Chapter V
Gandhian Phase: Varied ideas and interventions (1963-1999)

On release from jail on 15 August 1962 PD found opportunity to put his ideas and interest towards constructive works into practice. From 1963 to 1999 was a long phase of his life when his ideas and interventions related to socio-economic re-construction were remarkably varied. But fundamentally the peaceful and piecemeal road which he now undertook to create a harmonious village society was a Gandhian agenda. Still we see that the influence of the ideas of Rabindranath Tagore was equally powerful on his mind and activities during this phase of his career. All these will be discussed within this chapter to bring out the arenas where he struggled, how he tried to solve the problems and finally, the impact that he could create on people.

To begin with, he started contacting the people as well as the leaders of the left parties in order to get himself acquainted with the existing political situation and the general condition of the people of the country. He did not, however, move away completely from the political path, as evident from IB record. According to police reports, he visited Delhi in August-September 1962 and contacted top-ranking leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia et al to discuss the feasibility of the formation of a
democratic organization. Police sources also said that he attended several meetings held under the auspices of a four-party alliance among RSP, RCPI, FB (M) and BPI condemning the Chinese aggression and also expressed if a new party with minor left groups could be formed.\textsuperscript{369} West Bengal Police Abstract dated 14.9.1963 cited that the Howrah unit of RCPI (Rebel Group) organized a meeting on 3.9.1963. PD was present in the said meeting and delivered speech paying homage to the martyrs who had sacrificed their lives in 1959 food movement in West Bengal and urged the audience to unite for launching a similar movement over the existing food crisis.

However, if we examine his activities in the post-incarceration phase from 1963 onwards it would be clear that his political association was still alive, though it was not of militant nature like before. His continual contact with politics might be attributed to the political circle he belonged. As he stated, "Once I had my political affiliation. But gradually I felt that these affiliation-interests were making me more helpless and isolated. I, therefore, ceased to think in the old way and approached ...problems in a different way."\textsuperscript{370} It shows shift of his interest during 1960s from the realm of party politics towards a conscious exercise of motivating people for the creation of solidarity and awakening in society.

\textsuperscript{369} IB file 316/28 (PF), p-2135.
In a sense, this too was a politics of contention against the mainstream partisan politics, but of an altogether different variant like that of Gandhian activities. This path was difficult because unlike conventional politics where victory in election “at any cost without concern for principles” was the means of access to power, social re-construction was the larger realm where one might just end up with the struggle to inculcate new values in the minds of human beings acting in diverse social locations. As such, the focus of social reconstruction works was on the transformation in human nature by instilling values of unity and amity in place of existing ones that were produced by the old order in society. The task here was to reorient the gamut of social relationships to generate optimism and enthusiasm. This was probably what PD looked forward to when he talked about the necessity of positive thinking to get over the critical situation in early 1960s.

Seen in this context, social re-constructionism meant to work among people for refashioning their views and relationships with one another in local community, so that there could be greater mutual understanding and co-operation. It emanated from the conviction that these would bring in desired change in social order based on conscientious ends of life, collective labour, and non-violent social relations. It was a daunting task. But the difficulty of working through political institutions and state power

371 Ibid, p-5
often lay in the problems to reach out to the millions at the bottom and attendant problems of top-down thinking vis-à-vis people’s own thinking about the future goal and the ways of participation. Hence, PD felt that the role of the government should be one of facilitator in removing the hurdles confronted by the poor with regard to getting credit and other inputs. In short, the crux of the matter of reconstruction in his scheme of things could be reduced to the combined and concerted effort of all people to implement a colossal work-oriented plan and importance of values to unleash new energy and usher in new spirit in the masses. To quote PD from his writing, “An atmosphere of moral purity and true honesty in every sphere of life should be painstakingly created.” These formed the quintessential idea that developed into a perspective on social re-construction.

However, it may be noted here that some of his activities during the long period from August 1962 till his demise on 11 January 1999 were clear departure from the strand of Gandhian approach. For example, police files on him in the archive of West Bengal government speak of his role in rendering assistance, including arms training to the freedom fighters during Bangladesh liberation war in 1971. It was this relapse of the inertia of his pre-Gandhian behavior which indicated that PD did not

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373 Ibid, p-66
become a complete Gandhian. It was also evident in the publication of a book *Biplaber Darshan*, a translated version of *The Philosophy of the Revolution* written by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of Egypt from PD’s *Compass* Publication in December 1965. In the introduction of the said book PD discussed about revolution, and the revolutionary uprising of July 1952 against King Faruque in Egypt led by Nasser. It showed that he still believed in the necessity of revolution, though not directly through political means, but in terms of spirit of such acts that corresponded to Marxian principles—his pre-Gandhian ideological position.

But this time notably the leftist inclination in him did not resemble the same radical Marxian stance that characterised his early thought and actions as a champion of revolutionary communism. Rather, his views during 1950s and 1960s as found in his writings like *Gandhi Gabesana* were remarkably sober and unorthodox. This showed the formation of his thought in the aftermath of Dum Dum-Basirhat episode, which in spite of its predominant Gandhian orientation retained residues of his inherent Marxian proclivity. Hence, to make things clear, an attempt would be made in this chapter to draw up an illustrative inventory for highlighting PD’s diverse activities including his Gandhian, i.e. open, value-led, non-violent engagements in mobilizing people for social reconstruction, and those of non-Gandhian, i.e. secret, violent political elements in his ideas and activities.
During 1960s and thereafter, PD's ideas as well as mode of activism found articulation primarily through his editorship of *Compass*, a weekly news magazine in Bengali well-known for providing sharply analytical perspective on important contemporary events at home and abroad. The magazine was launched on February 10, 1964 and continues till to date, though in a lack-lustre and tenuous form in comparison to its carefully designed attractive illustration on the cover page and field reports during sixties and seventies. Yet, "the team behind the magazine", said PD, "did not deviate from the onus of finding out the right direction" or what he called *digdarshan* in Bengali. To quote him, "From its very inception, *Compass* had a distinct philosophy and outlook of its own: it aimed at finding and presenting the truth with painstaking effort. It wanted to make a positive assessment of all the major events, the social upheavals and

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374 The difference between the initial and later issues of *Compass* would be evident from perusal of its content in the 1960s and 1970s and those in the 1980s and 1990s. From an informative and intellectually oriented little magazine in the sixties containing separate sections on state and national level politics, Afro-Asian countries, Communist states, Western countries, Science and technology, industrial developments and problems (*Silpalok*), book reviews, performing arts and mass media like movies apart from letters from the readers, editorials etc. running over ninety pages, it gradually became thinner in content focusing on selective issues like agriculture, problems of rural society, carrying write ups on Gandhian life and struggle, ideas of village reconstruction, Tagore Society's projects and occasionally, discussion on major political and international events like disintegration of Soviet Union etc. In the sixties and seventies the constellation of contributors included scholars like Chinmohan Snehanbis, Gautam Chattapadhyay, Saibal Gupta, Golam Osmani, Rejaul Karim, Maitrayee Devi, Satish Chandra Dasgupta, Prafulla Gupta etc. apart from a host of its reporting team members. It was not the same in the nineties when *Compass* gradually fell from its earlier eminence. Although we find Prof. Amlan Datta, Ajit Narayan Basu, Tushar Kanjilal, Atin Goon, as major contributors to *Compass* in the 1970s, 1980s, it became a routine publication of the Tagore Society founded by PD.

375 In the editorial of the Compass dated February 10, 1990 PD wrote on the occasion of stepping into the 27th year of its publication that those who were behind the magazine did not deviate from the onus of finding out the right direction or what he called *digdarshan*. To quote him, "By tracing the succession of events the *Compass* would help establish the linkage of the roaring present with the past and future, and it would thereby make our lives and path more satisfying, duty bound and oriented to noble purposes." Translated from the editorial written in Bengali, *Compass*, February 10, 1990, p-1-2.
political turmoil. It tried to find correct answers to all the questions that arise in people’s minds. *Compass* wanted to find the general direction of man’s progress through all the ups and downs. Its conscious aim was to ensure that people, probably confused with the bewildering succession of contradictory events in the modern world do not lose the sense of direction, do not sink into pessimism, do not lose faith in Man.” All these were evident in the very nomenclature of the magazine signifying an instrument to instruct in its journey towards appropriate destination. It bore the imprint of PD’s sensitivity, inquisitive mind and his faith in the positive developments in the human community that could lead to the formation of the ‘new social order’ permeated by values of free and probing thought, enlightened leadership and co-operative efforts.

However, *Compass* was not an apolitical magazine. From its very inception it contained news and commentaries on different state-level politics—the issues that led to political mobilizations like ethnic movements in the North-East India, food movement in West Bengal in 1966 etc. It also covered political events at regional, national and international realms. A perusal of the discussions published in *Compass* would show that the basic tone of the writings was to evoke free and progressive political thinking than to endorse a narrow partisan approach.

For example, commenting on the election in Nagaland in January 1964

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376 *COMPASS:AN APPEAL*, a four-page publication dated January 1, 1990, signed by PD, clearly stated the origin and role of the magazine since its inception.
amidst the climate of political extremism and yet fair participation, the discussant in Compass concluded in an optimistic note that the election opened up a new way which should be utilized by the government, the Naga leaders and major groups in Assam. Similarly, in the midst of crises like refugee influx and ethnic separatism in India PD appealed through Compass to the Muslim leaders to agree to a discussion to chart out an amicable course of action. He wrote that without drawing the Muslims into the front row of a progressive movement, it was hard to achieve revolutionary transformation in the Indian sub-continent. All these showed that PD’s Compass was not the organ of news only, but it was imbued with his sense of purpose—underscoring the need of bold leadership to resolve conflicts, search for justice, and thereby bringing about desirable social transformation. However, we would see that this remained a wishful thinking because he could not do much in this direction despite his involvement in a number of activities towards social reconstruction, spanning over a period of three decades.

