had adhered to till 1950. It
creates the impression that having based on Marxian doctrine and yet,
freely appreciating Gandhi’s ideas in a manner of positive conjoining, PD
was out to explore a new path. This was why he wanted to intervene in
diverse fields of activities ranging from national integration to refugee
resettlement at Dandakaranya without getting stuck to one field. This
study thus delves into PD’s vibrant political and post-political career with
all its turns and twists, and provides an insight into the dynamics and
perspective of his thinking. This tends to serve twin purposes. First, seen
in the contemporary context PD’s life story provides us with a clue to the
historical process of transformation from violent revolution to peaceful
reconstruction in Bengal and India. This was evident as a number of
radical communist leaders (for instance Somnath Lahiri, Bhabani Sen,
Kansari Haider repudiated the violent line after India’s independence in the light of objective forces resulting in their reconciliation with democratic politics. Professor Nirban Basu’s article on Phulrenu Guha (1911-2006), “who combined the roles of a social worker, women’s right activist and a crusader for democratic and anti-imperialist values” also reveals the process of transformation from socialist to Gandhian stream. So, forsaking of violence by PD and his later decision to take to Gandhian line of reorganizing society peacefully was part of a larger historical trend and it should be construed in that context.

Secondly, PD’s political practice links militant nationalism and left radicalism on one hand, and left radicalism and Gandhism on the other, in two subsequent phases. This not only shows the relations and tensions among these different streams of thought in the minds of political activists, but also reveals the sharp differences between the ideas of these political activists and those of the masses. So far as PD’s programme of communist insurgency did not constitute mass action unlike what he claimed in Birbhum thesis, it obviously sensitizes us about the limits of such action in Indian society even now. That being so, if a radical reconstruction of society was to be accomplished, “there should be other methods for this objective; a new way of revolution must be discovered.”

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531 Basu, Nirban, Treading Across Two Diametrically Opposites: Phulrenu Guha’s Journey from Marxism to Gandhism, included in Dutta Roy, Keka and Mishra, Chitta Ranjan (edited) : Reflections in History: Essays in honour of Professor Amalendu De, Raktakarabhee, Kolkata, 2009, p-423.
This was precisely what PD intended through rural re-construction efforts in backward pockets in West Bengal and in few other Indian states. In other words, humanist commitment was so powerful for him that when he failed to deliver the goal through the path of revolutionary violence, he tried through a diametrically opposite path via Gandhi and Tagore. Like revolutionary political activists committed to their value-based goal, humanism reigned supreme in all his ideas and activities, rather than disparate ideological paradigms. As he observed in one of his writings, “whatever happens to ideologies, we cannot abandon the goal of life which is based on freedom, non-exploitation, non-violence or ahimsa, a society based upon universal love.” This idealism and sense of value at the back of his mind seem to act as a constant motive force despite his shifting ideas and forms of activism.

Though ideationally PD spoke in universalist language, his main arena of activities was interior villages in West Bengal. This was why his solutions to the problems of creating a co-operative socialistic village were only a micro-experiment in certain rural areas, not universally replicable. His village oriented thought and practice, however, did not suffer from parochialism as these were embedded in a long-term project of human emancipation from a state of endemic crisis both in the external

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and internal realms of mankind. His ideas since 1980s regarding 'the limits to growth'\textsuperscript{533} and revision of CADP model (find a fuller discussion in chapter V) indicated his perceptions vis-à-vis external challenge posed by scarcity of natural resources. On the other hand, he attributed the inner crisis of man to their blind pursuit for affluence that undermined basic unity and harmony of human development. Happiness, as he viewed it, was only marginally related to wealth. Hence, instead of approaching the problem of creation of a good society from the economic perspective of mass production (unlike the previous line of his thinking related to CADP) and trying to achieve equal distribution (like the communists), he talked about infusing values of brotherhood and a habit of self-restraint in human selves. As he said, "A greater struggle will be required to unite the whole human race and an awareness of this basic unity will have to be generated on a wide scale."\textsuperscript{534} This clearly suggests that his conception of social reconstruction originated from a deep-rooted awareness of change, a change in human self as an important precondition for creation of unity among people. Even observers of social transformations agree that institutional renovations are not sustainable without corresponding change in the value framework in individual mind. Macro changes

\textsuperscript{533} In his writings during late 1980s and throughout 1990s PD talked about 'limits of growth' with intent to highlight the need of putting a self-imposed restriction on senseless exploitation of earth's non-renewable resources. He believed that the present crisis of man was the result of his hedonistic pursuit of consumerism.

become stable only when micro changes follow up.

