Chapter IV

Gandhian Phase: Embracing Gandhian Philosophy (1952-1962)

PD spent 11 long years in jail in connection with Dum Dum-Basirhat armed raid case from July 1951 till his release on 15 August 1962 under amnesty by the government of West Bengal. During this long period of incarceration his political thought underwent radical transformation. He moved away from his hitherto political conviction in violent armed struggle to usher in a socialist society in India to espouse a philosophy of constructive intervention in rural society under the influence of Gandhi’s ideas of peaceful change. An indomitable rebel himself, this leader of RCPI realized through reading and analyses of Gandhian literature and also through discussion with different leaders and scholars that Gandhi sought a radical change in the human behavior to bring about a macro-change—an exploitation-free just order in society. Gandhi’s ideas impressed his thought at this crucial phase of his soul-searching under imprisonment. Hence this chapter deals with his appreciation of the Gandhian perspective while in prison during 1950s that led him to embrace Gandhian philosophy.

In contrast to violent seizure of the state power that defined the nature of his activities till 1950-51, Gandhian phase of PD’s thought and activities (1952—1999) was outcome of remarkable shift from ultra-leftist
orientation of his ideas and conduct in the Marxist phase. He admitted that “revolution is necessary and the capacity to wage struggle is necessary, but today it is no longer valid to assert that the use of arms is inevitable and is the essence of a revolution. There is no fundamental contradiction between the spirit behind Lenin’s views and Gandhiji’s non-violent struggle. While the Marxists talk about a classless society to be brought about through class struggle, Gandhi pointed to the goal of a non-violent, classless sarvodaya society to be created through non-violent means...Whatever may be the tactical differences between the two, what are common to both are the basic ideal and the stress on the need for struggle.” This sea-change in his views and ideas requires examination to explain the turn of his psyche and outlook from 1952 onwards.

His newly developed perception was manifest first in his serious interest in Gandhian literature. The product of his engrossing study and his reflections as a communist revolutionary to appreciate Gandhi’s ideas was his magnum opus Gandhi Gabeshana (i.e. research on Gandhi). We shall examine this writing to understand the distinct turn of his thinking from the early fifties. In the words of K V Subrahmonyan, the English translator of Gandhi Gabesana, this book was the fruit of a

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transformation which came into PD’s life. Later during this period of imprisonment PD wrote another piece entitled *Gram Deshe Kaj Kara* (i.e. working in rural areas, published in 1958). It carried his thoughts on constructive works in the countryside that bore strong semblance with Gandhi’s ideas.

However, the complexity of the turn in his case lies in the fact that it was not at all an abrupt transformation of his ideas. The point to be noted here is that in 1951 PD was in his forties. At that stage of life sudden and fundamental conversion of one’s views was generally unlikely. It naturally raises the question regarding crucial transformation of his mind. It evokes our attention more because it is concerned with a theoretically important point. That is, under what circumstances a man of radical politics becomes a champion of peaceful social re-construction. To analyse this issue, it is necessary here to dwell on his soul-searching during incarceration from July 1951 to August 1962 and formation of his thoughts on rural reconstruction followed by his works at a number of remote rural pockets. Hence, discussion, on this Gandhian phase of PD’s thought and activities, has been designed to uncover the development of his thought in the intervening period of his detention from 1951 to 1962.

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335 Ibid, see the translator’s introduction, p-xvi. In a personal conversation on 16.7.2011 K.V. Subrahmonyan called it a metanoia or spiritual transformation, said Prof. Susan Vishwanathan in her review article on this book.
We have already mentioned that the utter failure of the Dum Dum-Basirhat action lent a shocking blow to the line of his radical political activities i.e. armed struggle for seizure of state power. Also when police repression mounted and trials of treason started in courts, the militancy of his group diminished considerably. The prosecution succeeded in getting most of the arrested members of this RCPI group convicted on various criminal charges amounting to life imprisonment. It was those long years of penal confinement that gave PD the much-needed time and opportunity to evaluate his own activities and those of the leftists, Congress leaders including the role of Gandhi in India and analyse the situation in the country in the light of his experience.

