Chapter II
National Revolutionary Phase (1920-1937)

This phase is designed to deal with PD’s ideas and activities from 1920 to 1937. For analytical purpose, however, the phase is divided into two interrelated parts. The first part is devoted to the discussion on his ideas and activities from 1920 till his arrest in Mechua Bazar Conspiracy case in December 1929. The second part is concerned with his imprisoned life till 1937. In course of this period, he found an alternative to his belief in sporadic violence by a group of activists in certain pockets, in the Marxian line of collective action and preparation for mass revolution based on the conception of proletariat class consciousness. It not only relates to a major shift in his political ideas, but more importantly, it becomes imperative to examine and analyse the reasons behind the above shift in his thinking. This has been thoroughly dealt with in this section. The second part ends up with a brief review of his ideas and activities during this period.

Part-I

PD’s induction into active politics can be discerned from the political turn of his career since 1920s. However, he successfully completed intermediate course from Braja Mohan College in Barisal and went to
Calcutta to take admission in BA third year class at Vidyasagar College. In the words of Prafulla Gupta, "He came to Calcutta and got himself admitted in BA class. But he had hardly any contact with books." It was because his involvement in the activities of Barisal group of Jugantar led by Niranjan Sen (1904-1969) became so intense this time that he could not concentrate on studies.

Coming to Barisal proved to be a turning point in his life as far as the process of maturization of his political thought and activities were concerned. In the British period with its emergence as a separate district, Barisal went through a process of social reform movements under the influence of Brahmno Samaj in Calcutta. With the foundation of public libraries, schools, women welfare associations, newspapers such as Barisal Hitaishi etc. people of this district got politically mobilized by these agencies. In 1920-21 when Gandhi’s non-cooperation campaign was at its peak, the famous pro-Gandhi Congress leader of Barisal, namely Sarat Kumar Ghosh’s speech had inspired many students to participate in the political movements. Obviously thereafter when Non-cooperation movement was withdrawn and students went back to schools

40 According to David M Laushey, Niranjan Sen belonged to the main Jugantar party. (Laushey, 1975, p-68). Nakuleswar Gupta’s account in Hiralal Dasgupta’s book Swadhinata Sangrame Barisal (Barisal in Freedom Struggle) referred to Niranjan Sen of Barisal as a prime organizer of Anushilan Samity. It also mentioned arrest of Niranjan Sen and Satish Pakrashi with bombs from Mechua Bazar Street at Calcutta in 1929. (Dasgupta, Hiralal, 1997, p-323).
42 Generalised from the discussion on the lives of different revolutionary leaders in Barisal. Ibid, p-214-15.
and colleges, their political association was continued as they were engaged in public services rendered by Ramakrishna Mission, Sankar Math etc. Since many of the members of these social service organizations were members of either Anusilan Samity or Jugantar, the youth who had their political initiation during the Gandhian movement also began to take interest in the activities of these secret armed revolutionary groups.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus Barisal became one of the prime centres of many revolutionary groups and societies. Situated in this district, Braja Mohan College was well-known for its association with the renowned educationist cum political leader of Bengal, Aswini Dutta (1856-1923). No wonder this institution came under the scanner of British government's persistently stern and unfavourable attitude. Under the duress, Aswini Dutta had to transfer the right of management of the college to a trust in order to secure sanction of financial grant from the British government.\textsuperscript{44} These indicated that at that time Braja Mohan College was more a centre of political activities among the students and their training ground than merely a seminary, which made it a place of prestige and pride in public estimation. PD took admission in the I.Sc class in this college in 1927. It seemed that this time a number of factors like his moving away from his

\textsuperscript{43} The reference of the youth of Barisal taking interest in the activities of secret revolutionary outfits during 1910s and 1920s lay scattered in a number of portions of Swadhinata Sangrame Barisal by Hiralal Dasgupta. See for example p-119.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, p-70
ancestral village, taking more interest in the activities of revolutionary
groups as well as his exposure to political activities among college
students\textsuperscript{45} influenced his mind to develop his political outlook.

College life brought PD in touch with the organizing leader of Jugantar in
Barisal, Niranjan Sen. Latter’s revolutionary zeal representing younger
members’ impatient attitude born of intense urge towards armed struggle
and founding of a fighting squad under his stewardship, inspired PD to a
large extent. These activities, however, had nothing to do with well
thought out programme of bringing about revolutionary change based on
mass movement whereby colonialism could be torn apart. Rather, these
were based on violent attack on the facade of colonial rule, i.e.
government institutions and their key officials through explosion of
bombs and assassination which were but ‘anarchist’ in character. That
these were linked with anarchist ideas becomes clear from its explicit
reference in the leaflet found in the Mechua Bazar Street search in
December, 1929.\textsuperscript{46} The leaflet exhorted the youthful sons (anarchists) of
Bengal to ‘flare up with the fire of vengeance for the annihilation of
foreign enemies’. It literally meant to unleash a campaign of political
revenge by massacre of the British administrators in India. Here the brand
of anarchism was more of politically motivated xenophobic hatred, rather

\textsuperscript{45} Police file 316/28 revealed that during studentship at Braja Mohan college PD had friends like
Ramen Biswas who was an active member of the group of terrorist revolutionaries led by Niranjan Sen.
\textsuperscript{46} Mukhopadhyay, Ashok Kumar (ed.), \textit{Terrorism: A Colonial Construct Selected Terrorist
Publications}, Sahitya Sarsad, Kolkata, 2009, See the copy of the leaflet in p-592-593.
than the spiritual covering often employed to justify terrorist actions. These activities were responsible for causing the distraction of the revolutionary youths from the basic tasks of revolution. As Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar aptly mentioned, “This gave rise to a wave of romanticism and prevented them from trying to understand and assimilate the real lessons from the revolutions of other countries.”\textsuperscript{47} No doubt, this strain was present in PD’s ideas and activities during 1920s as stated by Subodh Mitra that PD got involved in these activities during this time.\textsuperscript{48}

It is also important to understand that nationalist revolutionary movements in India had undergone transformations in late 1920s.\textsuperscript{49} It was due to the impact of Marxist ideas at the victory of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia and the role played by various literature carrying socialist ideas and intellectual propagation by Bhupendra Nath Datta and others. As these ideas began to penetrate the psyche of the nationalist revolutionaries and youths since late 1920s, the politics and ideology of the revolutionary groups in India during this period was strongly influenced by this intrusion. In this situation class factor became the rallying point for the mobilization of many nationalist minds in favour of Marxist ideas in India. The strength of Marxism lay in providing the

\textsuperscript{47} Mazumdar, Satyendra Narayan, \textit{In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programme}, 1979, PPH, New Delhi, p-92.