On contentious issues of refugee settlement, food movement etc, the Compass played an instrumental role in consciously promoting values of

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377 Dasgupta, Pannalal, Compass, 2 May, 1964, see the editorial, p-5-6.
378 Ibid.
379 For example, in the Compass editorial dated 3April 1971 PD spoke of the responsibility and necessity of adopting a bold role of the government and people of India in Bangladesh liberation struggle that was going in full swing at that time. Later in Compass dated 8October 1983 he reiterated the bold approach that India should not have withdrawn from Bangladesh so hastily. Instead, India should have taken the responsibility to develop Bangladesh by releasing more river water, joint agricultural initiatives and above all, by building a confederation between the two countries—the idea mooted by Ram Monohar Lohia. PD’s writing in Sarodiya Compass, 8 October, 1983, p-9.
understanding and took reasoned stand on current problems. “From a news-magazine during 1960s, it gradually became a magazine focusing attention on the issues of rural economy, agriculture and questioning the accepted notions of ‘development’ in the seventies and eighties.”

These helped push forward his activism across class and geographic lines to build the connective networks that later allowed his campaign to reach to new publics in Assam, Dandakaranya and beyond. But to assume the scale of a broader social movement, PD’s efforts needed more than the ‘push’ provided by the discourse articulated in a little magazine called Compass. It also needed eagerness of the masses to uphold his philosophy. To that end PD’s Compass could not deliver much because from the beginning it abjured populist and sensational journalism, even at the cost of prospective funds. He was emphatic that “however strenuous the journey might be we have to take the course of morally superior things (sreyo), not the cheap and attractive things (preyo).”

He knew that Compass would not be a commercially viable paper. He said, “It is a hard struggle for us to keep Compass going from week to week.”

This financial difficulty was sufficient indication that in spite of his intention to spread his ideas, his basic thrust on unity among common people and

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380 A Short Life-Sketch of Pannalal Dasgupta, A typed write up signed by Monoranjan Sadhukhan dated March 14, 1985, Calcutta, p-4.
381 Translated from the editorial of the Compass, 10 February, 1990.
382 COMPASS AN APPEAL, a four-page publication dated January 1, 1990, signed by PD.
his anti-capitalist line carried through Compass could not elicit much readership so as to keep its publication smoothly going.

He regretted that such a courageous, non-party, truth seeking magazine could not run well due to change in the taste of the readers. Even the workers in different projects of Tagore Society were not interested to imbibe the values that Compass stood for. This indicated that Compass carried discussion on the necessity of harmonious community living, not individualized, consumption oriented existence. All these were not entertaining in the popular sense. As early as February 1970 PD expressed doubts in Compass as to the extent to which the subjects like the demands of the hills men in India’s North-East, the need of cultural relations between East and West Bengal, reorientation of the agricultural system were at all able to reach the people amidst allround political hue and cry. To quote him from his writing in Compass, “When there is noise everywhere, it is perhaps difficult to hear the voice.” It spoke of his sense of realization that the task of Compass as integrated to the agenda of creating an enlightened mind in people was difficult to achieve in the conditions vitiated by party politics.

Here we may perincently recount some of the events since mid-1960s onward which drew his attention and shaped his initiatives through the

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383 *Sarodiya Compass*, the issue released on October, 1996.
384 Translated from the Bengali version published in *Compass*, 7 February, 1970, see the editorial by PD.
platform of the Compass. It provides a useful microcosm for understanding his changed ideas and the acts he performed. For instance, 1964, the year of Compass' birth was stirred by the portentous mass awakening in the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) against the imperialist rule and oppression by Pakistan. At that time, Compass was the only Bengali magazine which sent an intrepid reporter namely Sakuntal Sen to East Pakistan to collect data of the actual political and cultural situation which was in ferment there. It evinced great amount of empathy and courage that PD had shown in planning the risky fact-finding mission. This further drove him towards the cultural question and political movement in East Pakistan. It was through Compass he initiated to observe 21st February in memory of those martyrs who had laid down their lives in 1952 to defend the honour of the Bengali language in East Pakistan. As such, Compass was not just a literary front or a publication house. Under PD’s conscious guidance it functioned like a cultural wing or agency of a wider social campaign to promote new lines of thinking, alert and responsive mind towards important national and international events. This was evident when under the banner of this little magazine he came forward to “organize exhibitions of books from East Pakistan in Calcutta University, National Library and other centres to acquaint common people of West Bengal with the cultural trends and
developments in the ‘other Bengal’.”385 Through these efforts, he wished to create a forward-looking and non-communal atmosphere in West Bengal.

At times the Compass became the platform of interesting intellectual debates. An early example of such illuminating exchange of views published in the Compass could be seen in PD’s critique of Satish Chandra Dasgupta’s writing published in the magazine called Rastrabani.

One might also remember how Compass published reports on the students’ upsurges in France, Italy386 and other European countries in 1968-69. These students’ upsurges contributed to the making of an intellectual debate over the challenge posed by new political mobilization to the old type of working class politics. Though this issue was a complex one, at that time based on the trend of events, role and radical approach of the student leaders of this movement, the Compass came up with the view that today the students, instead of the workers, would be the vanguard of the revolution in different countries. This, in turn, was vehemently protested by litterateur cum CPI leader Gulam Quddus, said Prof. Ramkrishna Bhattacharya. According to Prof. Bhattacharya, “This gave

385 COMPASS AN APPEAL, a four-page publication dated January 1, 1990, signed by PD.
386 See the writing on the student movement in Italy and France by Prof. Sumit Sarkar in Compass dated 19 July, 1969.
birth to an interesting polemic. At that time PD’s *Compass* virtually argued in the neo-Marxist lines of Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979).”

In 1973-74 there was an intense debate between PD and the peasant leader of CPI (M) Hare Krishna Konar (5 August 1915-23 July, 1974) over the aptness of the Comprehensive Area Development Programme in which PD was actively engaged. In response to Konar’s blistering criticisms of the said programme, PD wrote an exhaustive reply in *Compass*. This was published in six consecutive parts from December 1973 to January 1974. Without going into the nitty-gritty of PD’s arguments it would be suffice to mention at this place that he was quite confident and convinced of the beneficial effects and positive impact of the said programme on the rural economy of West Bengal on the whole. It showed the depth of his experience of rural life and firmness of his vision on the issue.

There were other facets of his intellectual exercise and position on contemporary issues which found expression through *Compass*. Sometimes this drove him to action like setting up a non-official Commission of Inquiry (i.e. the Saraju Prasad Commission), sometimes it did not. But on the whole, *Compass* became the springboard of thoughtful

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387 Views expressed by Professor Ramkrishna Bhattacharya in an interview with the researcher at his residence on 18.04.2004
388 Data on Hare Krishna Konar has been taken from *Amader Purbosuria*, a book in Bengali on the biographies of different leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) edited by Tanmoy Bhattacharya, National Book Agency, Kolkata, 2005, see p-343-4 on comrade Hare Krishna Konar.
discourses as well as the activist tendency that developed in PD. As we find from the IB report about the role of Compass in criticising US invasion of Vietnam. To quote from this report, “During 1965-66 when the US invaded South Vietnam which evoked world-wide reactions against American atrocities and campaign in Vietnam, the press in India played different role. The powerful dailies and periodicals of the establishment, controlled by big business and the ruling circles were generally right wing in tone. On the other, some independent leftist periodicals were doing valuable works for Vietnam. To this really worthwhile role played by some Bengali weeklies of Calcutta, Compass edited by Pannalal Dasgupta was one of such. Almost every number carried something.”

It affirmed his eloquent voice of protest against American aggression and his sympathy to the resistance movement, even though it assumed an armed form. At the same time, in Compass editorials PD inveighed against the brutal suppression of the uprising in Czechoslovakia in 1968 by the Soviet Union.

But PD’s role was not confined to that of a sensitive press reviewer alone. Rather, he played an active part in a number of occasions since 1963-64 till early 1990s. These developments over a period of three decades were diverse, shaping and forming the central core of his ideas on socio-cultural re-construction that he intended to put into effect. His

389 IB File 316/28 PF. See the extract of the report on America forwarded under memo number 27506/1372/66(Am) dated 28/6 to SP, DIB, 24 Parganas.
involvement in diverse activities in course of this long period also showed that he could not settle down to one task or issue. Rather he switched over to another issue or subject as soon he thought that the field of his engagement, for example, agricultural development could not provide solution to other problem like refugee rehabilitation. This not only implied restlessness underlying his thought and activities, but it was also responsible for wearing out his energy. This was one of the probable reasons behind diminution of his activities since early-1990s. No doubt his falling health and age turned out to be a deterrent to the wide range of his engagement. Before his death his efforts in social re-construction were mainly confined to the villages in and around Bolpur. Also there was recurrent feeling of disappointment in him for not being able to create a serious stir in public mind on the issues of socio-economic reconstruction in village that he had been talking for long. All these were important yardsticks from the point of reviewing his overall thought and endeavours.

Now based on availability of empirical data a catalogue of PD’s varied activities since 1964-65 till his demise on 11 January, 1999 may be furnished below. This might help locate certain aberrations from the trend of non-violent re-construction that characterized his ideas and activities on the whole in the post-1962 period. This is also useful to trace the evolving trajectory of his versatile ideas and activities.
1. PD’s predisposition to be grounded in objectivity in his understanding of social situations prior to his intervention, gave him a creative space to fulfill his perception of social commitment in the face of urgent situation whether that was violence-prone situation over food scarcity in 1966 or the flood in Birbhum in early 1990s. In 1964-65 he witnessed the resumption of food crisis that reached its peak in February-March 1966 when price hike of rice and different essential inputs like kerosene swept through West Bengal. Those who are acquainted with the history of mass movement of that period in West Bengal, particularly in 24 Parganas and Nadia districts know that thousands were arrested and many became victims of police repression. At that time PD’s *Compass* published critical editorials against the policy of the state government to suppress popular agitation over persistent food crisis. For example, in the issue of *Compass* dated 26 February 1966 which depicted in its cover page the dead body of Nurul Islam, a student killed in police firing in Swarupnagore, PD described the events in Basirhat and other parts of 24 Parganas as ‘symptom of an intensifying storm’ in West Bengal. To quote him, “In the past Calcutta was the main centre of public protest and mass demonstration. But where food is not grown and produced, the movement for food cannot be certainly successful in those places. The food movement will assume its ultimate form in the areas where the peasants
cultivate and grow food but remain starved. That indication is clearly perceptible this time."\(^{390}\) He attributed the cause of soaring prices of kerosene to black-marketing and the monopolistic, profit-maximizing policies of the oil-importing companies. In that state of affairs, his suggestion was stoppage of supply to the rich in the cities and simultaneously to enhance the supply of kerosene to the poor in the rural and the suburban areas.