After the political debacle of the RCPI group in 1949-50, retreat from the extremist political path probably was the only alternative left to act sensibly and behave in a responsible manner. So, tremendous circumstantial pressure had built on PD to revise his political line. One of the clearest lessons derived from the defeat of Dum Dum-Basirhat action was that there should be strong mass-support at the back of such radical political programme. Although in 1946-47 there was massive popular upheavals in India, people's conception in India had undergone crucial change after she achieved independence from British rule in August 1947. India's independence created a feeling amongst the rank and file that it was a kind of victory and freedom. The political implication of this
crucial change in public mind, it seems, was largely ignored at the time of planning the attack by PD.

Unlike the die-hard revolutionary position taken towards the later part of the Marxist phase of his thought and activities, his revised views in early 1950s were revealed in later admission of inadequacy in the evaluation of the circumstances by many leftists of his times. In *Revolutionary Gandhi* he termed it as “a fallacy of the time” to regard “that the country was ready and the masses were prepared for revolution” in the late forties. So, in the absence of revolutionary consciousness among the masses, in his reformed opinion the formation of armed militia by handful people was far from serious revolutionary preparation. This changed perception was indicative of noticeable transformation of PD’s ultra-leftist strain of thought as he subjected his Marxian understanding to rigorous analysis. This was meshed with the appraisal of changed circumstances after India’s independence when the old way of functioning along armed revolutionary line appeared to be discredited for its grossly lop-sided approach and disregard of mass contacts. All these probably led him to look beyond the Marxist frame of class conflict and work out a suitable alternative to the radical political path. As he observed in a later writing, “I had dreamt of a classless society free from

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337 Ibid, p-450.
exploitation after Marx and Engels. But afterwards I came to realize that true freedom (mukti) cannot be achieved by externally imposed idealism...The real path is that of Rabindranath and Gandhi. They said, real India lives in villages. Hence India will never prosper until the work of village development will be complete." It encapsulates PD’s wise realization at a later stage of his life. He probably realized that the seizure of state power by violent means could not be an appropriate way to seek liberation of the masses. The ideal way was one prescribed by Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, who reminded the importance of working in villages with people at the grassroots. Their observation that it was necessary to ignite awareness and instill values of equality and unity in the minds of rural folk for generating their self-force, which appealed to PD’s mind. Though it was his later realization, the process of ideological shift towards it can be said to have started in prison when he embarked on the study of Gandhian literature to be able to find a path after the failure of Dum Dum-Basirhat action.

This, however, did not imply that he took uncritical recourse to Gandhi’s ideas or was completely swayed by them. On the contrary, in Gandhi Gabeshana, he demonstrated exemplary open mind, sharp and impartial thinking. As he told in the epilogue “My idea has not been to focus all attention on or to limit myself to Gandhiji alone. I have wanted, through

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Dasgupta, Pannalal, *Grama Tumi Sudhu Vengecho, Gore Toloni*, (i.e. you have not developed villages, rather broken them), *Desh*, 7 February, 1998.
the medium of Gandhiji, to view and comprehend the entire history of that period. I look upon Gandhi, Marx, Lenin and other men of the age as forming a powerful giant telescope and introscope, if I may use that word to mean an instrument which shows what goes on within my mind. Had I limited the study to Gandhi, the individual, then a dogma would have surely come out of it. But as a result of not so limiting the study, the subject-matter has become so vast...”339 In another portion of the book he stated in no uncertain terms that “India today finds herself in the midst of a deep current of radical change, and here, along with Gandhiji’s thoughts and teachings, we have also to actively adopt and apply various other ideologies...We have to constantly re-orient our ideology and give new meanings to old words where the old meanings may have no value at all.”340 It makes the point amply clear that PD did not intend to confine himself to any single ideological compartment, nor he thought of writing a hagiography on Gandhi. We have to find out why then he chose to reflect on Gandhi’s ideas and authored Gandhi Gabeshana in 1954-55. For one thing, it seems that PD found in Gandhi’s thought a morally powerful tool of struggle to bring in change in common people. It was also probable that he being the part of the historical time it was natural on his part to reflect on the ideas that Gandhi had represented. As such, the

340 Ibid, p-466.
purpose was not to make a definitive statement, but to engage in an exercise to find a way out of his tortuous mind pressed and besieged by searching of a path.