The heart of his plan of rural social reconstruction as emerged from this study was to foster a feeling of amity, solidarity and co-operation through moral suasion, an idea which was not exclusive to particular space and time, but universally valid as an ideal. Hence, it might be argued that his ideas did not emerge from local domain alone, where he had been functioning. In course of activities during the later phase of his life these ideas arose from his deep interest in Gandhian philosophy and side by side from his critical reflections on the trend of development pattern viz. rapid industrialization, degradation of environment etc. His awareness of changing global scenario, his avid participation in the debates on development through writings and his concern for the future of mankind were what made him veer towards a broad-based approach.

Broadly speaking, PD’s case is part of the dialectical journey of political thinkers and leaders from one cognitive level to another. Many militant nationalists in Bengal (M. N. Roy for example) in the first half of the twentieth century became drawn towards Marxism for its universal and radical vision of human emancipation and subscribed to this new ideal. Later, like M. N. Roy, in PD’s case too we find this process of searching for alternative means of struggle and a move towards Gandhian road. However, while M. N. Roy’s radical humanism ruled out the Gandhian way, Gandhi’s ideas and Gram swaraj, in particular, offered PD a much
needed springboard for his varied activities since mid-1960s. In late
1960s when PD began working in village it was not only a novel bid
towards synthesis between Marxism and Gandhism which seemed to be
at variance and irreconcilable, but it was also a radical attempt to re-
conceptualize Marx, Gandhi and Tagore. For example, in Gandhi
Gabesana PD vociferously contended the viewpoint of many Indian
Marxists that “Gandhiji was a bourgeois and a reactionary.”
Culturally, PD’s village oriented ideas posed a challenge to the mind-set
that tended to create a feeling of inferiority among those working in
remote rural areas. He mentioned in his writings how the highbrow
attitude of the Bengali bhadralok stigmatized pro-village approach as a
narrow one. He not only broke with this stereotyped mind-set through his
persistent work in the countryside, but he was also hopeful to create a
movement infused with what he called ‘a new life’ in village setting.
Thus, his discourse on rural reconstruction running through legion of
articles emphasized the need to cultivate universalist understanding of an
egalitarian, peaceful and cohesive rural society. This is because he used
to celebrate village life of simplicity and idealized it as a vibrant close-
knit family marked by innumerable daily interactions, which could not be
substituted.
His views were staunchly anti-market and critically dismissive of the

535 ibid, p-469
approach of the political parties to rural development and also against those who favoured the conversion of villages into towns. Still he was optimistic about the prospect of self-reliant improvement of village through collective and constructive endeavours of the rural folks. Ironically, due to his excessive devotion to village (a traditional site which is relegated in modernity driven development discourse), he had been little known in India or at least remained so in the pan-Indian framework, not to speak of the foreign audience.

An important finding of this study lies in locating the factors behind the marginalization of his ideas. Since his connection with rural folks was well-established, the obvious question was why his ideas of self-reliant village or 'one village one family' slogan could not win enough popular support in rural society. The present work seeks the answer in his initiatives in diverse arenas of activities that could hardly be implemented systematically. It ranged from his editorship of Compass, a weekly socio-political news magazine, to his visit to the far-flung areas in North-East India, founding of TSRD, providing assistance in the freedom struggle of the masses in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), conceptualizing and functionalizing CADP, undertaking refugee rehabilitation works at Dandakaranya, so on and so forth. His involvement in these activities also showed that he could not settle down to one task or domain. Rather he moved continuously from one to another sphere of public issues as he
thought that his involvement in one or the other area was not adequate to provide solution to various types of problems. This not only implied mental restlessness underlying his thought process and level of hyper activities, but it was also responsible for dissipating his energy. At times he also participated in gramin sahitya sammelan, i.e. rural literary conferences. This was one of the probable reasons behind marginalization of his ideas and activities. No doubt, his failing health and old age turned out to be deterrent to the wide range of his engagement since early 1990s. Before his death in 1999, the theatre of his activities was mainly confined to the tribal villages in and around Santiniketan in Birbhum district of West Bengal, where he stayed in the house of Shyamali Khastagir, an anti-nuclear activist, artist and writer.