\textsuperscript{48} Dr. Mukhopadhyay, Maloy (ed.), \textit{Banya O Amra}, Akhil Bharat Bhuvidyta O Paribesh Samity, Bolpur, 2001. See the article on Pannalal Dasgupta by Subodh Mitra, p-140.

perspective that certainly helped to unravel the issues of the day with distinct theoretical understanding by linking up with the structure of capitalism and its world-wide spread in the form of imperialism and colonialism. Consequently, those who believed in overthrowing the British power from India through violent actions alone, many of them became less inclined towards terrorist activities. The ideological effect of this led a number of younger members of both Anushilan samity and Yugantar group to break away from the camp of older leadership as the former became disillusioned with the lack of radical approach of the latter. This was true in PD’s case too as he joined the revolt group of Niranjan Sen in the late 1920s.

It marked the period of PD’s intense engagement in revolutionary activism. Partly it was largely due to the impact of revolutionary literature on his youthful mind. Police report (IB File 316-28) showed that he was a young man having deep knowledge of foreign revolutionary literature. According to this report, he had read books on Irish and Russian revolution and also the biography of the famous Chinese nationalist revolutionary Sun Yet Sen. Thus, during his student life he was not only familiar with contemporary political scenario of Bengal, he also acquired sufficient knowledge about the nature and course of revolutionary movements abroad. This helped to broaden his perspective by extending his vision beyond territorial frame to other nationalist and radical anti-
colonial struggle. Ideologically, however, there was a subtle difference in it because reading of foreign revolutionary literature related to Irish revolution and that of the Russian revolution were not the same thing. Rather, it suggested twin impact on his youthful mind. Of these, one related to nationalist extremism and the other were radical ideas of burgeoning socialism that was gathering force alongside it.

However, the rise of patriotic feelings in him was not without any dilemma. As noted by Subodh Mitra, a naxalite activist turned social worker in his article *Kalpurus Pannalal Dasgupta*, PD himself had stated, “A few years later I went to a town, where my uncle had stayed, to continue my studies. But there the revolutionaries met me and asked me why should I not join them to overthrow the foreigners. The pale face of my mother, the expectations of my uncle and other members of the family rose at once before my mind. I was in dilemma.” But it did not prove to be an impediment strong enough to prevent him from joining the freedom struggle since the call of the nationalist revolutionary current had greater appeal to his young mind. Some intercepted letters in police file showed that during his stay at Barisal with his uncle Motilal Dasgupta PD was selected as an organizer of the group led by Niranjan Sen at Barisal. This indicated that though a fresh college student, his role was not merely

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50 Dr. Mukhopadhyay, Maloy (ed.), *Banya O Amra*, Akhil Bharat Bhuvidya O Paribesh Samity, Bolpur, 2001. See the article on Pannalal Dasgupta by Subodh Mitra, p-140.
51 IB File 326/28.
that of a courier in the group, rather much greater responsibility was entrusted on him compared to his age. It was organizational tasks, in addition to the role of custodian of party’s arms in which he soon turned out to be an adroit agent. It partly explained his ascendance in organizational power hierarchy, and also provided with an insight into internal power struggle in the revolutionary group.

He succeeded in winning confidence of the group leadership within a short span of time. It became evident from one intercepted letter in which Niranjan Sen referred to PD as a ‘new but one having a spirited soul within.’ PD’s name occurred in many other epistolary correspondences (cited in police files), written by Niranjan Sen to other important members of his group like Benoy Roychoudhury. This indicated that Niranjan Sen’s relations with PD during the period 1926/7-1929 had developed into such a close bonding that resembled one of guru-sishya (i.e. master-disciple) relations, though the former was not his teacher in the formal sense. It enabled PD to earn so much trust that he soon came to be regarded as a reliable member of Niranjan Sen’s group at Barisal. That was why police enquiry was started at Barisal and Faridpur to frame

52 The researcher has found from interviews with old RCPI comrades like Ashoke Biswas, Pashupati Mitra and others that PD had fair knowledge about fire arms and that he also had expertise in arms collection. It was due to his experience of activities as member of the Mechua Bazar group of revolutionaries and later his leading role in the secret detachment of RCPI over a long period of time. He knew secret sources and visited faraway places like Bombay (now Mumbai), Assam etc. to maintain contacts and secure arms. What was more interesting, however, was the finding that PD used secret operations to woo young chaps in his group and through them carried out his plans.

53 IB File 316/28 mentioned many such correspondences between the members of the group led by Niranjan Sen in which PD’s name had occurred. From these, police was of the view that PD was an important member of the Barisal group of revolutionaries.
charges against him.\textsuperscript{54} It might be a reason behind his shift to Calcutta thereafter. Taking admission in Vidyasagar College for further study was, from this angle, a pretext purposely devised to cover up his real intention to operate from the Calcutta centre. In all probability, therefore, PD had moved to Calcutta under the direction of the revolutionary group and its leader Niranjan Sen.\textsuperscript{55} So far as the party discipline was concerned, the directive in the revolutionary party was mandatory for its members and hence binding for PD also.

To appreciate the factors which left deep impression on his ideas and activities during late 1920s it is necessary to have an understanding of the the emerging pattern of political activism in India at large, and Bengal in particular. It appears significant also because “the terrorist movement in Bengal after 1928 manifested important new developments, developments which help greatly to explain why many of the terrorists converted to Marxism after the British finally crushed this violent phase of activity in early 1930s.”\textsuperscript{56}

According to authors like David M. Laushey, the brief phase spanning from 1929 to 1933 could be marked as the fourth outbreak of terrorism in Bengal. But its seeds were sown earlier. Regarding the background of the

\textsuperscript{54} IB File 316/28; See the note on PD which spoke of police enquiry and hunt to trace PD at Barisal, Faridpur and Calcutta.

\textsuperscript{55} After the split in Anushilan Samity around 1927-28, Niranjan Sen of Berhampore was the main organizer of the Anushilan (Revolt Group).

period Laushey observed, “The period between 1925 and 1927 may be characterized as one of relative revolutionary inactivity. ...Most of the leaders of the revolutionary parties were either in jail or under detention...By December 1926, the situation had become so outwardly quiet that the Bengal Government decided to begin a gradual release of prisoners....”