Going through his writing in *Gandhi Gabeshana* one is bound to be amazed by the level and depth of his knowledge of Gandhi’s ideas and Marxian literature and thus, ‘the special historical viewpoint’ from which he had written the book. It really creates the impression that having grounded in Marxian doctrine and yet, freely critiquing the leftists’ blinkered approach to Gandhi and Indian national movement through an elaborate discussion on Gandhi’s ideas on wide range of issues, he was out to explore a new path. His writing in this book reflected his reasoned understanding of past events and his volition to move ahead in the spirit of ‘search for truth, tireless scientific inquiry, love for exploration, and alert mind’. To quote him, “Conditions in India and the world have changed, the spirit of the times has changed, and there are new problems confronting men. Had Gandhiji been alive today, he would have been obliged to change himself too and move ahead if he were to personally give leadership again in the new conditions. It is very difficult to speculate what Gandhiji would have done today on the basis of the events and actions of the past alone. For, what is needed is not dogma but

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341 Ibid, p-443.
342 Ibid, p-466.
creative thinking. This shows that although Gandhi’s ideas lent a new vision and dimension to his thought during the fifties, this did not constrict his views. Rather, there was an inherent dynamism in his inquiring mind. This was why he wanted to intervene in diverse fields of activities viz. national integration, refugee resettlement at Dandakaranya etc without getting stuck to only rural pockets for works of village reconstruction.

However, a careful reading of this book suggests that it was not mere fleeting change that motivated him to revise his radical political views. Rather, it would be overly simplistic to argue that his turn towards Gandhian ideas during fifties was prompted solely by the experience of failure of the armed action in 1949. That left a dent on his mind undoubtedly. But the fact was that after Dum Dum-Basirhat action he wanted to reorganize for more such strikes. So, there was no immediate change of his mind. That was why, when PD expressed his interest in Gandhian techniques of struggle in his epistolary correspondence from jail with Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-1972), an eminent anthropologist and Gandhi’s secretary, during the Bengali months Paus-Falgun 1359 (i.e. 1952), the police did not place much reliance on it. Even pleas for his clemency release on the ground that the subject had

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344 These correspondence were published in two issues of Sanibarer Chithi a popular Bengali magazine edited by late Sajanikanta Das. These issues were those published in the month of Pous and Falgun according to Bengali calendar 1359.
changed his political views concerning violent movement were not considered acceptable by the police.\textsuperscript{345}

However, the process of introspection had already started in him. His statement in the court bore testimony of his changing views. To quote him, "...in my considered view violence is becoming a dangerous means defeating its very purpose...yet the way for non-violence for the solution of all conflicts was not an easy one... And non-violent solution of all social conflicts and antagonisms will not be very smooth as some may imagine...But in spite of these, all serious political workers must today think more and more of other means than violent ones. It is wrong to say that I am a believer in violence...my faith has only one ultimate loyalty that is the loyalty to truth in the service of mankind. If, in its interest, one has to give up violence, he must do it unhesitatingly." It clearly testifies a signal change in PD's realization. Although he did not idealize non-violence for "it had also been misused as an excuse for cowardice and abject surrender to powerful evil", noticeably he did not also attach any value of usefulness to violence as means of bringing about desirable social transformation. But non-violence cannot be forced specially in a hostile environment. One has to move consciously according to the exigencies of a particular set of circumstances. Therefore, the logic of PD's perceptual change in jail has to be understood in the context of a

\textsuperscript{345} See the notes of police officers in the margins of prayers of persons seeking release of PD. IB File 316/28, serial 125/28.
host of factors viz. the state of his mind, the environment of confined life, suffering of party comrades, the condition of his health that rapidly declined\(^{346}\), and above all, intellectual stimulus he received from Gandhian literature. It seems reasonable that a complex interplay of these factors set him to reconcile Marxian understanding with Gandhi’s ideas of united non-violent struggle. Thus an eclectic orientation gradually crystallized to inform PD’s thought during the fifties and thereafter. He regarded the Gandhian way as complementary to the Marxian project.