The issue of *Compass* dated 5 March 1966 also carried a thought-provoking editorial on the momentum and nature of the food movement in West Bengal. He wrote, "It seems that in West Bengal the students and the youths have surged up. Of late, in many countries the students have taken the lead...Is it the same fate India is out to face today? But what is true in small countries cannot be equally valid for a vast country like India."\(^{391}\) He also commented on the need of stretching the struggle beyond towns. "If the struggle is to take the appropriate path", said PD, "it would have to spread to the remote villages even beyond Basirhat and Bongaon, and it would have to raise deep and fundamental questions

\(^{390}\) Translated from the *Compass* 26 February, 1966, see editorial by PD, p-101-3. This was exactly what PD stated in his memorandum to the non-official inquiry commission headed by Justice Saraju Prasad. To quote him, "...about the recent movement that started in February this year, there is a remarkable characteristic about it ...In the past the food movements were invariably Calcutta-oriented. Calcutta was the centre and the main arena of the movement. Organised peasant and working class rallies used to be brought from the district to Calcutta to take part in the movement. There were little or no political or agitation activities in the districts directed against the local authorities on a well-thought out and long-term basis...This year the movement started in the mofussal towns and semi-towns where modified rationing had been introduced but the supply was inadequate and irregular, while there was no 'open' market in rice. The pitch of hunger was felt by these town people and therefore the movement originated there." [Dasgupta, Niren, *Bishoy: Pannalal Dasgupta*, Sribhumi Publishers, Kolkata, 2000. p-40].

\(^{391}\) Translated from the *Compass* 5 March 1966, see editorial by PD, p-133-4.
regarding the land system and the relationships in agricultural economy."
Indefatigable, he wrote in Compass editorial dated 19 March, 1966 that people were indignant more because of the ruthless violence and adamant attitude of the government than scarcity of food. The central demand of the mounting mass discontent at present was for a judicial probe into the causes of the incidents of police firing and killings of students. Even without waiting for the government to set up an enquiry, he urged common people to take initiative in keeping the account of the events in their locality for placing the same before the unofficial commission to be constituted.

Subsequent issues of Compass on 2, 9, 16 and 23 April 1966 reflected the gathering heat in the state politics over the food issue, hartals and parley of the left leaders with the Prafulla Sen government. In this context, PD indicated that the food movement exposed the failure of the Congress led state government in West Bengal to continue to enjoy the confidence of common people. Government order of police action was a symbol of rule by brute force and a proof of lack of its sensitivity. The defeat of the Congress government was inevitable if an election was held, he opined. He also hinted at the chances of promulgation of the President's rule in West Bengal. But he opined that either it would be looked upon as

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392 Ibid, p-134.
393 Translated from the original Bengali writing in Compass 19 March, 1966, see the second and third page of the editorial, p-198-9
394 The editorial of Compass published on 26 March, 1966, p-219
continuation of the Congress rule, and hence, it might not be effective and acceptable to the people, or it might lead to more oppressive rule if administered through police forces.\textsuperscript{395}

Finally, the Prafulla Chandra Sen government set up a commission comprising three retired judges of Calcutta High Court namely Shri Surajit Lahiri, Panch Kori Sarkar, and Prakash Chandra Mallick. In \textit{Compass} dated 23 April 1966 PD's response was clearly negative. He was not satisfied with the official step since the terms of reference of the said commission, according to him, were unduly comprehensive instead of focussing on the policy and actions of the government. He put question about the competence of the members of the official commission particularly Panch Kori Sarkar by citing facts from the law journal.\textsuperscript{396} Against this, he advocated the proposal for organizing an independent non-official fact-finding inquiry commission. At that time this proposal received strong endorsement by eminent educationist Triguna Sen, Saibal Gupta, I.C.S., newspaper editor Vivekananda Mukherjee and others.\textsuperscript{397}

Thus, it was mainly through the efforts of PD that a non-official commission of inquiry consisting of three renowned jurists namely N C Chatterjee, A N Malla led by Justice Saraju Prasad was set up in May

\textsuperscript{395} The editorial of \textit{Compass} published on 19 March, 1966, p- 198.
\textsuperscript{396} The editorial of \textit{Compass} published on 23 April 1966, p-348-9.
\textsuperscript{397} \textit{Compass} published on 28 May, 1966. See the detailed report under the section Kolkata with the caption unofficial enquiry commission, p-507. It referred to a public convention held in May 1966 at Muralidhar Girls' College under the chairmanship of Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar. It was agreed in the said convention to set up an unofficial enquiry commission to delve into the causes of the food shortage and police atrocities on the protesters.
1966 to go into the role of the state government as well as the police vis-à-vis the movement. PD himself worked hard to prepare a comprehensive memorandum for the commission, recording in minute detail, the incidents of those stormy days and the venues and nature of police actions. In the said memorandum he also pointed to the undemocratic climate and hostility that plagued the legislative assembly of the state from late 1950s with statistics and furnished maps and charts of police firing during the food movement. The Commission acknowledged the service rendered by PD in its report.

All these showed his solidarity to the cause of the food movement. To him, it was a fight of the farmers, students, youths, and different sections of the masses for their right to food and justice. Through Compass and Saraju Prasad Commission he sought to give ample coverage to this democratic movement by bringing it to the knowledge of the civil society and people at large. It indicated the mode of his participation in the struggle of common people and broadly, his urge towards people centered development, which induced him later to work in the countryside. The mobilization of the leftist forces in course of the food movement influenced him politically. It was evident when he came out openly in

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399 Pannalal Dasgupta, a booklet in Bengali written by Prafulla Gupta, a close associate of PD and published by him from Bolpur. However, the publication year was not mentioned in the booklet. But it appears to have been published in January-February, 1969. See p-13 which spoke of PD's initial proposal for constituting an unofficial inquiry commission—the Saraju Prasad Commission, and latter's appreciation of the report placed by him.
Compass in support of the United Front coalition as 'a collective platform of all the toiling people'. This brought him closer to left politics, which was out to target the state government led by Prafulla Chandra Sen in West Bengal. As the food movement gathered momentum, there were more propensities to attack and vilify the state government in West Bengal, rather than analysis of facts. The fact was persistent shortage of food production since independence, evasion of levy by the owners of husking mills, problem of hoarding, coupled with the dislocations caused by two major wars—in 1964 with China and in 1965 with Pakistan, which shot up the prices of food grains. The country itself was dependent on import of foods. Besides, continuous influx of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan into West Bengal during 1960s further added to the pressure on land in this eastern state of India. These apart, there was lack of supply of food grains from the central government. Faced with this situation, the government’s inability to tackle the situation was evident from its resort to police action to quell the mass agitations. It appeared from PD’s writings in Compass during the food movement in 1966 that politically he was leaning towards militant anti-Congress character of the said movement. Later in the introduction of a book on Prafulla Chandra

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400 Translated from the original Bengali writing in Compass editorial on the 22 February issue, 1969, p-78.

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Sen he admitted that at that time he was opposed to Congress and had been a supporter of the leftists."\textsuperscript{401}

In fact, if we see the timing of his writings in \textit{Compass} from 1966 to 1969 having a political message, we would find its political culmination in his election to the West Bengal Assembly as an independent candidate from Bolpur constituency of Birbhum district with the support of the left parties. This victory in election was a proof of his touch with the villagers in different villages of Bolpur. Further, it might be inferred from his political background, and above all, the simple way in which he carried his life\textsuperscript{402} that all these worked in conjunction to create a positive appeal in his favour against the turncoat image of Dr. Radha Krishna Singha, the Congress candidate.\textsuperscript{403}

Here it would be pertinent to quote from PD’s writing in \textit{Compass} regarding independent candidature in election. It would help us unravel his thinking so far his shift to politics in 1968-69 was concerned. He said,


\textsuperscript{402} PD’s simple life-style was a distinct characteristic of his approach, which had been endorsed more or less by all the respondents whose views were sought in different interviews.

\textsuperscript{403} \textit{Pannalal Dasgupta}, a booklet in Bengali written by Prafulla Gupta, a close associate of PD and published by him from Bolpur. However, the publication year was not mentioned in the booklet. But since it was published as part of the election campaign for PD, it appears to have been published on the eve of the Assembly election in West Bengal in January-February, 1969. See p-14-5 of the booklet that referred to defection of the opposition candidate who first stood as a candidate against Congress but later who crossed the floor and joined Progressive Democratic Front led by Prafulla Ghosh. Again in the mid-term election in 1969 he contested as a Congress candidate against PD. Both Ananda Sen and Sajal Basu in separate interviews dated \ldots and 23/4/2012 respectively expressed that Bolpur being a constituency predominated by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population was a stronghold of Congress. Yet, victory of PD, according to Dr. Sajal Basu, a long-time observer and author of few empirical works on West Bengal politics, was related, among other things, to a decisive swing against Congress in the Scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribes’ belt in the district since 1967.
"There are two types of independent candidates. One comprises those who do not keep connection either with their own parties or any other party. They do not have any fixed loyalty or obligation. The other group of independents wants to keep in touch with all the parties of every united front, to put forth to them a possible consensus. They do not attach importance to the differences among the parties, but concentrate on their unity and consensus. They talk to all the parties with honesty and try to point out their merits and mistakes without fear. This category of persons can stay independent for integrating all the parties for national unity and for creating unity among common people. In this case these independent candidates can play the part of positive cementing force." It clearly revealed PD’s intention to work for solidarity and unity among people at the grassroot level through the political medium, but in an unpartisan fashion. In other words, he wanted to exploit the political channel as a means to accomplish the task of social reconstruction. But his move to join politics was not decisive. It was so in two senses. First, his agenda was to usher in positive social transformation by inculcating change in the value framework of people. But there was apparent difficulty in approaching this task politically. It was because victory in election could provide an opportunity to achieve political power. But in parliamentary