Consequently, what happened was that out of jail those revolutionaries had started contemplating revolutionary programme anew, thus heralding a new phase of revolutionary upsurge in Bengal. Mechua Bazar Conspiracy case in December 1929 in which PD was arrested for the first time owing to his alleged involvement is to be seen in this context. It was not an isolated event. Neither did it happen suddenly. Rather, this flicker of revolutionary ebullience was the culmination of several new trends that were developing quietly at the backdrop of the said period. For instance, according to Laushey, it seemed that towards 1927-28, the two major revolutionary groups in Bengal (i.e. Anushilan Samity and

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57 Ibid, p-40-41
58 Its immediate root can be traced to Rangpur meeting in 1929 when some of the leaders of the Revolt groups met to discuss about revolutionary programme and returned to their respective pockets to give final shape to their plans. The plan was to carry out attack on government arsenal in districts like chittagong and Barisal and to make armed raid in Dacca and Calcutta and arrange an uprising at all these places simultaneously on the same day—Suprakash Roy, Bharater Jatiyatavadi Baiplobik Sangram (i.e. India’s nationalist revolutionary struggle), Patraput, Calcutta, 1983, p-333.
Jugantar) would merge into one unified revolutionary party. Besides, many political prisoners were imbued with the Marxist doctrine while biding their time in jail. Finally, a new generation of activists arose within the established revolutionary societies, which rejected the old-guard leadership, demanded immediate outrages and after 1928 led the groups to new extremes in revolutionary activism. It happened because of growing disenchantment among the younger revolutionaries with the way the revolutionary movement in Bengal was developing. They were particularly distressed about the division of the movement into two main organisations and the inability of the older leaders to effect amalgamation and latter’s tendency to water down revolutionary programme in order to gain support of the Congress. The older leadership, on the other hand, was somewhat disturbed by the intrusion of Marxist influence among the younger members of their organizations. This resulted in revolt group activities in which PD was involved.

Seen in this context, it was important to reiterate that PD’s political tendency during 1920s was mediated by the revolt group activities. Behind this line of activities the intent was one of disowning the veteran leadership of the mother organizations. The result was evident in the

59 According to Laushey, when Subhas Chandra Bose and the Karmi Sangha where the terrorists had considerable representation agreed to work together to run the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, it was widely believed that Anusilan and Jugantar were on the verge of merging or at least co-operating very closely. Both parties were represented in Karmi Sangha and were, to that extent, already cooperating. But Anusilan and Jugantar, far from merging, actually intensified their mutual rivalry after 1928. Laushey, BengaL Terrorism and Marxist Left, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Kolkata, 1975, p-48.
organization of separate new groups at different districts like Dacca District Freedom League under Satish Pakrashi⁶⁰ followed up by the Barisal Independence League under Niranjan Sen⁶¹ and so on. Though based in districts, and hence invested with a local character, the new-born outfits indicated inextricable link with the larger struggle for freedom. “The nation-wide mass uprising,” according to Laushey, “of course, never occurred. But the terrorist movement did take new directions after 1928, especially because of the influence of the revolt groups.”⁶²

Study of the activities of the revolt group which led to Mechua Bazar Conspiracy case in December 1929 revealed that though nipped in the bud, its special character was inbuilt in the revolutionary plan itself. The group took a definite line of establishing close contacts with Surya Sen of Chittagonge Yugantar group⁶³ for organizing armed insurrection on a wider scale simultaneously in certain districts of the then undivided Bengal such as Berhampore, Calcutta proper, Barishal etc. and for that it started bomb manufacturing.

Here two points need to be noted.

First, activities of the Mechua Bazar group with which PD was actively associated were all youths, who believed in the application of violence.

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⁶⁰ Laushey, p-50
⁶¹ Laushey, p-68
⁶² Laushey, p-68
⁶³ That the Mechua Bazar group of revolutionaries led by Niranjan Sen had connections with the group of Surya Sen has been mentioned by both Suprakash Roy in Bharater Jatiyatabadi Baiplobik Sangram, 1983, p-335-6 and Prafulla Gupta in his book Comrade Pannalal Dasgupta, 1953, p-6.
As an active member of the group he too had subscribed to the concept of violent revolution. By revolution he meant sweeping change than mere violent rising. It was evident from police report of his views in an interview on 30.1.1930. He said that by revolution he did “not only mean violent upheaval that would bring about a change of the government, but also similar forces which would combine to destroy the existing socio-economic orders and on their ruins entirely different order would be born.” It showed the depth of his understanding about the ways of occurrence of such fundamental change in the order of society. To quote him, “Violence, i.e. the application of physical force is preeminently necessary for the freedom of the country. (But) it must be coexistent with other contributory factors i.e. Congress, youth unrest, spread of literacy, re-ordering of society on the basis of untouchability etc.” It was clear from this opinion that he believed in the importance of violence as a means of emancipation from the oppressive colonial rule in India.

But how could violence or coercion go with the fundamental and comprehensive task of re-constructing society through peaceful programmes like spread of literacy, the campaign against untouchability etc. was difficult to conceive. It revealed the dilemma in PD’s contemporary views. In fact, this contradiction in PD’s thought could be

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64 IB File 316/28 Part-I. See the interview of PD, an undertrial prisoner in Barrackpur Sub jail by S. Majumdar, SI, IB.
65 Ibid
seen in his later life also. It was because he spoke of developing a co-operative socialist society but the ways he chose for it in early 1970s like comprehensive area development was neither fully socialist path nor a completely voluntary system.

However, as a man of action his views on violence, it might be argued, were probably shaped by his participation in the activities of armed revolutionary groups. From above it appeared that to his young mind violent venture was coterminous with aggressive direct struggle to repudiate colonial bondage and creation of a free nation. Hence in his thought the conviction in the efficacy of violence was writ large. Probably, this attitude in him came up as a dual response challenging the colonial regime on one hand, and Gandhian non-violent method on the other. The idea was to invoke violence in transforming revolutionary movement from a simple flicker to a rapid fire in which, though the British power was the prime target, other vestiges of repression operating in connivance with it were also sought to be liquidated. Therefore, to PD, violence was a necessary component of any real comprehensive struggle. However, his attitude had a middle class petty bourgeois feature. In 1948 in the book entitled ‘Khokami rog’ (i.e. infantile disease) Saumyendra Nath Tagore criticised PD’s political line as typically suffering from middle class impatience for lack of scientific knowledge about revolution. This charge could be cited to indicate middle class petty bourgeois
orientation running through his thought and activities at that point of time.\textsuperscript{66} This class background of PD was not in accord with the programme of mass revolution. Since they did not have sound basis among the masses, their ideas of revolution had perforce to fall back on violence. It was precisely this contradiction that lay inherent in many nationalist revolutionaries. PD was no exception. Also we would see that during the period from 1962 till 1990s when his violent ways had mutated, his conception of peaceful reconstruction could not gain wide currency among the people.