The inclination of his developing ideas was evident in his statement before the Special Tribunal in April, 1954. He said, “But today the nature of violence and the weapons to carry it out have become so overwhelmingly overpowering and devastating that there is no longer any scope for moral and creative intellect in violent struggles...That is why violence must be rejected as useless and as devourer of all morals without which man cannot live...And historically, we have today—I believe—after long, strenuous, bloody and painful struggles—come to such a stage when many of the weapons that were once so useful shall have to be abandoned as obsolete for the task ahead...Ordinary men must be strengthened with some other weapons.”\(^{347}\) This aptly points to his new

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\(^{346}\) It is learnt from IB file 316-20 that PD could not attend the court during trial due to his suffering from chronic colitis during entire February 1954. Besides, in a letter dated 2 March 1960, to B.C. Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal PD’s mother Giribala Dasgupta also expressed her concern for continuous deterioration of health of PD in prison.

\(^{347}\) Statement of Comrade Pannalal Dasgupta before the Special Tribunal, RCPI publication, p-11-3.
vision that the path of violent struggle would be futile to pursue in future, because violence leaves little scope for constructive activity and initiative for the masses at the grassroots. Besides, in his emerging feeling of dislike for violence PD seemed to have discerned that armed struggle, insofar as it involves secret conspiracies and deceit, tends to thwart the very ideals of these struggles. So, peaceful change was to be given priority over violence, for violence was often associated with intrigues. In this PD was definitely influenced by Gandhi’s ideas of truthfulness in practice and conduct that lay underneath non-violent fight against the opponent. As he mentioned in Revolutionary Gandhi, the English rendering of his Gandhi Gabeshana: “Gandhiji believed that it was unjust to employ secretiveness and deceptive strategy in a struggle against an adversary. His moral objection to armed, violent struggle was mainly on the ground that it was inevitably accompanied by secretiveness, underhand methods and deceit. It was not the sight of death that turned him non-violent...It was against revenge, secret conspiracies, cunning and fraud, all of which pervade violent conflicts, that Gandhiji vehemently protested. For all this surreptitiousness and deceit drag men lower and lower to their ultimate fall and perdition.”348 It was the Gandhian identification of means: no good end could be attained by evil means, and violence was evil that would defeat the end ultimately.

348 Dasgupta, Pannalal, Revolutionary Gandhi, Translated by K.V. Subrahmonyan, Earth Care, Kolkata, 2011, p-7.
Since PD himself was involved in covert armed activities, he realized the want of moral force behind these endeavours. This was why Gandhi’s ideas, particularly his emphasis on unity of means and ends made a deep impress on PD’s ideas during fifties. He was quick to appreciate the importance of ethical underpinnings in the fight for a new social order that led him to shun the path of violent politics and to veer towards Gandhi’s ideas. Henceforth, his views revealed a complex reconciliation between his understandings of Marxism with Gandhi’s ideas. In his words, “there is a mutual attraction between Gandhian morality and Marxist realism.” This was exactly what he sought to reconcile in *Gandhi Gabeshana*. It reflects his intellectual quest by plunging into Gandhian philosophy from an analytically refined Marxist angle. The issues thus raised and the uncommon approach taken to address them was of momentous import for the development of his ideas and activities.