404 Translated from the original Bengali writing of PD published in Compass as quoted in Prafulla Gupta’s Bengali booklet Pannalal Dasgupta,p-16. This booklet was published from Bolpur on the eve of PD’s election campaign in early 1969.
politics in which numerical majority in favour of a political party or a coalition was the deciding yardstick, the share of political power had to be large enough to carry the power of the establishment along. As an independent candidate it was not possible for PD. Writing in Compass on 7 February 1970 he regretted that because of not leaning towards any particular political party, his observations became a voice in the wilderness. It was a confession of his inability to register his voice and failure to reach out to people in the milieu permeated by partisan politics. Second, PD realized that prevalent practice among the functioning political parties in democratic politics was largely reduced to ‘vote canvassing by instigating all sorts of hullabaloo in a competitive fashion.’403 This was precisely the reason behind his objection to form class-based organizations in village society during the Left Front regime in West Bengal. It was antithetical to what he had aimed at since the rise of class based organizations could aggravate schism, strife and disunity among the masses. Hence, he could not approve of this political line. His loss of faith in politics was evident in his writings in Compass during 1970s and 1980s. Even as early as 1967 in his general introduction to the published volume on the seminar papers on hill people PD reprimanded the actions of the political parties for their lack of principles and broad vision. In the editorial columns of Compass in February-March 1970 he

403 Mitra, Rathin and Dasgupta, Barun (edited), A Common Perspective For North-East India, Calcutta, 1967, see the general introduction written by PD, p-5.
referred to intense mutual suspicion and rivalries among the political parties and political leaders within the second United Front government in West Bengal. On 5 September, 1969 he was hurt at the news of assassination of his old political companion in RCPI namely Hiranmoy Ganguli (26 August, 1919—5 September, 1969) at the hand of police. As per IB (CID, West Bengal) file 316/28 PF, on 6 September PD led the silent procession with the dead body of Hiranmoy Ganguli. According to some, this event led to PD’s serious difference with the leaders of the government and his symbolic protest to the police action made clear the hiatus between his thinking and that of the united front government.

Another reason of his withdrawal from politics might be the nature of politics under the second United Front government in West Bengal. At that time it was basically a politically organized movement of the peasants and their demand for distribution of land through land reform legislations, and implementation of these acts. It was not the objective PD had postulated. This did not, however, mean that he was unaware of the problem of the poor peasants in village, which was basically tied to the question of land. But his conceptualization of the problem was fundamentally different from those who advocated the line of political

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406 The tenure of the second United Front government in West Bengal was 25 February, 1969 to 16 March, 1970.
407 IB file 316/28, serial number 73/1928. Find this information in the addendum to the dossier of Pannalal Dasgupta (RCPI-Rebel Group).

265
mobilization of marginal and landless peasants for land reform. To him, it was not the peasant versus landlord sort of problem. The real issue was the creation of a ‘new society’ based on fellow-feeling instead of hostility between the owners and non-owners in the countryside. In his cooperative self-sufficient village, production would be done by all villagers held in a bond of mutual relationship irrespective of their ownership of land. It would be a model of production and distribution of basic necessities among the villagers, not mass production of commodities for market.

Hence, in his writings in Compass, PD spoke of the absence of correct political approach and repeatedly stressed the need of unity of the masses in the countryside as the most important factor to unleash the spirit of collaborative efforts. It was this insight which drove him to rural reconstruction and concrete intervention in village life for promoting co-operative farming and to disseminate values of reciprocity and amity among all countrymen. Like Rabindranath Tagore, he thought in the line of developing co-operative system seeking to replace the existing competitive, profit-based development model. Therefore, the situation in which he was compelled to join politics under the pressing demand of local villagers408 was not to be understood as moving away from his

primary emphasis on reconstructing relationships between man and man in the line of mutual helpfulness and harmony in society.

2. North-east India occupied an important place in PD’s mental map during 1960s. It was a place known to him because it was an important base of his political activities during forties. However, in those days of his contact with this region, it was more or less known by one denomination—Assam. It consisted of areas a part of which joined Pakistan at the time of independence. The shape of this region underwent further change during 1960s when it was not just Assam because Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura were curved out as separate states. While this process of creation of new states and awakening of tribesmen were in the offing, there was a continuous demand for autonomy from Assam on the part of certain hill tribes. These turned the entire region into a volatile cauldron vulnerable to external threat and internal tension and unrest. It was this development, which in PD’s opinion was “taking the shape of sub-nationalism—a stunted growth due to many difficulties involved in the process of development”\(^\text{409}\), resulting in the violent political activities by certain tribal groups. This became evident from the discussions on issues of this region published in Compass.

From PD’s intercepted letter dated 4.11.1962 to Patit Paban Karmakar, a known member of his RCPI group at Sainthia of Birbhum district it was evident that at that time he was concerned with India’s threatened unity. This letter not only revealed his critical attitude to Chinese attack but it also showed his urge to focus on the burning problems of divisive tendencies in the tribal zone in the north-eastern portions of India. In particular, PD concentrated on the situation in Assam, Nagaland and adjoining areas due to mounting assertions of separatist tendency amongst the hill tribes. Whereas in the past Assam was a host state, the picture was reverse during 1960s, creating a psychological hiatus between the hillmen and the people from the plains. Besides, there was increasing demands for secession from Assam on the ground of cultural exclusiveness of different ethnic groups. PD apprehended disintegration of the nation in the portentous tendency among the people living in these areas of the North-East India surrounded by foreign territories, in the context of Sino-Indian conflict in 1962.

He toured different places in Assam, Kashmir and Nagaland in 1963-64 and became seriously interested in the problems of hill people. His attempt was to familiarize us with the sociological understanding of the lives of the tribesmen, specially the historical and cultural aspects of their lives. Thus, as early as 1968 PD stated that ‘there was no military solution to the Naga problem. Even it could not be solved like a problem
of law and order or through police intervention. The problem of this nature ought to be solved at the social, economic, political and psychological levels'. The mission of his tours, as he conceded, was not simply seeking peace for the sake of peace. Rather PD's objective was to meet people in order to know their minds, feelings, aspirations and above all, the process of construction of their identity and personality than giving priority to any centralized plan of unification. He observed that "the rebellion of the Nagas was against the process of incorporating them in India's mainstream culture. They were pitted against the Assamese since the latter were the main agency of this process." In his words, "Indians should be more cautious on their part. Else it would not be possible to win over the hearts of these tribesmen..." Besides, his prodigious reflection was that in the broader historical backdrop all such problems including the problems of the Naga and the Mizos were problems of human unity. In his words, "It was not entirely correct to hold that unity would follow the establishment of democracy and socialism. Rather, democracy and socialism could not be put to vogue without unity. Here unity was both the path and the object." Through these efforts at understanding the social, cultural and psychological make-up of the hill tribes in India's north-eastern states we find a characteristic feature of PD's changed ideas and his conscious search for solution of the problems through deeper study of the tribal behavior. It was evident when
he organized a national seminar on hill people of North Eastern India in the Calcutta University in December, 1966.

More than 100 eminent representatives of the hill people including Rani Guidalo, the minister of Nagaland Mr. Ikom Imong and a much larger contingent of social workers, scholars, administrators and intellectuals of the plains attended the seminar. Hon’ble Mr. D. N. Sinha, the then Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court addressed this seminar. A number of illuminating speeches and papers were presented at the seminar. The purpose of the exercise, according to Rathin Mitra and Barun Das Gupta, the joint editors of the published volume, was “to provide a sort of national platform on which the representatives of the hill people of the North Eastern India could speak out their minds and the intellectuals of the plains could also express and exchange their viewpoints.”410 The chief intent was to stress the importance of sharing in attitude and goodwill among the hill tribes as well as between the plainsmen and the hill men based upon the recognition of the principles of equality and unity. It was these values of unity, amalgamation and integration of different groups of people which underlay PD’s thought and activities during 1960s and 1970s. According to him, there was a contradiction in the suffering of the north eastern region due to lack of development of productive forces and inherent richness of this land in terms of its

410 Mitra, Rathin and Dasgupta, Barun (edited), Common Perspective For North-East India, Calcutta, 1967. See the preface, p-iii-iv.
abundant natural resources. To quote him, "the Brahmaputra valley is much more rich than the Gangetic valley and it is not difficult to make this region not only a self-sufficient food-producing zone but a surplus area as well, if only a drive for total mobilization can be arranged with full participation of the people, both of the plains and of the hills...Had all these potentials been seriously tapped and released, the people of this region would have found out the common grounds at once, and instead of fighting one another for petty things, a bold, youthful, integrated personality would begin emerging, assimilating all modern ideas and maintaining its continuity with their rich and colourful heritage, synthesizing into a real renaissance."\(^{411}\)

From the above standpoint, PD's advocacy was not for the creation of separate units but for the development of the economic base of the north-eastern region as well as creation of necessary congenial atmosphere of interaction among diverse schools of thought as antidote to political particularism. Though situation has altered since 1960s, the views of PD appear to be relevant even to date if we read the arguments of presentday scholars on the problems of India's north-eastern region. For example, Rangan Dutta, former secretary to the government of India, in his paper on Assam in recent time argued in similar fashion that "given the history of ethnic conflicts in the state, since the early 1960s, any further political

\(^{411}\) Ibid, general introduction by PD, p-2-3.
division in any form would render Assam ungovernable...With eight states including Sikkim, nine autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule and scores of other autonomous councils vying for statehood...the North-East is indeed a deeply divided region. Being flanked by China, a great power, populous Bangladesh and unstable Myanmar, the region is prone to interference from neighbouring countries, as they will be keen to capitalize on internal differences and weaknesses. Since Assam is the lead state in the region on which the regional economy and communication systems depend, a strong and a developed Assam is a strategic requirement for India’s progress.”

In 1967 PD in his general introduction to the seminar-papers wrote exactly in similar spirit against political division of Assam. His prudent logic was, “In case of separation, you perhaps get yourselves independent of your immediate neighbour, but you bank more on central help and subsidy. In that case your Swaraj will make you more dependent on the Central Government, or on foreign governments in case of complete separation.” In the words of the joint editors of the seminar-publication, “The seminar succeeded in pointing to the need for vigorous, unbiased, national thinking on these problems. It brought home to

413 Mitra, Rathin, and Dasgupta, Barun (edited), Common Perspective For North-East India, Calcutta, 1967. See the preface by PD, p-6-7.
responsible Indian citizens the truth that narrow, limited, administrative approach would be a poor, insufficient and ineffective substitute for such thinking in attempts to find answers to these intriguing problems.\textsuperscript{414} The Calcutta edition of the Statesman on 3 March, 1968 rated the seminar as a ‘brilliant’ enterprise.