Secondly, a distinction needs to be drawn between armed insurrection and mass revolution as a means of achieving freedom of the country. While PD and other members of the group had a positive approach to the latter, they, nevertheless, thought that unless they could draw the masses to their side by their activities, mass revolution would not be possible.\textsuperscript{67}

So, in the meantime, armed insurrection including killing of European high officials and raiding government institutions was preferred modus operandi rather than arduous task of mass mobilization. It was thought that all these, if carried out successfully, would convince people of the

\textsuperscript{66} In 1948 in his book ‘\textit{Khokami rog}’ meaning infantile disease Saumyendra Nath Tagore criticised PD’s political line, though without directly mentioning latter’s name. PD, according to Tagore, suffered from middle class impatience due to lack of scientific knowledge about revolution. Though worth of the criticism is subject of analysis, it prima facie indicated middle class petty bourgeois orientation running through PD’s thought and activities at that point of time.

\textsuperscript{67} Derived from recorded statement of a deponent about PD in IB file:316-28, Part-I.
organizational strength of the revolutionary group and induce them, particularly young men to join their group.

But all these ultimately ended abortively in the very preparatory stage in Mechua Bazar Bomb case. Though a flicker of armed revolutionary activities in Calcutta, it was quite well-known in the political history of nationalist movement of India. So, when secret activities ‘to make and keep explosive substances with intent to cause serious injury to property in British India’ were exposed in police raid, PD was amongst those who were arrested in connection thereof in January 1930. It may be noted that during trial of the case his cousin Promode Dasgupta being an active member of Anushilan Samity helped in his defence. He along with Prafulla Sen (Niranjan Sen’s brother) raised fund to fight the case. It may be considered the culmination of his nationalist revolutionary phase because his involvement in revolutionary activities for country’s political independence reached unprecedented height at this stage. Besides, this case became a watershed marking out his ideas and activities up to this time which was different from his growing inclination towards Marxian line since late 1930s.

68 See the report of the arrest of PD from 9/1, Abhay Mitter Street, Coomertuli, Calcutta along with Tarapada Gupta on 25 January, 1930 in the police raid in connection Mechua Bazar conspiracy case in IB File 31628. Police report mentioned that on search of the room a dhuti (Ex cviii) was recovered from PD’s suitcase. It contained the mark RMB, the identical mark which was found in the dhuti with which the bomb (Exhibi: xix) was wrapped up in the suitcase of Sudhangsu Dasgupta, a prime accused in the said case.

His trial in the case under section 120B of Indian Penal Code along with section 4(b) of the Explosives Substances Act as found from the extracts of the judgment on 14/06/1930 by the Special Tribunal at Alipore led to his conviction for “his complicity in the criminal conspiracy”. But in view of his young age the Tribunal reduced the term and sentenced PD to undergo rigorous imprisonment for four years. Thereupon he appealed to the Calcutta High Court. The court released him on 22nd April 1931. But even after acquittal PD was arrested again on 24th April 1931 under the

70 IB File 316/28 contains the portion related to the trial of the Mechua Bazar Bomb case in the High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal on 22 April 1931 under the criminal jurisdiction by a bench of three judges namely R.E.Jack, S.K. Ghose and D.C.Patterson against the Appeal number 553 and 597 of 1930 by a group of appellants including PD. In the said case the charge framed by the prosecution against the appellants was that of group conspiracy to unlawfully or maliciously make or keep explosive substances with intent by means thereof to endanger life or cause serious injury to property in British India. On hearing of the case, however, the Hon’ble court had acquitted PD and few others namely Sudhir Kumar Aich, Debapriya Chatterjee, Satyabrata Sen, Tarapada Gupta et al while dismissing the appeals of Niranjan Sengupta, Ramendra Naryan Biswas, Satish Chandra Pakrashi, Sachin Kar Gupta, Mukul Ranjan Sengupta and others. It observed “there is nothing to connect the accused arrested there with the conspiracy except a RMB marked cloth...The mere finding of these cloths at different places indicates association between the parties, but not necessarily of course for the purpose of the conspiracy.” It also held that “there is not sufficient corroboration of his (i.e. approver’s) evidence. It is noteworthy that he only incriminates Ramendra, Niranjan, Rabindra, Sudhangsu, Mukul and Pannalal". As regards the case of PD, in particular, the bench referred to the evidence of the approver that Pannalal accompanied Ramendra at the time of purchasing papers for the purpose of printing revolutionary leaflet Banglar Tarunder Proti. But in absence of corroboration of that particular incident, the court concluded that this alone was not sufficient to connect PD with the conspiracy. To quote from the ruling “There is also evidence that he was seen by one of the watchers entering 16 Panchi Dhobani Lane on one occasion and that he was associated with some of the conspirators. On search of his room a dhoti marked H.M.B was found. All this evidence goes to show that he was associated with the conspirators, but it is not sufficient to show that he (i.e. PD) was actually engaged in this conspiracy. We think, therefore, that he also must be given the benefit of doubt and acquitted.”

71 The information of re-arrest of three released persons including PD could be found in the letter number 8323/C dated 25 April 1931 by B.B. Mukharji on behalf of Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta to the Deputy Secretary, Political Department, Government of Bengal (IB File 316/28).
Bengal Criminal Law (Amendment) Act\textsuperscript{72} of 1930. First he was committed to the Presidency jail and then sent to Hijli Jail. It is worth mentioning that while major state prisoners were kept in the notorious Hijli Jail near Khargapore, which was famous for its small solitary cells, a young worker aged about 22 namely PD was confined there. This fairly indicated that the British government treated him as a major state prisoner.

It seems pertinent to refer in this context to the brief note\textsuperscript{73} dated 1\textsuperscript{st} June 1931 in which the then Deputy Commissioner of police, Special Branch, Calcutta observed that “He (i.e.PD) is young, but a very dangerous member of Niranjan Sen’s gang. He has cited the example of the Irish Free State. In the Irish Free State, the revolutionary movement continued even after Dominion Status had been granted”. It made clear his political mission and also the level of his political knowledge of radical anti-colonial struggle abroad. It was also a facet of anti-colonial politics in which political ideas and aspirations of the actors took lead from distant actions of anti-colonial radicals abroad. As it was anti-colonial

\textsuperscript{72} According to David M. Laushey, in Bengal The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1925 had expired on March 21, 1930. But under the prompting of the Bengal police, on April 1, those sections of the Act which provided for trial by special procedure were re-enacted as the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment (Part Continuance) Act of 1930. Actually, the police desired that the entire Act of 1925 be re-enacted as permanent legislation. Obviously the police were aware of and were quite concerned about the subversive activities of the revolt-groups. Therefore, in October, 1930, at the end of the six-month life of the ordinance, the Legislative Assembly passed the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1930 which gave to the Bengal Government, again for a five-year period, the same powers as contained in the 1925 Act. With these powers in hand, the Government, by the end of 1930, had arrested a number of leaders and activists from different parties (1975: 76-77). This new Bengal Act of 16 October 1930 gave police unbridled power of apprehensive arrest. Also see Banglai Biplababder Palabadal by Basudeb Chattopadhyay, Progressive, Kolkata, 2002, p-59.