In PD’s words, “*Gandhi Gabeshana* may mean two things: an inquiry into Gandhiji’s experiments with truth and inquiries made by others regarding Gandhiji. In this book, I have tried to examine Gandhiji’s thoughts and works from the Marxist point of view. I believe that I understand the cult of Marxism-Leninism fairly well. I have read the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Mao Tse-tung…and have put their ideas to use in the field of practical politics. Both in prison and outside, I have lived the major part of my life along their philosophical
lines. As I involved myself in all areas of India’s freedom movement, I was also well acquainted with the Congress and the Gandhian movement...Indian communists have never tried properly to understand Gandhiji. So I have tried to acquaint people with the two most important phenomena and ideologies of our times, Gandhism and Leninism. I have explained Gandhism in the light of Marxism and also analysed Marxian thought and action in the Gandhian light. This was a necessary exercise for, otherwise, there would be no area at all for mutual understanding and the firmament of reason would forever remain darkened by the clouds of superstition, blind devotion and prejudice. It spells out his intent to re-present Gandhi before the Indian leftists, who debunked him to be a bourgeois leader and therefore, neglected the value of his movements to a large extent. In contrast, he called the attempt of the communists to prove Gandhi a bourgeois leader a ‘fallacious thesis’. In his opinion “if Gandhi was to be viewed as a representative of the reactionary bourgeoisie, it would be impossible to explain any event of our times or the history of modern India. It would only serve to weaken and trivialize Marxism itself.”

This was his critical view of the Marxist approach towards Gandhi. He talked of Gandhi’s historical role in leading anti-imperialist freedom movement, in ushering in a participatory democracy in India and various

349 Ibid, p-viii-ix
350 Ibid, p-469.
other social movements for the liberation of the downtrodden masses as 'profoundly revolutionary from the Marxist point of view'\textsuperscript{351}. To quote him, "Even if we regard Gandhiji as only cast in the mould of a great peasant, it need not prevent us from attaching to his role an anti-imperialist, new democratic meaning in the light of Marxist exposition..."\textsuperscript{352}

From this standpoint he also assailed the aversion of the Indian leftists towards the Harijan movement led by Gandhi. To quote PD, "They were unable to understand the significance of the Harijan movement and looked upon it not as a class struggle but rather as a ploy to evade that struggle. The trouble with the leftists was that for them class struggle simply meant a conflict between the worker and the owner, or between the cultivator and the landlord and nothing beyond these. By sticking to this one aspect, they ended up misinterpreting the Marxist concept. When Marx said that history was the product of class struggle, he did not have any particular kind of class struggle in mind. The Marxist concept of class struggle has to be understood in the light of its wider connotations."\textsuperscript{353} On one hand, this was based on his perception of the significance of various social movements led by Gandhi. The assessment of Gandhi’s contribution led him to look at the inner harmony between

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid, p-405
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid, p-411
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid, p-319
Marxism and Gandhism since both had a common ideal of human freedom. On the other, he pressed for reinterpretation of Marxian concepts in the light of Gandhi’s ideas and movements for proper application of the former in tune with societal reality in India. As he stressed with depth of his matured understanding that it would be unrealistic to call for a revolution simply on the idea of proletarianism.\(^{354}\)

It was because revolutionary transformation was to come ‘step by step through gradual awakening of the masses and through a combination of big and small struggles’\(^{355}\).

However, after having engaged in communist movement for over a decade when he leaned towards Gandhi’s ideas and constructive works in the countryside within the existing state structure, it was naturally construed as deviation from the Marxist path. In PD’s words, “In the perspective of my past political life this constructive thinking seemed to be contradictory and amazing to good many people. This was so even among some of my erstwhile comrades and co-workers.”\(^{356}\) His altered view in early fifties was that India could peacefully advance towards socialism. Although the ‘Nehruvian state’ in India took the shape of a bourgeois state,\(^{357}\) PD upheld the view that the direction of motion of

\(^{354}\) Ibid, p-318

\(^{355}\) Ibid, p-318

\(^{356}\) Translated from Gran: Dashe Kaj Kara (1), Introduction to the second edition, written by PD and published in Compass, 11February, 1984, p-3

history would drag national leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) to construct socialist society in India. PD was probably impressed by the socialist moorings in Nehru’s thought which found an eloquent expression in the Avadi resolution of the Congress in January 1955. But during 1960s ‘he held the Congress leaders in power responsible for their alleged failure to eradicate various social evils in the country.’