While this was basically an effort on his part at understanding and facilitating rapport between different ethnic groups inhabiting north-eastern zone of India, his ideas and involvement in bringing about a peaceful society were centered on agriculture since agriculture was the main life-line of India’s rural economy. From agriculture in the beginning to the creation of a new life movement in village was the continuum composing the target PD had envisioned. No doubt, it was a comprehensive task which became PD’s focal point of rural development initiatives since late sixties. In the words of Ananda Sen, one of his close associates during 1980s and 1990s, ‘PD founded Tagore Society For Rural Development in 1969 to give concrete shape to his ideas of agriculture based area development programme.’\textsuperscript{415} As a brainchild of PD’s ideas this organization remained closely tied to his activities concerning village welfare in many areas in West Bengal, Orissa and

\textsuperscript{414} Ibid, p-iii
\textsuperscript{415} Translated from \textit{Amar dekha Pannalal}, written by Ananda Sen, published from Amar Kutir Society For Rural Development, Sriniketan, Birbhum, West Bengal, 2004, p-23.
In this sense, the establishment of Tagore Society was considered to be an important milestone in the course of PD’s changed life and onward journey in quest of rural development in tune with his vision of a vibrant local community and social regeneration. Hence, our discussion on Tagore society follows in order.

3. PD’s growing inclination towards Gandhi and Tagore’s ideas of ushering in a comprehensive social transformation became evident in his activities during late 1960s. Inspired by the Gandhian ideal of building up an independent and self-sufficient village community and Tagore’s call for holistic uplift of the distressed populace in rural society through education, health care, agriculture and cultural exchange, PD initiated development works in remote countryside. Birbhum was the starting point of this new engagement because part of his career as a political revolutionary in pre-independence period was spent in this district. So, his attraction to Birbhum as a site for rural reconstruction had a political legacy linked to those days in 1930s when he was kept detained in Rajnagar-Khairasol area by the then colonial administration. As stated

416 The coverage area as shown in the Annual Report of Tagore Society For Rural Development for the year 2010-11, confirms that the Society now operates eleven comprehensive rural development projects—six in West Bengal, two in the newly created Jharkhand and three in Orissa. See p-4 of the report. However, according to Bilwa Gopal Chatterjee, the Joint Secretary of the Society, barring Sagar and Hingalgunj projects in South 24Parganas and North 24Parganas respectively, all the projects were initiated during PD’s time. Interview of Sri Bilwa Gopal Chatterjee was taken at the Head Office of the Tagore Society at Aurobinda Sarani, Kolkata on 14/3/2012] Sri Tushar Kanjilal, the present Secretary of the Tagore Society, also wrote in his foreword to the publication on Maheshpur Project History (September, 2000) that “Most of the development projects of the Society at the formative stage had the privilege of having the emerald (Panna) touch.”
earlier, at that time PD established a rapport with the poor and underprivileged villagers. Thus he became deeply familiar with a host of rural issues. This made a crucial impact on his views on rural reconstruction. Besides, his association with Sushen Mukherjee’s *Amar Kutir* during 1930s helped him acquire some experience in the productive activities like handloom, leather crafts etc. Amidst financial paucity and repeated penal actions by the then colonial British administration, *Amar Kutir* functioned like a self-reliant organization for the cause of welfare of the poor villagers at the outskirts of Santiniketan.

Given this background in which his ideas gradually crystallized, it would appear natural why this veteran socialist turned towards the task of village reconstruction—the area, which was completely marginalised by the ‘big’ issues of the day like development of new urban centres, etc. As a result, during sixties rural scenario in West Bengal was in a shambles. Prof. Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay in his book *Bangali Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar* (i.e. Fifty years of Bengali Politics) pointed out that “even a farsighted man like Bidhan Chandra Roy during his tenure as the chief-minister of West Bengal did not pay enough attention to rural development and development of agriculture in the state.” So, this led to systematic decline of villages, their economy and psychology of rural people. Besides, the lessons of the food movement in 1966 and the rural

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economic scenario in West Bengal at large apprised PD of the need to think of new agricultural system to achieve self-reliance in food for every village. This helps locate the cause behind his emphasis to begin work in rural society since 1968-69. The establishment of Tagore Society for Rural Development and commencement of its operation in Bolpur area of Birbhum district since 1969 was the product of this realization.

According to the project history of Bolpur published by Tagore Society in 2000 “It was in 1969 when Pannalal Dasgupta, one of the founders of the Tagore Society visited the area. During the visit, he having got a feel of the distress of the rural folk organized the development work on their own with his local associates. This opened up an altogether new avenue of development initiatives and a voluntary social organization, Tagore Society for Rural Development, was formed. People imbibed with the spirit of self-help rallied around the Tagore Society. In the local language this organization was known as Thakur Samity. To initiate the development process Jai Prakash Narain, one of the co-founders of the Tagore Society, arranged for a sum of Rs. 20,000/- from a relief fund under his command.” Later in the obituary on Jaya Prakash Narain (hereafter JP, in short) published in Compass PD acknowledged

418 According to the Report on Ten Years of Working published by the Tagore Society, Jaya Prakash Narain as founder President of the organization had arranged a loan of Rs. 25,000/ from Bihar Relief Committee of which also he was the president. p-1. This report does not bear the year of publication. But from perusal of the report we may infer that it was published in 1981. The back cover of the report bore the miniature seal of Statesman Commercial Press Calcutta.

the support and assistance provided by JP to the Tagore Society at its formative stage and for his interest in the functioning of the Society even during his illness.\textsuperscript{420}

To understand the foundational inspiration behind the creation of Tagore Society it would be pertinent to briefly dwell on Rabindranath Tagore’s ideas on rural uplift. It would bring out the level of impact of Tagore’s ideas on PD’s thoughts and his multifarious activities through Tagore Society for Rural Development (henceforth TSRD) which he carefully nursed, navigated and superintended for a considerable time. TSRD built on Tagore’s conception was at the centre of PD’s activities in rural India, whether that was building of irrigation facilities in Nadia district, installation of shallow tube wells and pump stations in Bhandardah Beel in Murshidabad district, construction of Dharmogolah in Choto Simulia village in Birbhum, the creation of a self-reliant society in Rangabelia in south 24 Parganas or his intervention in the problems of rehabilitation of the displaced refugee families in Dandakaranya. It was amply evident from all the available literature published by TSRD till date that “The aims and objective of the Society are drawn from Tagore’s motto of rural development as expressed in his own words...to bring back life in all its completeness, making the villagers self-reliant and self-respectful, and to make an efficient use of modern resources for the fullest development of

\textsuperscript{420} Compass, 20 October, 1979, see the editorial \textit{Jai Prakasher Jibanabasane} (At the death of Jaya Prakash) written by PD, p-489-90.

277
their physical, social, economic and intellectual condition."421 It showed that PD, the man behind TSRD, consciously thought in the line of Tagore in the pursuit of promoting all-round uplift of village life.

"In his programme of constructive work" writes Sudhir Sen in his book *Rabindranath Tagore on Rural Reconstruction* "Tagore laid the stress on the work of rural improvement. Here was, in his view, by far the most promising field for nation-building activities while this was also the field in which the need for patriotic enterprise was the most pressing. In his writings on political and social problems he came back again and again to this theme."422 For example, in the well-known essay *Swadeshi Samaj* Tagore put forward a powerful plea for reorganizing rural life in the line of constructive Swadeshism. It reflected Tagore’s critical approach to the militant political programme professed by the extremist leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, Arabinda Ghosh and others. “The immediate occasion of writing this essay was the agitation of the people in the face of scarcity of drinking water in some of the Bengal villages. Tagore reacted vehemently to such negative political agitation and emphasized on the need for rural

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421 Tagore Society For Rural Development: A Report on Ten Years of its working, There is no mention of its year of publication, but it appears from the content of the report that it might have been published some time in 1981, p-1. Also see A Profile published by the Tagore Society in April 2004, p-1-2.
development by the villagers themselves and more particularly for voluntary self-help organizations. 423

According to Tagore, society and state in the eastern civilization were two different phenomena and the primary importance in India was laid on society. To quote him, "The source of Europe's strength lies in the State or the Government; our well-being depends on the Society." 424 From this position Tagore analyzed the causes of disintegration of self-sufficient village life in India and set forth his view that our indigenous society lost its vital life force when we began to depend on the state more and more. According to him, the European civilization had from the very beginning tried to consolidate itself in towns and cities, but social system in our oriental civilization centered round the village. Tagore observed that, "our real motherland" can be seen "in the village; her heart is there, and it is there that the Goddess of Plenty seeks her throne." 425 He, therefore, urged for the revival of the traditional social cohesion for the natural flow of life-spirit and atmasakti or the inner power of people in village.

In his ideas of rural uplift Tagore laid stress on the idea of co-operative principle. To him, village self-government and uplift were interlinked

423 Focus India, vol. II, published by Post-Graduate Department of Political Science, Hooghly Mohsin College, West Bengal, February 2000, see the article Concept of State and Society and Philosophy of Social Reconstruction: Tagore's Perspective by Kritiyapriya Ghosh, p-91
with *samabay* or co-operation. In *The Co-operative Principle* Tagore wrote “The villages in the country must be built up to be completely self-sufficient and able to supply all their own needs. For this, village-groups should be formed...Thus only can self-government become a reality all over the country. The villagers must be educated, assisted and encouraged to establish primary schools, centres for training in arts and crafts, centres for religious activities, cooperative stores and banks. Our salvation lies in thus making our villages self-reliant and knit together by the ties of corporate life.”