\textsuperscript{73} This secret note on PD’s views was found in the IB File 316/28.
nationalism, so was anti-colonial universalism, which must have influenced his mind. During the period of internment from 1931 to 1937 he appeared in B.A examination and passed out successfully in 1936. This completion of university degree during detention also provided a good indication of his intellectual ability.

Most importantly in course of his internment a remarkable turn in his ideas and activities could be discerned. He began to realize the limitations of terrorist movement. His ideas during 1930s moved in the direction of ‘much work ahead for the erstwhile terrorists’. This was what he said according to the report of an Intelligence officer who interviewed him on 18th May 1931. In the said interview he commented, “The terrorist movement is negligible in view of the vastness of the country, strength, and number of the population of India. There was a terrorist movement, but it had lost its sting owing to government action, and in view also of the impending momentous change in the constitution of the country, if the terrorists persist in committing acts of violence, they would certainly be doing positive disservice to the country. Now only one type of warfare could be carried out and that was the economic warfare.” This signified his changing realization that terrorist acts would not help further the cause of a true revolution—one in which there would be spontaneous

75 Report of an IB officer regarding interview with detenu PD on 18 May, 1931, as contained in the IB File 316/28.
mass participation against oppression inherent in the economic system. This realization based on inchoate Marxian idea probably started transforming him in the aftermath of Mechua Bazar episode.

Part-II

It is well-known that since late-1920s Marxist ideas steadily penetrated in the domain of India’s national revolutionary politics. Since PD’s thought went through this transition period from 1932 to 1937, this part seeks to dwell on the significance of this crucial transformation in his thinking. This, in turn, led to his induction in the Revolutionary Communist Party of India. We would see that this party was launched in Bengal in 1934 by Saumyendra Nath Tagore after disagreements with the official Communist Party in India. It showed how PD’s ideas acquired a different orientation in terms of shift from militant nationalist position to revolutionary Marxism in course of his detention during 1930s. The discussion in this part is important to appreciate his political ideas and activities in this Marxist phase that ended in failure of his radical attempt to seize local power.

To begin with, PD gradually developed left leaning during 1930s. His interest in Marxist literature might be inferred from the general trend of conversion of many Indian revolutionaries into Marxism under the impact
of Marxist literature and the role of the communist prisoners in the thirties.\textsuperscript{76} It was also probable that his shift to revolutionary communism started through a process of intense discussion, introspection and assessment of past ideas under incarceration. However, it was not his maiden acquaintance with Marxist texts. As stated before, he was introduced to these ideas at a rudimentary level through his reading of some Marxist literature prior to 1930s. But as Satish Pakrashi recapitulated that the members of Anushilan Samiti had contacts with Russia, but they were not interested in Marxism or the policies of the Comintern. “They were concerned only with getting arms from whatever source they could, but the Samiti leaders soon discovered that Russia was more concerned with supplying propaganda literature than weapons.”\textsuperscript{77}

So, what probably happened to these revolutionaries including PD in their callow boyhood was their lack of theoretical training, which caused natural failure on their part to grasp the essence of Marxist ideology.

1930s brought in qualitative transformation in his thought. It could be reasonably attributed to multiple factors. One was definitely the contemporary developments in the country and abroad. Specially one of

\textsuperscript{76} David M Laushey in his book \textit{Bengal Terrorism And Marxist Left} pointed out that probably half of the terrorist revolutionaries shifted to the Marxist left. The remainder joined Congress or dropped out of nationalist politics. Those who did convert to Marxism either organized into new leftist political parties of their own, or they joined the CPI or one of the other leftist parties which had come into existence in the 1930s. (p-vii) In case of PD we would see that his attraction to the theory of revolutionary communism led him to join Saumyendranath Tagore’s Communist League. Later it came to be known as Revolutionary Communist Party of India.

\textsuperscript{77} Laushey, p-95.
the important events during 1930s was the rise of working class movement in India as organized political force which the revolutionaries became aware of. It was typically applicable to PD. It was the time when the penetration of communist ideology in the working class bodies and peasantry resulted in their mobilization around this radical political doctrine. Besides, students' growing interest towards working class movements had crucial impact on the revolutionaries. What Laushey said quoting from Satish Pakrashi, a convict in Mechua Bazar Bomb case, seemed apt for understanding the conversion of some of the terrorist revolutionaries to Marxism: “the terrorists were losing control of the students to the communists and therefore, in order to maintain their position among the students, the terrorists had to follow suit by adopting the ideology that was becoming attractive to the students. The terrorists of the 1920’s had neither a clear conception of how to accomplish their goal nor an accepted conception of what their goal was other than the ending of British imperialism in India. They had no idea of what the future independent Indian state should be. Communism filled this ideological void for many young Bengalis, both terrorists and non-terrorists.”

It, however, could not be put conclusively in the absence of definite information on his life, whether his conversion to communism had taken place precisely the same way as above. Yet, the fact was that in general

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78 Ibid, p-99
towards the end of 1920s there was hardly a single sphere of public life in
India or its economy which had not been affected, in whole or in part, by
the wave of communism which swept the country during this transition
period. It veritably introduced a new pattern of political activism, new in
the sense that it brought in class perspective as a tool of analysis and also
the declared political agenda of action.

Among other factors, the impact of communism in the entire country in
the period from 1929 to early 1930s could be attributed to the Meerut
Conspiracy case (1929). It turned out to be the focus of popular curiosity
and mass sympathy, since the communist leaders put in trial utilised the
official machinery for the propagation of their political ideal. According
to Saumyendranath Tagore, who was a co-accused in the said case:

“Nothing made so much propaganda in India for communism as did the
Meerut Conspiracy case. The entire attention of the political India was
focused on the Meerut conspiracy case and hundreds of radical youths
were drawn to the Communist Party because of it.”  

As per Sir Horace
Williamson, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India
from 1931 to 1936, the Meerut prisoners made it clear that “No
permanent advantage could be gained from sporadic murders and they,
therefore, strongly deprecated political murders and anarchist outrages.”

79 Tagore, Saumyendranath, Historical Development of Communist Movement in India, Calcutta, RCPI,
It is reasonable to assume that during 1930s the powerful propaganda campaign of the communist rebels might have evoked PD’s attention in jail. His interest in Marxism could be deduced from it. But although he got attracted to communism in mid 1930’s he was not spoon-fed to such ideas. Blind acquiescence to communist principles was not expected of him, because he had gone through the passage of revolutionary nationalism for quite sometime. So, it might be inferred that his experience in violent revolutionary activism and also the political insight that he had gained from the failure of Mechua Bazar event had an important role in bringing about change in his erstwhile political line. A statement dated 18/3/1935 of a deponent in police file (IB File 316/28) pointed in the same vein. He said, “I learnt from Baidya Nath Chakravarty that while he was at Buxa camp in 1931 he came to know that most of the members of the revolt group were thinking in the line of communism as the detenus of the Communist Party were then taking lead. Panna Lal Dasgupta and Sudhangsu Sen of Barisal, both members of A.R.G were also definite to take communism.” 81 Thus PD’s interest in Marxism and adherence to its ideological tenets were natural corollary of this process of reorientation of his thought.