This monograph has shown that he was hurt by his life experience, that it was difficult to motivate the workers of his own organisation (i.e. TSRD), let alone the general masses with his ideas and self-practised simple lifestyle. The centre of his activities was in remote rural pockets where poverty and social backwardness were writ large. But common villagers could not follow his ideas, may be for the gap between his notion and the poor power of comprehension of village people, who constituted the target audience of his ideas. This gives rise to a surmise from his repeated emphasis on the creation of a ‘socialistic co-operative society’ that his vision was perhaps too complex and esoteric to be understood by the
village rank and file. It followed the conclusion that his involvement over a period of three decades in diverse activities in pursuit of social reconstruction remained just a wishful exercise. Neither PD nor TSRD could build up a sustained movement on an appreciable scale at the grass root level in the 1980s or 1990s to develop an integrated philosophy and practice of the ‘new society’ that he envisioned.

It is evident from this thesis that from 1951 till his demise on 11 January, 1999, PD stayed out of active politics except for a brief period of 1969-1970. As such, his ideas and activities did not get the attention in mainstream politics. Besides, it has been pointed out that he had a critical attitude towards the left parties for introducing political mobilization in the countryside based on ideology of class divisions. From his practical work experience he realized that politically induced class consciousness put undesirable obstacle to the efforts of building unity among the rural people. It caused lack of official support behind his programme during the Left Front regime in West Bengal since 1977. Under the Left Front rule, not only his plan of CADP was completely discarded, also new areas of confrontation between his ideas and those of the Left Front government had emerged. These were related to the issue of police action on the refugees in Marichjhanpi in 1979 and ‘PD’s filing of a petition at the Calcutta High Court against the West Bengal government for its
inability to meet the eventuality of flood in the river Ajoy in 1995.36 While all these completed his alienation from the political process of the state, the present study reveals how over time TSRD drifted from the programme of natural farming to other programmes than following his line of ideas. He was mentally perturbed by these later deviations of TSRD. He was also fighting against consumerist life-style that was eating into the vitals of society. “Consumerism”, said he, “set by Western/American standard must be shunned and boycotted. A simple human standard is enough to attain complete humanity...”337 But here too, he failed to contain consumerist craze among people.

True, he wanted to reshape the village but he lacked the strategy for this task. To do so it would obviously be necessary, on the one hand, to give up the “pocket approach”538 and to horizontally link his disparate activities viz. digging ponds, constructing dharmagolas (community grain banks) with various other struggles in the countryside like that of land to the tillers, implementation of minimum wage for the agricultural

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536 Mukhopadhyay, Malay (Ed.) Banya O Amra, Akhil Bharat Bhuvidiya O Paribesh Samity, Bolpur-Santiniketan, 2001, p-4 (See Shyamoli Kastagir’s essay Pannalal Dasgupter Lekhai Gramjibon O Banbanya (i.e. Village life and flood in Pannalal Dasgupta’s writings).
537 Dasgupta, Pannalal, A Minimum Programme of Action and Understanding, Sribhumi Publisher, Calcutta, 1983, p-67
538 By pocket approach we mean limiting one’s view to one or few small places “due to advantages for operating in such an area. But there are instances when a person seeking to solve some local problems finds his efforts thwarted by developments in a larger context.” We do not however argue that PD’s ideas were necessarily focussed on immediate, local problems of village community. Rather what we mean to say is that although global trends figured well in his perceptions, this did not translate into a correct methodology of work in local areas. He was often found groping for solution of a problem within small rural areas while the nature and gravity of the concerned problem was much bigger and also complicated in scope, like refugee rehabilitation. So, what follows from this is the need for concerted action of men and women in different fields which he could not generate through micro-experiments at remote rural pockets.
labourers etc. On the other hand, it was equally important to connect his struggle with the movements that were going on in other parts of the country and even outside. Though he was aware of social movements at different levels in India and abroad, it has to be admitted that he did not try to take his activities beyond localised frames barring few occasions like his initiatives for refugee rehabilitation in Dandakaranya. He also played an active role in Sundarlal Bahuguna’s cycle rally from Gangotri to Sagar in December 1995-January 1996. But, on the whole, during his time TSRD’s network with other voluntary organizations like Sreema Mahila Samity, Duttapulia, Nadia, Institute of Motivating Self Employment, Kolkata and Vikas Kendra, Atghara, North 24 Parganas, (as found from published reports of TSRD) was not well-spread. All these bodies had their sphere of activities confined to limited areas in West Bengal. Obviously PD’s activities did not build up sufficiently elaborate architecture and social coalition to make the impact of his ideas feel palpably at regional or national level.