All these put together, give us a picture of Tagore’s ideal of rural life as also of the methods he envisioned for its realization. But “Thoughts alone” observed Sudhir Sen, “did not, however, satisfy him. At least in two outstanding cases he made a deliberate attempt to give practical effect to the ideas he preached: At first in a tentative way in his own zemindari at Silaïcaï and Patisar, and later, on a more systematic basis, at the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan...” In 1922 with the help of Leonard K. Elmhirst, an agricultural scientist, Tagore set up this institution for rural development at Sriniketan in Birbhum. A detailed plan for rural development was drawn up including development of agriculture as well as village art and industry.

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426 Ibid, p-19
This is in brief the outline of Tagore’s perspective on socio-economic reconstruction of village. But Tagore was also conscious of constricted ways of thinking and inertia in village folks that hastened the decay of village society. His essays compiled in Palliprakiti (i.e. reflections on rural environment) testified these realizations. Yet, at the same time he felt the need of emancipating villagers from the clutch of ignorance and suffering in order to realize the true spirit of India in a miniature form.\textsuperscript{428}

In PD’s ideas and activities pertaining to reorganization of village similar viewpoints could be discerned. For instance, like Tagore’s emphasis on self-initiative of village people, PD stressed on the activation of inner force of the countrymen. Another common thread between Tagore and PD’s thought could be traced to their identical views towards co-operative principle. In his discussions on agriculture in Compass and other publications throughout 1970s and 1980s PD repeatedly stressed that the interests of the weaker sections of village could not be improved without the shift from individual-centred, market-oriented production system to co-operative farming and dedicated market for the villagers themselves. It was his field experience which led PD to appreciate the importance of co-operative enterprise in rural economy like that of Tagore. As Tagore attached priority to harmony as the cherished basis of society that paved the way to mutual helpfulness, PD also thought of

\textsuperscript{428} Tagore, Rabindranath, \textit{Sriniketaner Itihas O Adarsha} included in the compilation Palliprakiti, Visva Bharati, Calcutta, 1962, p-04.
constructing a new village society by knitting together the families in small village community in order to rouse their natural propensity to cooperate among each other in rural society.

TSRD was the reflection of Tagore’s influence on PD. Being pragmatic Tagore understood the necessity of an organization to guide village development activities. The culmination of this process was the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan. That PD was influenced by the same idea of Tagore became clear from the nomenclature: Tagore Society For Rural Reconstruction (TSRD) of which PD was the founder secretary. As a socialist turned Gandhian leader of national stature, JP’s assistance and association with TSRD meant that PD intended to give TSRD a shape of a national enterprise. While it reveals the notional purview of TSRD, PD was conscious of the ideal of Tagore related to constructive activities in village to guide its functions. Following Tagore, he emphasized the task of assisting the poor villagers to build up their own organizations and to develop self-reliance among them. In PD’s opinion “It is not the typical problem of handful voluntary organizations like Tagore Society, but a national problem. We conduct experiments in small pockets to find out suitable ways for the entire country. Else the creation of few oases cannot be our aim. These cannot be sustainable
This clearly showed that PD wanted to spread the message of self-help, co-operation and solidarity across the length and breadth of rural India through the activities of TSRD. But these activities were not exclusively economic in approach. Rather, through TSRD, PD’s basic intention had been to explore a new path— to build people’s own initiatives in parallel to the sphere of state-led and market dependent activities. In the words of the present secretary of TSRD Tushar Kanjilal, “they (i.e. JP and PD) thought of development of a third front which will be non-political and a model for comprehensive development of the most neglected areas of the country. They gave stress on active and meaningful participation of the grass-root level people...That was how Tagore Society came into existence.”

In addition, TSRD had another distinction. The schemes it implemented in the period 1969-74, under PD’s guidance were a forerunner of the Comprehensive Area Development Programme which was launched in West Bengal in 1974. It would be dealt in detail later. Suffice to mention here that one of the key elements in PD’s ideas behind the formation of TSRD was to put a premium on agriculture and allied vocations like animal husbandry to build the base of rural economy on a strong

430 Probably by ‘third front’ Tushar Kanjilal meant a front which would be neither state-centred, one involved in politics and its complex reconciliation, nor the capitalist market, but a socially united front of people that would represent positive human values of reciprocity, common well-being, and consensus, not the power of majority, its domination or exploitation.
foundation by utilizing the huge man power that lay idle in the
countryside, and often forced to migrate to city. So, during 1970s and
1980s PD in his different writings and talks drove attention to the need of
creating a host of productivity-oriented activities in villages. It would be
evident on the examination of the initial programmes of TSRD in
different villages in Nadia, Murshidabad and Bolpur bloc. Most of these
activities as found from the report on the first ten years of the working of
TSRD were tuned to agriculture viz. extension of irrigation infrastructure
through organizing small and marginal farmers into groups for sinking
shallow tube wells at a lower cost, cleaning and excavation of ponds for
store and collective use of water for purposes of cultivation, making
arrangements for supply of bank credits to the small farmers, i.e. group
loan scheme etc.432

432 Tagore Society For Rural Development: A Report on Ten Years of its working, There is no mention
of the year of publication, but it appears from the content of the report that it might have been
published some time in 1981, see p-5-35. Similar points emerged from the interview with Manab Sen
of Lok Kalyan Parishad, Kalighat, Kolkata who was a Bloc Development Officer posted in Birbhum in
late 1960s and early 1970s. He told about PD’s programme of group loan scheme for the farmers, his
initiative at rural electrification in villages, his works in Choto Simulia farm of TSRD and such other
activities based on agriculture—all during the period 1968-70. According to him, around the time
1969-70 PD had to retreat for a while due to mounting Naxalite activities in different villages in
Bolpur. But shortly afterwards from 1972 PD resumed his activities in remote villages bordering river
Ajoy in Bolpur. He added that at that time PD wanted assistance of the Planning and Development
department of the state government for the embankment of the left portion of the river canal to protect
farm lands from the ravages of floods. PD also had political influence as a former MLA. At that time
the concerned department formulated a crash scheme for rural employment through which the work of
embankment of a length of 8 kilometers was done. In this matter, according to Manab Sen, PD’s ideas
were influenced by the model of activities in Mao Ze Dong’s China. That was, silt to be lifted from
the river bed by dredging. The accumulated silt would then be used for works of embankment and also for
promoting fertility of soil by pouring out on field, all to be done with the participation of people. This
interview was taken on May 24, 2008 in the office of Lok Kalyan Parishad, a voluntary organization in
south Kolkata to which Mr. Manab Sen is presently attached.
Barring the above-mentioned activities, TSRD in its initial years of functioning also undertook literacy programme, child health care etc.\textsuperscript{433}

These showed that TSRD's approach to rural development was not just economic development, but it was much wider in scope. TSRD was basically an organ of continuous struggle for the creation of a value orientation among villagers to develop a self-sufficient and enlightened climate in village.

From this angle PD's emphasis on agriculture could not be seen in isolation. Agriculture was an important part of his programme of rural reconstruction through TSRD. It is seen from the report of the TSRD that given the disparity in the size of holding and fragmented nature of holdings in West Bengal, "it was not possible for the poor farmers to sink shallow tube-wells in their small holdings. The rich farmers used to own the shallow tube-wells and supply irrigation water to poor farmers at exorbitant rates. As the rates were very high most of the poor farmers could not utilize this irrigation water. The Society realized that not only agricultural production will increase considerably through fuller utilization of the irrigation water..., enhanced agricultural operations will also provide additional employment to the landless labourers. The Society started organizing the small and marginal farmers to form groups for

\textsuperscript{433} Tagore Society For Rural Development: A Report on Ten Years of its Working, p-4.
sinking and energising shallow tube-wells with Bank loan...”\textsuperscript{434} It signified two aspects of PD’s thought and activities at that time. First, PD wanted to organize small and marginal farmers in a largely unorganized sector like agriculture. The efforts for setting up small groups, co-operative societies, Swabalamban Samities (i.e. self-reliant groups) were derived from this idea. The purpose was to organize the weaker section of the peasantry for co-operative enterprises on the basis of specific programme like sinking of tube-wells etc. In this the role of the TSRD was one of a co-ordinating agency between the group of farmers and banks. Similarly, TSRD engaged in persuasion to have mutually acceptable agreement between the Swabalamban Samity and the pond owners for leasing out ponds to the Samity.\textsuperscript{435} Besides, through TSRD “All the farmers irrespective of their land ownership were included in the irrigation groups for full utilization of the irrigation water.”\textsuperscript{436} All these showed that PD’s intention was to create a level playing field for all in rural society.

However, he was not unaware of the underlying class disparity in rural economy. It was evident in TSRD’s report which clearly mentioned that ‘the big land owners were reluctant to work in co-operation with small

\textsuperscript{434} Ibid, p-6
\textsuperscript{435} Find TSRD’s role in the formation of Swabalamban Samity in Bolpur project area in the 1970s in the booklet \textit{Project History of Bolpur} published by TSRD in September, 2000, p-4-5.
\textsuperscript{436} \textit{Tagore Society For Rural Development: A Report on Ten Years of its working}, p-7
farmers.\textsuperscript{437} Hence the report pertinently referred to the efforts of the members of TSRD who were also in the State Planning Board to prevail upon the state government to enact a comprehensive legislation and undertake an integrated rural development programme commonly known as Comprehensive Area Development Programme\textsuperscript{438}. It alluded to the role played by PD as a member of the State Planning Board in West Bengal since its creation in 1972 till 1977.