However, the distinction in PD’s ideological position could be discerned from his intellectual attraction to the writings of Rabindranath Tagore.

81 See the statement of deponent number 815 recorded by J. Roy, IB, CID, Bengal on 18.3.1935 in the IB File 316/28 Part-I.
During the period of internment at Khairasol, a village domicile in the south-west of Birbhum from 1934 to 1937, PD used to read out from Tagore’s ‘Kaler Jatra’ (i.e. March of Time), ‘Rather Rashi’ (i.e. Rope of a Chariot) etc. to local villagers. It was possible since the bar on his social hobnobbing was relaxed than duly maintained. It bespoke his unconventional strategy to pull the subordinate mass of poor and downtrodden villagers with a view to building a rapport with them. It also signified that the extent of his diverse reading interest and choice—Rabindranath’s essays—were by no means Marxian, but rooted in his perception of the Indian condition. It had important implications for PD’s future applications of Marxist ideas to Indian soil. As such, his study of Tagore’s writings was significant in political sense.

However, it was not to speak of his unmixed admiration for Rabindranath Tagore. As a political worker of ‘samajtantric samyabad’, to use PD’s expression (meaning socialistic communism), he poured out sharp reaction and made no bones about his suspicion of Tagore’s works. To quote him “We lived so nearby to Santiniketan, yet we could not attach ourselves to the activities of Visva-Bharati. At that time Rabindranath

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82 Dasgupta, Pannalal (Ed), Compass, 30th Yr, No-17-18, June 1993.
84 Interestingly, however, Mercus F. Franda in India’s Third Communist Party said that more highly educated among leadership of the communist movement in India who joined the CPI were attracted to communism by the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore etc. Asian Survey, vol.9, No.11, Nov 1969, p-798.
was not trustworthy to our eyes.\textsuperscript{85} It showed that during this phase PD’s ideas and activities charted on a different line, not rigidly Marxist, narrowly terrorist or of \textit{Rabindrik} kind (i.e. \textit{a`la} Rabindranath Tagore). It partly explained PD’s ambivalence—why neither he could acquire much prominence in Bengal’s left radicalism nor become a non-Marxist thinker. His thought and activities seemed to incline along a complex slant and remained ideationally unfastened. It was difficult to fit his thought in the category of classification into Marxist and non-Marxist frames. Here lies the reason for relative marginalization of his thought in the mainstream.

PD was not a theoretician\textsuperscript{86}. His study of Marxian theory, as indicated above, did not lead to the formation of any systematic body of ideas. Rather he was an activist in the sense action was always his domain of work. Yet, there were always certain ideas that guided his activities. In that sense, his approach had a distinct orientation based on his reading of the situation in India and abroad. It was crucial for appreciating two

\textsuperscript{85}Desh 7\textsuperscript{th}Feb.1998, Translated from the article \textit{Gramke Tumi Sudhi Bhengecho Gore Toloni} by PD, p-52.

\textsuperscript{86}That PD was pragmatic than a theoretical person was testified by his own confession in an interview to Dhirendra Nath Sen, the editor of \textit{Manabmon}, a tri-monthly journal published from Pavlov Institute, kolkata, July-Sept, 1989, No. 3.p-168. However, use of the terms ‘pragmatic’ and ‘theoretical’ do not convey sense of absolute distinction, but as shorthand label, meant to suggest tendency or inclination in him. Thus in his case i: primarily indicated his propensity in favour of action because he was an activist. Yet, there were always certain ideas that guided his actions. So, it ought not to be mistaken that PD was a man of activities alone, or that the line of his thinking constituted a distinct realm separate from his practical engagement. It would be an unduly sweeping generalisation that PD was not a theoretical person. Lot of his writings bore the testimony of his multifaceted thoughts and theoretical reflections, which developed continuously through his participation in the radical leftist actions in late 1940s and in course of his works of rural reconstruction since late sixties till early nineteen nineties. \textit{Chetana Prerona O Sanghat} (written under the pseudonym Naren Jana in January 1948), \textit{Gandhi Gabesana} (first published in 1986, but its manuscript was written in 1954-55 while he was in jail) were only few to name in this regard.
interrelated points regarding his conversion to communism. One was that he did not join the mainstream of communist movement led by the Communist Party of India (henceforth CPI), but he was attracted to Saumyendranath Tagore’s communist group. Although dominant in certain pockets, this communist group founded and led by Saumyendranath Tagore was a lesser force in terms of both organization and political support-base at national level. In spite of that, the reason behind PD’s growing affinity to this tiny group might be attributed to his distinct angle of thinking and the perception of Saumyendranath Tagore, hereafter ST (8 October 1901—22 September 1974).

ST was grand nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore (7th May 1861-7th August 1941), but more importantly he was a leading light in Bengal’s intellectual arena and one of the pioneers of Marxian thought in India. ST studied Marxist philosophy at the Lenin School at Moscow and participated in the sixth World Congress of the Communist International held in July—September, 1928. There he developed differences with Stalinist line due to his critical approach to Stalin’s formulation of ‘socialism in one country’, the Stalin-Trotsky struggle etc. ST was also

87 There was an impression, however, that Saumyendranath’s group was Trotoskyite and hence ‘they looked askance at Stalinism’. B. B. Mishra’s book Indian Political Parties (Oxford University Press, 1976) has put RCPI within the category of Trotoskyite parties (p-621). But while referring to this characterization Sinha, L.P. in his The Left-Wing in India stated that this was denied by both Saumyendranath Tagore and Sudhin Kumar (p-476). Besides, PD himself criticized the CPI for their ill-motivated propaganda to brand RCPI as a Trotoskyite party in Bharate Samyavadi Andoloner Dhara, 1950, compiled in Rachanabali, 1999, p-103. He supported V.I.Lenin’s views vis-a-vis Trotsky’s idea of ‘Permanent Revolution’, ibid, p-103-106. To quote PD, “Later, specially in the present epoch the trotskyists adopted a strange policy that if any movement was not launched under the leadership of the
opposed to the kind of control over CPI by Comintern. He believed in the
development of indigenous form of communism in India rather than externally guided one. That was why on return to India in January 1934, ST took up a distinct line of political action. His “Disagreements on fundamental questions like the attitude to be taken by the communists towards the petty bourgeois intelligentsia and trade union unity continued till the middle of June 1934, when the Bengal apparatus of the Stalinist party started a campaign of distortion of Tagore’s (i.e. ST’s) viewpoint and it was only after then the Communist League of India (CLI) was started in 1934.”88 Put in this perspective, ST’s idea of founding CLI as an independent communist party in India in August 1934 bore testimony to his courageous thinking and attempt at application of Marxism-Leninism in India. In addition, ST’s crusade against fascism and concern for release of political prisoners greatly enhanced his image and rendered his appeal quite attractive to many revolutionaries turned communists in the 1930s.