There was a constant feeling of disappointment in him for not being able to create a serious stirring in public mind on the issues of socio-economic reconstruction in village. To quote him, “I wanted to initiate a country-wide debate on the current vital issues of economics, social malady, moral anarchy etc. I moved from door to door of many widely known

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339 It was a campaign of *janjagaran* for protecting the river Ganges from pollution. This was found from his writings in *Compass* and the leaflet brought out on that occasion by Tagore Society.
recognised intellectuals of the academic world in order to persuade them...But beyond getting lip-sympathy, I found no real response.”

Even relatively simpler plank of his thought related to caution people about the impending danger due to wanton exploitation of natural resources through modern technology went unheeded. In the introduction to the compiled volume of his writings entitled *Bitarka Bikalpa O Biplab* (i.e. *Debate, Alternative and Revolution*) he regretted, “Much has been said but all in vain, much has been traversed that too in vain.”

This expression of remorse revealed his agony and sense of failure to popularize constructive endeavours, and inability to generate enough motivation among the rural folks towards co-operative, self-reliance model at the fag-end of his life. Such feeling was a natural corollary to what A. R. Desai would call ‘emotional approach’ of individuals and groups involved in rural works. This originated from their tendency to forget a thorough objective study of rural society. According to A. R. Desai, “as they evolved naive programmes of rural work, these tended to fail or meet with partial success. This was what bred the sentiment of defeatism among them.”

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540 Dasgupta, Pannalal, *Production By the Masses And the Philosophy of Charkha*, Sribhumi Publishers, Kolkata, 1983 (see preface).
541 Translated from PD’s Bengali writing, *Bitarka Bikalpa O Biplab* (i.e. Debate, Alternative and Revolution), Mitra o Ghosh Publishers, Kolkata, BS 1398 (i.e. 1991), see Introduction p-ii.
However, it was clear from this research that PD did not suffer from mental block to constrain his unflinching willingness and propensity to continuously experiment with different ideas and programmes. A notable example of his later ideas was Minmangal (i.e. programme of discharging small young fishes and fishes with eggs in river stream to ensure availability of fish/food in future). The relevance of this programme is evident today when mad hunt for fishes has only resulted in the ever-deepening scarcity of its supply. But however well-meaning the idea of Minmangal, it could hardly be compared to the challenging and comprehensive nature of the tasks involved in social reconstruction, let alone the radical political programme for seizure of power. So his activities pertaining to Minmangal did not simply imply a shift in his ideas and activities, but more importantly it signified gradual shift of his interest towards less-problematic and less-challenging areas, where chances of state repression were minimal compared to armed struggle.

Nevertheless, the strong point in his character was his indefatigable spirit and his relentless quest in pursuit of appropriate development path. Yet, his failure to spread his ideas among people was due to his diverse ideas and activities without sticking to a compact political or social doctrine. His critical leftist approach and deviation from Gandhian path of non-violence at the time of liberation struggle of Bangladesh put him in an ambivalent position. His philosophy of social reconstruction was based
on assertion of fundamental unity among people and their collective action, but this found expression in a tortuous way through his interventions in many disparate events. This partly explained why his efforts failed to deliver the intended message in a straightforward way. This, however, did not reduce the value of his sincere strivings. But in socio-political re-construction activities the most important factor was acceptance of the people. Earlier his armed political action in DumDum-Basirhat was doomed due to isolation from the masses. Paradoxically, his later peaceful attempts also failed to make much headway because of lack of support from rural people. In spite of this, the publication of some of his earlier writings like Gandhi Gabesana in English in recent times indicates a lasting and enduring interest in his ideas and activities.