Besides, PD's thought on improvement of agriculture with modern methods showed that these could be used by the small peasants provided a suitable organization was accessible to them to ensure delivery of required inputs like fertilizer, bank loan etc. Thus, under PD's stewardship, TSRD's programme "was a move to rid the rural economy of the clutches of mahajans, and speculative traders and to objectively allow the productive forces to expand unhindered."\textsuperscript{439} Although, "PD's suggestions of work like sinking tube-well, excavation of ponds etc," said Professor Ajit Narayan Bose, a noted economist who worked in close association with PD since 1972-73, "were not theoretically tenable. But PD had a horse sense. He could smell the needs of village. Therefore he insisted on improvement of agriculture from the angle of economic uplift

\textsuperscript{437} Ibid, p-7
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid, p-7
\textsuperscript{439} Views of Ajit Narayan Bose, a noted economist and former member of State Planning Board, West Bengal. Dr. Bose worked in close touch with PD from the days of the formulation of Comprehensive Area Development Programme in West Bengal. His interview was taken at his residence on two different dates. This was the first interview on 7/12/2003. The quotation was part of the verbatim dictation he had given to the researcher.
of the villagers and its overall impact on village welfare."\(^{440}\) Besides, explaining PD’s tilt towards intensive farming, Professor Ajit Narayan Bose pointed out that 1960s was a period of Green revolution in agriculture. Hence PD did not think of radical land reform.\(^{441}\) On the contrary, he thought in terms of suitable use of modern methodology to unleash productive forces ensuring thereby economic well-being of the poor rural folk.\(^{442}\) For this he was awarded Rathindra Puraskar by Visva Bharati University on 10 January, 1987.\(^{443}\)

No doubt, agriculture constituted a major plank of TSRD’s activities designed by PD. This had been so during 1970s and for a considerable part of the eighties. Since 1987-88 PD switched over to advocacy of natural farming—a method “which could help to reverse the degenerative momentum of modern agriculture and requires no machines, no chemicals, and very little weeding”\(^{444}\)—under the influence of Masanobu Fukuoka, an advocate of natural farming. The impact of Fukuoka’s thought on PD could be deduced from his invitation to Fukuoka to visit India in 1987. In 1989 PD got Fukuoka’s seminal work *One Straw-\(^{440}\) Ibid.

\(^{441}\) If we try to follow the movements for land reform in West Bengal in late 1960s we would see that under the two United Front governments from 1967-70 militant land grab movement was based on politics of radical mobilization of the small and weaker peasantry and their confrontational actions against the big land owners. But hostility and violence that it generated in rural society could not mobilize all the people, far less weld them into an integrated community. Naturally, PD was averse to violent land grab movement which was being pursued whole hog by some left political parties and the peasant sabha.

\(^{442}\) Views expressed by Dr. Ajit Narayan Bose in an interview with this researcher dated 18/4/2004.


\(^{444}\) Fukuoka, Masanobu, *The One-Straw Revolution* as translated from the Japanese by Chris Pearce, Tsune Kurosawa and Larry Korn, Other India Press, Goa, 2010, See the Introduction, p-xxi.
"Revolution" translated in Bengali. Significantly this book was published from the TSRD with PD’s brief comments. There he wrote on the book that it was not about farming alone, but a way of life, reflection of spiritual health, science and society all knit together in an integral approach in which this process could take place. But he concluded with a word of caution regarding the hype about the method of natural farming. His proposition to general farmers was to acquire experience first by applying this method afield.

Some experimentation in natural farming was done in some project areas of TSRD, for example, in the farm in Choto Simulia in Birbhum district. However, it was not followed up and replicated in different project areas. According to Ashok Ghosh, the general secretary of Society For Equitable Voluntary Actions (in short, SEVA), an associate organization of TSRD, “TSRD gave up the task shortly thereafter. PD’s activities were irrespective of the calculus of profit and losses.” Thus, what emerged from this comment and different past reports of TSRD was that the concept of natural farming was not preached well during 1990s through institutional ways. Rather, in TSRD projects areas capital-intensive agricultural methods like cultivation of high-yielding variety of paddy, use of power-tiller etc. were carried on which were more popular and

445 Fukuoka, Masanobu, *Ekti Trinokhando Biplab*, a Bengali translation of *The One-Straw Revolution*, published by PD from TSRD, Calcutta, 1989. See the foreword written by PD.
446 Views expressed by Ashok Ghosh in an interview with the researcher on 26/1/2012.
amenable to agency funding like National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and different foreign based foundations. These were the methods and practices which were sought to be promoted probably with an eye to augment productivity and for their link with market. As such, the current agricultural activities of TSRD were not in conformity with PD’s ideas of village self-reliance in which production by the masses would not be for outside market but for villagers themselves.

This disjunction between his thinking and the functioning of TSRD could be noticed since late 1980s. It was evident in the activities of TSRD that its focus on agriculture lost salience with gradual shift taking place in favour of other rural development projects. Of these, the most important in recent times between 2000 and 2011 were those concerning Reproductive and Child Health (in short, RCH), biodiversity conservation, empowerment of community, especially women etc. It was also seen from the list of major activities undertaken by TSRD’s Rangabelia (Sundarban) project given in a brief report published in January 2010 that while agriculture topped the list in 1975, it was Mahila Samity (i.e. Women’s organization for training and income yielding activities) in 1976, comprehensive health project in 1978, animal resource

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447 It was found from the annual reports of TSRD in the last ten years of its functioning from 1999-2000 up to 2009-10.
448 A Brief Report of Rangabelia Project, published by TSRD, Kolkata, 2010, See the page on major activities undertaken chronologically.
development in 1984, greening programme in 1992, RCH in 1999, mangrove conservation and livelihood support in 2007, so on and so forth. This did not, however, mean a complete shift from agriculture in TSRD's functional programmes. But the point was that in TSRD there was conspicuous lack of new thinking on agriculture which was a hallmark of PD's thought on rural reconstruction. In the words of Ashok Ghosh (SEVA), "PD had changed the techniques from one of modern agricultural tools to natural farming. What PD did not, however, change was the strategy that agriculture was the main field, and through it the country would change. Hence to him, ideas and experiments in agriculture were basically the means of social change, a way of bringing about a reorientation of values in people. In this sense, TSRD began under PD's parentage, but it was not the child of his ideas."

It was an important point which suggested that the present TSRD no longer represented his thought.

However, PD's ideas cannot be put into a single frame. A follower of Gandhian road to the work of non-violent rural reconstruction and having inspired by Tagore's vision of holistic development of rural life, PD became actively associated with the freedom struggle of the masses in erstwhile East Bengal against the oppression by Pakistan army in 1971. Unlike peaceful nature of his activities in village, he intervened in the

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449 Views of Ashok Ghosh (SEVA) expressed in an interview with the researcher on 26/1/2012.
political crisis in East Bengal through rendering assistance to the freedom fighters. We would now concentrate on this aspect of his activities.

4. In late 1960s, in addition to his involvement in constructive works in rural sector, an area of PD’s growing interest was the struggle of the masses in erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh) against army operation by Pakistan. Though rural reconstruction and the task of confronting military were two completely different spheres, we could see from PD’s writings in *Compass* in 1971 and his participation in various activities in 1970-71 that he openly supported the struggle of the masses of East Bengal for a host of reasons. To quote him from his writings in *Compass*, “The significance and importance of the events in East Bengal were immense to the people of all countries who wanted freedom and believed in democracy. Therefore, people of the world could not remain indifferent to the happenings in East Bengal...The responsibility of the government and people of West Bengal and India in this matter was greater and more direct. While people of all countries would sympathize with the struggling Bengali people on grounds of humanity and protection of democracy, India’s loyalty to the cause of the movement in her self-interest would be just and exact.” He argued that had the liberation struggle continued for a longer period, it would obviously push the Hindus and Muslims alike to cross the border and take refuge in India.

450 Translated from the editorial—*Purba Banglar Sangrame Bharatiya Daitya O Kartabya* (i.e. India’s responsibility and duties in the struggle in East Bengal), *Compass* dated 3 April, 1971, p-195.
Besides, he apprehended that there could be outbreak of famine like situation in East Bengal not only due to these violent clashes, but because of probable obstruction to the entry passages of food within East Bengal by the military government in Pakistan. In these circumstances, he doubted whether we could refuse the pressing need of relief to those homeless seeking temporary refuge in India. Hence, for the sake of duty, according to him, it was imperative for the government of India, that of West Bengal and people of India at large to take up active measures to counter the military onslaught of Pakistan.451

PD's feeling was that in case India showed ruthless indifference to the call for help to all democratic countries by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party men, she would not be able to face the people of East Bengal in future. He also mentioned that the successful outcome of the mass revolt in East Bengal would go in favour of India since it would likely to foment various revolts for autonomy in West Pakistan, especially in Baluchistan, north-western frontier province and Sind. All these would deal a heavy blow to Pakistan's ambitions in the Indian sub-continent. Thus, when the sub-continent would be free, said PD, from the scourge of two-nation theory452 nurtured by the founders of Pakistan, Indian history would find its new path leading to a new journey, and advancement in both these

451 Ibid.
452 It was true that in 1971 the two-nation theory was negated by the emergence of independent Bangladesh. But the society in Bangladesh was still an Islamic society after independence and communal forces played a major role in the society and polity of Bangladesh.
countries. In the sociological inquiry—*Islam, Bangladesh and Bengali Nationalism* by T N Madan we find a corroboration of part of PD’s viewpoint that the birth of Bangladesh proved the inadequacy of religious tie for the nation-building process. In this essay T N Madan discussed the cultural factor that created the ferment, and how the sense of deprivation, insecurity among a large section of the Bengali Muslims in East Bengal, who supported the demand for creation of Pakistan in 1940s, led to constitute major support base in favour of independent Bangladesh in 1971. However, it can be mentioned here as a caveat that PD’s expectation regarding the emergence of a democratic progressive polity in free Bangladesh did not fully materialize. The expectations that were aroused in 1970-71 centering round the political leadership of Sk. Mujibur Rahman were shattered in the unfolding events in Bangladesh from 1973 onwards.

One might discern the influence of PD’s revolutionary background in this connection. In his writing in *Compass* dated 3 April, 1971 he discussed the efficacy of guerrilla tactics for reducing the capacity of the coercive apparatus of the Pakistani state on the one hand, and to boost up the morale of the patriots engaged in the liberation struggle on the other. He persistently insisted on India’s active assistance to the liberated areas.

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433 Translated from the editorial—*Purba Banglar Sangrame Bharatiya Daitya O Kartabya* (i.e. India’s responsibility and duties in the struggle in East Bengal), *Compass* dated 3 April, 1971, p-196

Besides, at that time *Compass* also published several articles\(^{455}\) on the techniques of guerrilla action, seemingly to highlight their importance in the people’s movement in East Bengal. These reminded us of the type of struggle put up by the RCPI group in Dum Dum-Basirhat region in West Bengal and parts of Assam in 1949. It seems from all these writings, including PD’s essay on JP’s unpublicized role in the liberation of Bangladesh\(^{456}\) that like JP, PD too, in the need of immediate struggle against the military oppression in East Bengal, was not willing to make any difference between violent and non-violent resistance.