PD’s conversion to communism, as we already indicated, was not mechanical wholesale adoption of Marxist principles. ‘Though he was not

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a Marxist theoretician in academic sense, his intellectual forte and practical experience enabled him to combine terro-nationalist strand with communist ideas'. 89 One comrade of his group, however, opined that ‘insofar as violent revolutionary inclination was the driving force of his political activities, he had diluted Marxism. Underneath the cover of Marxist surface, his thoughts had underlying terrorist orientation that he could not rid of’. 90 Though not fully identical, yet similar views emanate from the generalization put forward by Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar. This seems befitting in PD’s case. To quote Mazumdar: “On the minds of those who were being attracted towards communism, it had a dual effect. It simultaneously strengthened the subjective attraction to communism as well as the spirit of romantic revolutionism” 91. It underscored a vital point that while being attracted by the ideas of communism the young national revolutionaries in India continued in their old line of activities. Since PD’s metamorphosis occurred in that age, the possibility of such dualism could not be completely ruled out in his case. “PD”, however, “seemed unfazed, because terrorist techniques in spite of their inherent limitations were instrumental in enthusing the youth of the day.” 92

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89 Based on my interview dated 22/3/2011 with Robi Roy, a participant in Dum Dum-Basirhat armed action in 1949. The interview was taken at his present address: new quarters at Dum Dum.

90 Ibid,

91 Mazumdar, Satyendra Narayan, In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programm, PPH, New Delhi, p-184.

92 Views of Robi Roy expressed in an interview with the present researcher on 22/3/2011.
After failure in organizing a revolutionary strike the deportation of most of the leaders of Mechua Bazar case created voidness in the group. At that time going through the process of analysis and search for new path probably had motivated PD to try to revive organizational activities by constituting ‘study circle’ in jail. It was not his brain-child however. Rather, at that time there were many study circles and kitchens run by the camp-followers of contending groups in different prisons. These study circles were conceived of as a device to prepare a meeting ground, sort of rendezvous among the like-minded political prisoners for discussing political issues of the day. Under the cloak of group-study, inter and intra-group debate, conversation on future movement and its action programme, these study circles became informal centres of political communication, training, opinion making, and the platform of perhaps what may be called ‘discursive politics’.

In Gandhi Gabeshana PD conceded that during 1930s he had read some of the basic books of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Mao Ze Dong, and even Che Guevera. It was also likely that he had come across some of the writings of esteemed Indian communists

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93 PD himself later admitted that he had read their books and applied their ideas in practice. See ‘Kaifiyat’ meaning explanation written during the first edition of Gandhi Gabesana (1986). Also refer to Desh-1998.
like Bhupendranath Dutta, ST94 and others. His acquaintance with these Marxist literatures was probable because at that time the political detainees and convicts had little difficulty in obtaining these books. At times such literature could be brought in jails stealthily and then circulated. Since PD was kept detained in different prisons for quite some time during 1930s we may assume that availability of Marxist literature and propaganda materials probably did much to influence his political vision and played an important part in converting him to communist path. A point to be noted here is that during this time a good number of revolutionaries in India came to know about communism through the books written by Bertrand Russell, G. D. H. Cole and others, and not always communist literature alone.95 Though the same could not be arrogated to PD’s case for lack of data, yet the general fact cited above was instrumental for understanding as to why many revolutionaries of the day did not join the mainstream communist movement in India led by the then undivided CPI. Rather, they became subject to unorthodox ideological foundation. However, since PD’s frame of mind had been largely shaped by his participation in the activities of armed revolutionary groups, therefore, Russell or Cole’s ideas of peaceful and piecemeal

94 In going through the early political writings of Saumyendranath Tagore we find that in as early as 1929 he wrote Sadharan Satyobadir Itehar, a Bengali translation of the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. It speaks of his immense love for and commitment to communist ideas that led him to translate the magnum opus in an effort to propagate these ideas in Bengal.
95 Laushey, p-97.
progress of socialist movement would have but very little appeal to him. But since the characteristic style of socialists like Russell or Cole lay in their moral and psychological arguments, rather than in their strictly economic criticisms, therefore, their ideas were more intelligible to the revolutionaries than probable agonies of understanding the pure economic aspects of Marx’s works. Logically, this applied to PD to certain extent, since his induction to Marxism happened mainly through his independent reading, not through any formal course. However, it would be unfair to try to read his nascent conception of Marxism entirely in terms of Cole’s formulations. It was because the variant of socialism represented by Cole tended to make fundamental departure from Marx’s major doctrinal tenets like class struggle and proletarian revolution of which PD became convinced. It was evident from the orientation of his thought and activities since late 1930s.

Another factor which had impressed many revolutionary nationalist turned communists in India like PD was the international political outlook of the communist doctrine. It transcended the national barrier to permeate all capitalist and semi-capitalist colonial societies. It did not, however, mean that communist doctrine was opposed to patriotism. But its theoretical underpinnings regarding the class character of the state denied unqualified patriotic obligation on the part of the proletariat. This encouraged many converted communists towards anti-feudal, anti-
imperialist struggle over and above their hitherto focus on national independence. Later PD conceded that ‘At that time Gandhi’s programme of village uplift was out to sweep the country with the aim of national liberation by unleashing the forces of comprehensive non-violent rebellion in the spirit of satyagraha’. Inspite of this we had taken the path of communism and put our efforts to spread communist doctrine in the countryside and among the workers in factories.

At the same time, his recapitulation of coming in contact with different political streams signified how his mind was influenced by these different political currents. To quote him, “since I was involved in various aspects of the Indian freedom struggle, I was informed of the Congress and the Gandhi-led mass movement as well. During the course of my prolong prison-life I had the occasion of reading and listening to different ideas of different doctrines.” This indicated that inspite of his growing affinity to communism, his mind was always open and receptive to different ideologies. He was unlike those revolutionaries, who resisted communist influence or those who got fully swayed by its ideological underpinnings.