Guided by the belief in socialism, he held that despite differences there was a similarity between India and China “in their colonial and semi-colonial imperialist situation and significance. It is for this sole reason that as independent countries they have the same kind of social problems that call for socialistic solutions...just as the building up of socialism has become the only national goal in China, the socialistic pattern of society has been proclaimed as the national goal in India too.” It shows that PD was not only aware of the Congress decision of constructing a socialistic pattern of society, but he had also begun to believe in the peaceful road to socialism, and discovered in Gandhi’s ideas a source of inspiration to work out a new path. Gandhian orientation became a cardinal feature of his new thinking from the mid-fifties onwards.

If we delve deeper we would see that he kept his belief in socialism unaltering beyond the period of his incarceration. It was only the

359 Dasgupta, Pannalal, Revolutionary Gandhi, Translated by K.V. Subrahmonyan, Earth Care, Kolkata, 2011, p-405.
doctrinaire and dogmatic reasoning and training he found in most of the Indian communists that he decried in *Gandhi Gabeshana*. That was why, albeit his writing was sharply critical of the Marxist understanding of Gandhi’s role, he continued to believe in the Marxian vision of socialism. But in spite of his socialist moorings he gravitated towards the Gandhian frame in unusual way. It was unusual in two senses, first being the time when the shift in his ideas occurred was quite important. At that time Gandhian ideas and Gandhian leadership, were not the kind of stuff that the communists considered ideal. On the contrary, there was serious reservation to talk about enrichment of Marxian perspective by referring to Gandhi. Hence, PD’s deliberation on Gandhi’s contribution was naturally unacceptable to the leftist leaders.

Secondly, he had shown that Gandhi was not a Marxist, socialist or communist. Yet, he considered that Gandhi, “albeit unwittingly, was preparing the ground for socialism in India.” It was very unconventional reading of Gandhi’s role and deeds. Indeed, he was thinking Gandhi anew in terms of supplementing the Marxist project of ushering in a revolutionary social order.

Also his deep soul-searching was coterminous with important political changes in the country. In this regard it may be noted that in 1951 the erstwhile policy of the CPI underwent significant changes. The CPI leadership finally called off the armed struggle in 1952. It realized its
political excesses during late 1940s and drove towards forging a broad democratic front. As an intelligent organizer PD probably realized the significance of this political switch-over from radical path to the mainstream democratic politics. It seems from the time of this event that it might have had an impact on his mind.

During early fifties Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982), a disciple of Gandhi, started walking through Telengana district of present Andhra Pradesh requesting landowners to donate land voluntarily to the landless which came to be called Bhoodan (literally, land-gift) movement. This created a popular churning which had drawn PD’s attention at that time. It is found from police report that he had written a letter from prison to the editor of Sarvodaya monthly magazine at that time. In the said communication he described the villages where lands under the influence of the movement were being given away as ‘Tirthasthan’ or pilgrimages of India which should be emulated in other villages.\(^{360}\) It shows PD’s appreciation of the far-reaching significance of the movement. But at the same time he felt that “Land re-distribution alone cannot bring about a major change; at least it will not meet the demands of socialism. Besides, merely by securing the collective right of all the villagers only to village land, we cannot bring prosperity to the villages in the new society.”\(^{361}\)

\(^{360}\) IB file 316/28 PF

\(^{361}\) Dasgupta, Pannalal, *Revolutionary Gandhi*, Translated by K.V. Subrahmonyan, Earth Care, Kolkata, 2011, p-216.
Revolutionary Gandhi he posed the question: "What about the development of industries? Gandhiji had said that mere land reforms could not bring about the all-round development of the village...Full use will have to be made of village industries also."\(^{362}\) This shows that he acquired from Gandhi a comprehensive conception of a constructive movement in village of which *bhoodan* was a part. But PD, as the above quotation suggested, believed that *bhoodan* in itself was not sufficient to reach the goal of a just and economically viable society unless the process was supplemented by a drive towards suitable industrialization.

In practice, however, PD was disheartened to see the limitations of the said programme. To quote him, "the *bhoodan* people, including Jaya Prakash Narayan, are still silent on socialism. On the other hand, Vinobaji says that the real ground for constructive action can be prepared only in the *gramdan* villages where one will find the inspiration to dedicate oneself to such action. However, till now we do not find signs of any such work being done in these villages."\(^{363}\) All these unmistakably indicate that his thought was inclining more in favour of constructive intervention at the level of village society such that the building of a new society by people themselves with their direct labour could become easier.