96 “The term satyagraha has an interesting origin”, says Rudrangshu Mukherjee. His discussion on its origin also bears out the terminological meaning. “When Gandhi began his movement in South Africa, he first used the term passive resistance. As the struggle advanced Gandhi found ‘passive resistance’ to be inadequate to express the substance of the movement.....Maganlal Gandhi suggested the word ‘sadagraha’ meaning ‘firmness in a good cause’. Gandhi liked the word but as it did not fully represent the whole idea, he changed it ‘satyagraha’, ‘the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence’ [Abinash Chandra Dutta Memorial Lecture, CU,2009,p-5]

97 Translated from PD’s article written in Bengali Gramke Tumi Sudhu Vengecho, Gore Toloni(i.e. You have not constructed but only destroyed village) published in Desh, 65th Year, No. 8, 7 February, 1998, p-52.

For this reason, PD could not be bracketed with the doctrinaire communists. Since his entry into communist fold was mediated by his experience in national revolutionary politics, as an activist, the imperatives of searching a path led him to curve out the niche for himself during 1930s. Anyway, he was not a formal member of a communist group till early 1930s. After a brief period of interruption due to his illness in 1932-33 he was brought to Suri jail and then interned in Nanur in Birbhum district. Thereafter he was kept under surveillance in Khairasol till 1937. Since it was not a confinement of a traditional type, he could manage to establish rapport with the surrounding village life by mixing with those at the bottom line in society and acquired insights into the problems of rural vicinage.

It might be mentioned here that PD’s internment in Birbhum coincided with Gandhi-led Civil Disobedience Movement in early 1930s in India. In Birbhum this movement was rather weak as evident from the writings of Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury. In *Birbhumer Prekshapate Rajnaitik Andolan: Satchallish Theke Sottar Ebang AagePore* (i.e. *Political Movements in Birbhum: Nineteen Fortyseven- Nineteen Seventy, Before and After*, First Part) Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury stated, ‘even amongst the Hindus differences in leadership coupled with communal (actually caste-wise) schism were glaring. The leaders hailed from the Mukherjees, Chatterjees, and the huge mass of local people were made up of Hanri,
Bagdi, Muchi, Dom with hardly any struggle for altering the latter’s lifestyle, habits and tradition in society’. To the Marxists, the point was of tremendous significance from the angle of organizing mass movement in future. It led to the realization that any future movement must not only seek power in stereotyped fashion, but more importantly, it must reach out to the people at the grassroots and develop awakening among them.

In this context it may be noted that PD’s strategy of developing a fairly good public relation with the ordinary village folk implied his intention to prepare a field of future class struggle in Birbhum. According to Marxism, class struggle was the engine and mechanism to bring about fundamental social and political transformations in a class-society. In the aftermath of the Great Depression in the nineteen thirties prices of food grains, paddy for instance, got declined, leading to destitution of rural bottom-line. The resultant discontent, specially among the small peasantry made the soil fertile for radical political mobilization. Dwelling on the history of the formation of peasant organizations and movements in Bengal during 1937-38, Md. Abdullah Rosul, a communist organizer in Bengal having a long experience of working in the peasant front of the Communist Party of India, referred to the release of many political

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100 According to Prafulla Gupta, at that time simultaneously PD became homoeopath doctor of the villagers, their teacher as well as the arbitrator of local disputes. Gupta, Prafulla, *Comrade Pannatal Dasgupta*, Kolkata, 1953, p-11.
prisoners in the late 1930s. This, according to him, provided peasant movements with new leadership because many of them were imbued with Marxist ideas of class struggle. Of those, who lived in villages joined peasant movements and linked up socialist ideas to the socio-economic issues in the countryside.\textsuperscript{101} It was this background in which PD’s work from a village centre in Birbhum to implement his ideas of communist movement needs to be appreciated.

Taking all these into account, if we turn to a brief review of PD’s ideas and activities within the frame of the national revolutionary phase we would see that this period marked his entry into active revolutionary politics. The journey, however, came to a halt with his arrest in connection with Mechua Bazar case. His ideas and activities during this phase, as has been delineated, bore out his youthful patriotic drive that led to his association with violent revolutionary groups. Their ideas and techniques had an important role in shaping his political thinking, and his activities had tenuous connection with mass-movement or people’s revolution. During 1920s they appeared to be ‘meeting violence with violence’. It was neither national in terms of spatial scope, nor ideationally revolutionary. To qualify for that his middle class discontentment had to be dovetailed with anti-imperialist, anti-feudal consciousness of the workers and peasants to form a united front against

the British power. The Mechua Bazar incident, that brought him to the forefront in public domain for the first time, was certainly not an attempt to involve the masses in the said programme. Therefore, in spite of its radical underpinnings, the act was basically confined to a few localized pockets.

Yet, on retrospect, Mechua Bazar episode was not an attempt in vain. It highlighted the limitations of the entire exercise. The realization that mere violent activism could not be the line of revolutionary mass movement became an important lesson which PD learnt through experience. This along with his study of Marxist literature led to change in his ideas under detention during 1930s. But it was also true that at that time a predominant belief among the cross-section of revolutionaries in India and abroad was to regard terrorism as a necessary phase of revolution. Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar noted in his work *In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programme* by quoting a revolutionary manifesto that “terrorism is not the complete revolution and the revolution is not complete without terrorism. It can be supported by an analysis of any and every revolution in history.”\(^\text{102}\) In this sense, the Mechua Bazar case could be claimed to represent a stage in the development of the activities of the revolt group of revolutionaries in Bengal and their daring conception of revolutionary action. So, it may be

reckoned both approximately national in its imaginative compass and revolutionary in spirit and intent of the participants.

With regard to the use of violence, there was a belief among the rank and file of the revolutionaries that if arms could be procured then common people would join their rank at the time of insurrection. PD, it has been noted earlier, subscribed to this line of thinking. It had an element of anarchism in so far as the revolutionaries lacked in any clear definition of positive programme, except the ideal of freedom, for which they stressed the violent overthrow of the colonial rule. But it did not play down the significance of enthusiasm of the revolutionaries born of intense nationalist urge that independence was to be won.

However, the question was how far the impact of Marxism during this transition period was really substantive in transforming PD's ideas and activities. It was because while from Marxism PD derived ideas and inspiration for radical collective action, there was enough difficulty in motivating his followers about the distant goal of communism—tasks involving protracted class struggle and patience, in contrast to, rapid offensive to strike terror among the colonial rulers. From this, we might assume that at the fag end of this phase certain ideational tension might play at the back of PD's mind. Yet, it was not typical of PD, but it could be explained in terms of typical feature of the contemporary epoch. Mid-1930's represented an age of gradual conversion of terrorists to
communism—“a creed”, said Ashok Kumar Mukhopadhyay, “not in accord with the status of the average terrorist, who is recruited from the ‘bourgeoisie’, but one which he was persuaded to adopt as a path to his ideal of revolution...”

Seen in this perspective, PD’s case as we have discussed above indicated development of his ideas and activities through a complex process.

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