PD’s conversation with Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose in the backdrop of which *Revolutionary Gandhi* was written also corroborates his penchant

\(^{362}\) Ibid, p-216.
\(^{363}\) Ibid, p-217
for conceptualizing social change along the lines of the ideas and activities of Gandhi’s disciples like Vinoba Bhave, Dr. J C Kumarappa (4 January, 1892—30 January, 1960) and Dhiren Majumdar (1901-1978). This indicated that PD’s militant attitude of attacking the capitalist state was changed noticeably, not his overall attitude of opposition to the exploitative capitalist system. Much like Gandhi’s apprehension of the state, PD expressed his lack of hope on government of the state as well as the political parties for not creating a massive movement in society that was badly needed for ridding the people of narrowness of mind and vision. Besides, in the early 1960s he noticed that active role of the Indian state in public welfare was slowing down. In his words, “There are many inherent contradictions and manipulations in the planning of the state. The mill-owners made ceaseless campaign and put up stiff resistance against Ambar charkha. The state fears to be firm on this issue. There is hardly any sincerity on the planning to refurbish village industries and to introduce co-operative farming. Even various forces within the government are opposed to this effort.”

Hence, not leaving these matters to the state, he was pondering in terms of redefining the idea of constructive works as a regenerative social movement.

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364 Dasgupta, Pannalal, *Gram Deshe Kaj Kara* (Originally written in Bengali under the pseudonym A. Meghaban), 1958, p-75-6.
365 PD’s letter to Prof. Nirmana Kumar Bose published in the Bengali magazine called *Sanibarer Chithi* under the caption *Jailer Chithi* meaning prison letter. This particular issue was published in the month of *Poush*, 1359, according to the Bengali calendar. It corresponds to December 1952. See p-247-8.
PD's second letter to Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose was more exhaustive in which he dealt with the economic aspects of the new production system and discussed how charkha, handloom, bellows (hapor) etc i.e. small machineries of village and cottage industries could be made economically viable. He emphasised the need to bring these instruments of manual labour under collective effort to involve 'billions of hands' or 'unused labour time and skill' in villages on the principle of 'to each according to his or her labour' to protect them from the onslaught of profit driven monetary capitalist economy.

However, like Gandhi, he did not suggest abolition of private property. Rather, he put forward an idea to create a system which would be based on 'individual right on property but its collective use' to avail dual advantages— interest and initiative of individuals participating in the production and at the same time to cut their selfishness to encourage collective spirit and mutual aid. He put forward the notion of voluntary co-operation in which the land would be held jointly by the owners, big and small, and would be cultivated in a co-operative manner. Thus, co-operative farming ensuring higher volume of yield and productivity of labour would automatically lessen dependence of the poor peasants on such exploitative institutions like usury. Along with this, weaving and other productive activities in village, he expected, would help banish poverty and idleness from village life by creating a congenial condition in
which all would be bonded as one well-knit family. So, not through violent methods of conflict and force, but by inculcating the spirit of collective life among people in the countryside that a just village society could be formed became the idée fixe of PD’s thoughts from 1950s onwards. What he however did not spell out was the point as to how far such works could be done successfully without engaging into a negotiation with the state. Evidently there was an underlying indifference in his attitude to the state in 1952-53. According to Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose this attitude of PD was prompted by the view that there was no hope of positive help from the state since it was moving blindfold. This view of PD got changed during 1972-76, when he came to be actively associated with the State Planning Board of the Government of West Bengal and worked on the Comprehensive Area Development Programme.

In his thought during 1950s we find an emerging tendency towards village-oriented activities. These seemed to him a new strategy to draw people into a piecemeal transformation of their lives by injecting values of co-operation and collective labour in individual minds. He therefore laid emphasis on changing the mental make-up of villagers. According to Prof. Amlan Datta, unlike Marx’s philosophy based on materialism, PD spoke about ‘hriday paribartan’ (literally, change of one’s heart) by

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urging village people to think from the angle of common bond amongst them, instead of narrow individual gain, rivalry and conflict. However, according to Prof. Amlan Datta, this transformation in PD's ideas from his earlier belief in ushering in socialism by violent means to peaceful reconstruction of society was not a unique phenomenon. In his opinion it was found in other personalities of the day like Jaya Prakash Narayan. So, there was a distinct direction of the change of ideas that occurred in the context of that age and individuals response to it.\textsuperscript{367} So, PD's was no exception.

In \textit{Gram Deshe Kaj Kara} written in jail in 1958 PD talked about the responsibility of common villagers both to change their lives and in the formation of a new society based on new social, economic and cultural relations amongst themselves. He thought that this could not be achieved by institutional regulations or coercion. Instead, there should be what he called \textit{‘lok shakti’} (literally, people’s strength) to run the affairs of society with the objective of all-round, integrated and inclusive rural uplift. It was to be seen that the panchayet did not exert its power in forcible manner. Else, it would spoil the unity and put peaceful transformation of village in jeopardy.

\textsuperscript{367} Interview with Prof. Amlan Datta (1924-2010) at his Salt Lake residence on 23.11.2003. Prof Datta kept in touch with PD’s activities in village during 1980s and 1990s. He also accompanied PD during his invitation visit in Bangladesh in 1987.
In this book he put forward the scheme of fusion of private property with co-operative arrangement of production by villagers themselves, by bringing scattered lands under one integrated system to introduce co-operative farming along with land reform legislations to boost up redistribution of lands among the landless. At that time his belief was probably that inequality and discontent in village society could be met in this way. But there is no gainsaying the fact that at that time PD’s views were conceptually simple. He did not quite comprehend the problem of switching over to a co-operative production system. Later he himself stated, “Co-operative venture is weak in West Bengal and because of faulty and corrupt practices people developed a certain resistance to formal co-operatives.”

It seems that during fifties and sixties, he probably overestimated the role of values of fellow-feeling and simple-life-style as the catalyst to bring about desired change in society. No doubt, values are important factors in structuring and restructuring a human society. But values in the sense of right and wrong are not abstract ideas. They are the function of one’s living experiences, interactions and relationships in and at different levels of society and its changing material conditions. From that angle it was quite an ambitious task for an individual to promote values of solidarity and camaraderie and to

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implement this. For this to realize, it was necessary to transform PD’s mission into a mass movement.

But in the early 1960s and even thereafter, PD was largely a solitary voice despite his persistent endeavours to propagate values of ‘new life’ and call for putting an end to all sorts of conflicts and inculcate fellow-feeling among all members of village community. The question however remains as to how far it was possible to develop ideal mentality free from authoritarian tendencies in the hierarchical socio-economic set up in the countryside that continues to be steeped in caste and class divisions. Until 1980s he could not also realise the implications of ever-increasing production that it was anti-nature and hence, unsustainable. Unless there was restraint, the building of a new society that was in harmony with nature could not be achieved. In that sense PD’s ideas regarding the creation of a new society was in an inchoate form during 1960s. However, above analyses made clear that PD’s ideas during incarceration in the 1950s underwent signal transformation. Although his revised line of ideas was opposite to his ideas in the Marxist phase, it was the result of his evaluation of his earlier ultra-left ideas and above all, the changed circumstances after India’s independence when functioning along armed revolutionary line appeared discredited. Although his belief in the ideal of human emancipation that Marxism initiated in him remained, his study of Gandhian literature and his appreciation of Gandhi’s programme of
constructive works in village led him to synthesize socialism and Gandhism. This lent his thinking from 1952 onwards a new orientation, which was reflected in his contemporary writings. The most interesting point about his thinking while in jail in the 1950s was that when embracing Gandhism as a path of social reconstruction, his observations in *Gandhi Gabesana* were evidences of his unbiased thought and his effort to evaluate the ideas of Gandhi and Marx in the light of practical experience. But his tragedy was that in the 1960s there was hardly any subscriber to his new ideas, which were imbued with an ethical overtone and his stress on creating a socialist co-operative village society.