One important point among all these was that nowhere in his writings did he speak in favour of revolutionary violence or overthrow of the state in East Bengal through mass insurrection in communist fashion. Even when he talked of guerrilla war he made it clear that the scattered armed forces and the youth volunteer groups had to be organized into a unified command so that it was possible to chalk out the strategy and tactics of an

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\(^{455}\) One of such article was on the policy and techniques of guerrilla war by B. Chakraborty published in *Compass* dated 8 May, 1971. Also find the article on the role of guerrilla war in the liberation struggle in Bangladesh by Prafulla Gupta in *Compass* dated 15 May, 1971. Again in the issue of *Compass* dated 19 June, 1971 we find an article *Bangladesh bahinir janno prayojano guerrilla juddher nudstra* (i.e. The main principles of necessary guerrilla war for the Bangladesh liberation army) written by Abdul Kader. The caption of the editorial essay in *Compass* dated 26 June, 1971 was *Muktisangram—Satasfurtata theke sachetan prastuti* (i.e. Liberation struggle—from spontaneity to conscious preparation). In this writing, among other things, PD also spoke of the need of clandestine armed operations, guerrilla actions, organization of youth camps etc. In it he interestingly opined that it might not be possible to achieve the ultimate victory with the help of guerrilla company alone. A regular army would be required at length because probably Indian army would not involve in the internal affairs in Pakistan in a direct manner. See *Compass* dated 26 June, 1971, p-483-7.

\(^{456}\) This editorial essay after JP’s demise was written by PD and it was published in *Compass* dated 20, October 1979.
all-pervading struggle.\textsuperscript{457} In the editorial essay in \textit{Compass} dated 3 April, 1971 he stated emphatically that today protracted struggle was the real road for the fighters in East Bengal. If they could continue the struggle till monsoon they would be able to drag the military of Pakistan to the extreme point of difficulty.\textsuperscript{458} It was clear that he did not view the event of mass struggle from the point of accomplishing a thorough systemic transformation. Neither had he insisted on arms for that purpose. Rather, if we put things in historical perspective, we would see that the struggle in East Bengal did not begin as a nationalist movement for liberation from Pakistan. It was a historical conjuncture of events in the late 1960s which lent the popular mobilization in East Bengal sort of anti-imperialist character vis-à-vis the role and hostile attitude of Pakistan. PD was probably enthused by this stir among a large section of masses in East Bengal against the political repression unleashed by Pakistan.

From above account, it was clear that in PD’s conception of the struggle violence was only a defensive tool to meet the aggression and repression by the state machinery in Pakistan. According to Ruchira Shyam\textsuperscript{459}, Sailen Medhi\textsuperscript{460} and others, it was indicative of the point that PD did not

\textsuperscript{457} Editorial of \textit{Compass} dated 17 April, 1971, p-244
\textsuperscript{458} \textit{Compass} dated 3 April, 1971, p-196
\textsuperscript{459} See the article \textit{Antaraler Bandhu} (i.e.Hidden friend) by Ruchira Shyam published in \textit{Compass} in December 2001, p-1654. Ruchira Shyam knew PD closely due to her association with PD’s activities from late sixties.
\textsuperscript{460} Views expressed by Sailen Medhi, an old and close associate of PD since the time of DumDum-Basirhat struggle. This interview was taken by the researcher at Sailen Medhi’s residence at A.T. Road, Guwahati, Assam on 18/6/2011.
completely shun the path of armed struggle till that point of time. But PD’s own writings at that time also revealed another dimension of his thought with a distinct moral tone. To quote him from his writing in *Compass* dated 29 May, 1971, “Before equipping the people of Bangladesh with arms they had to be made strong morally and politically. Without high moral standard, no nation could make effective use of armaments irrespective of the number they were delivered.” If these were taken as the underlying thought which guided PD’s activities with regard to the struggle in East Bengal, it would not be impertinent to say that his real purpose was to bolster the struggling masses with moral strength and courage. This moral fillip was very much necessary because according to PD, the people in East Bengal were fighting an unequal war with the military government of West Pakistan. That was why, through his series of writings he wanted to convey the message of support to the masses in East Bengal. Also his explicit Appeal to the people of West Bengal, published in *Compass* was meant to seek help for medicine, packed food and money for the people in East Bengal. From that standpoint, his activities related to armed assistance in support of the mass movement was not actually a break from his empathetic approach to the sufferings of people and his active role in social reconstruction in the post-incarceration phase of his life.

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461 Translated in English from the editorial essay in *Compass* dated 29 May, 1971, p-393.
462 See the Appeal published in *Compass* dated 15 May, 1971, p-356.
However, the above-mentioned information related to PD's active involvement in the armed struggle in East Bengal poses problems as to how can this be explained from the Gandhian frame of activities. No doubt, it was a crucial point in the discussion on the evolution of PD's thought and activities. Here for the purpose of analysis we may look back to the events of communal frenzy in Calcutta on 31 August, 1947 "when a group of young people informed Gandhiji that they would protect the affected, but if necessary might use arms. He appreciated their gesture and assured them help in case of police interference."\textsuperscript{463} This showed that Gandhi would have approved application of violence if necessary in case of rescue and relief in a riotous situation. Such a necessity of violence might arise from the situation of self-defense in the event of mortal assault on individual. Thus, the justifiable use of violence from the Gandhian point is the kind and gravity of the circumstances necessitating armed resistance to prevent genocide and deter lethal aggression. Viewed from this angle, PD's activities concerning organization of armed camps for training and aiding the youths of East Bengal in 1971, it could be said, was prompted by a sense of urgency to try resisting violence that was forced upon the people of East Bengal by the military government in Pakistan.

Yet, the post-1971 experience showed that the supply of arms to the people became a serious obstacle to the programme of peaceful reconstruction in Bangladesh in early 1970s. So, what was needed at that time was a public appeal to the masses to surrender illegal arms to help strengthen the process of socio-political reconstruction. But a much-needed appeal of this kind was conspicuous by its absence in PD's *Compass* magazine. Besides, it is important to mention in this context that unlike Gandhi, PD believed violence to be a science.\(^{464}\) It showed why PD did not reject violence, but tried to understand it for practical use. On the other hand, he held, "Most of what is practiced as non-violence is just at the level of sentiment."\(^ {465}\) What actually we mean by nonviolence should be defined.\(^ {466}\) This made it clear that non-violence did not carry mere sentimental value in PD's thought. Rather he preferred an activist, interventionist posture than putting an air of passivity for the sake of non-violence. From this perspective, his involvement in armed activities in the political struggle in East Bengal in 1971 could not be considered as a case of departure from the orientation of his thought and activities from 1962 onwards. This could be affirmed from his views in a

\(^{464}\) This view was expressed by PD at a national seminar on Calcutta held at Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture on March 26-27, 1971. It was taken from the excerpt of his lecture *Methodology of Nonviolence Needed* published in the report in the form of a book *The City in Turmoil* edited by Narendra Goyal, 1971, p-113.

\(^{465}\) If taken as a generalization it appears a vague observation which cannot be substantiated by the acts and struggle of a number of Gandhian leaders throughout the world like Martin Luther King Jr. in America, Nelson Mandela in South Africa etc.

national seminar as reported in *Compass* dated 17 April 1971. There he said that those, who believed in violence with a higher ideal in mind, could be persuaded to be restrained. To quote him, "We have to prove it by action that social change could be possible without resorting to violence."\(^{467}\) We could fairly understand from the timing of this observation that his changed thought in post-incarceration phase was firmly anchored in non-violent path of social reconstruction. During 1970s PD’s approach to rural reconstruction in West Bengal found prolific expression in his conception of Comprehensive Area Development Programme. Therefore, it would be pertinent here to highlight his ideas and activities pertaining to the said programme.

5. During early 1970s Comprehensive Area Development Programme, in short, CADP was launched in West Bengal in which PD played a pivotal role. As Professor Biplab Dasgupta, an eminent economist and the executive vice-chairman of West Bengal Comprehensive Area Development Corporation from 1978 till mid-1987 mentioned in the monograph *Rural Development the CADC Experience* “The main initiative for setting it up was taken by Pannalal Dasgupta and Dr. A. N. Bose.”\(^{468}\) It was evident from different publications related to CADP that both of them conceived the programme as “an integration of

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\(^{467}\) Translated from the reported speech of PD delivered in the national seminar and as it was written in Bengali version by H. Bhattacharya in *Compass* dated 17 April 1971, p-249.

technological modernization in agriculture with socio-economic structural modernization in rural sector.469

Before we delve deeper into PD’s thought on CADP, it seems pertinent to mention that he was a member of the State Planning Board (hereafter SPB) in West Bengal in the early seventies. The SPB was set up in May 1972 with a view to ‘helping the West Bengal government with regard to the proper assessment and utilization of state resources and enunciation of broad policies as also with regard to the formulation of different plans and programmes.’470 It was his role as a member of SPB from 1972 till 1977, which indicated his close affinity with the then Congress government in West Bengal. Here a point to be noted is that PD acquired exposure and insight in the socio-economic conditions of the rural folk through village level reconstruction activities from late 1960s. In that sense the period from late sixties till early 1970s might be considered as a formative period of his ideas.

His entry in SPB in early seventies gave him an opportunity to work inside a greater body and to formulate comprehensive, replicable plans for the entire state. His rise to prominence as a development thinker and activist could be traced to his ideas and activities since that period. It was a major shift in his activities, particularly in two senses. First, while


during sixties he was critical of the Congress led government in West Bengal, he accepted the offer of SPB’s membership made by the ruling Congress government led by Siddhartha Sankar Roy. It did not, however, indicate his pro-Congress attitude. At best, it appeared from his observation in a booklet\textsuperscript{471} that he regarded the efforts of the regime to be a welcome development for the economic revival of the state. His views, however, were that despite a number of government agencies, activities of bloc-level officials and land reform legislations for the peasants and share croppers, the agricultural sector in West Bengal was wallowing in a pitiable condition. CADP which was basically consolidation of all infrastructural facilities in an area, could start functioning as an economically viable plan in a politically and socially conducive climate. It showed that PD was aware of the importance of socio-political factors in making CADP into a broad based constructive movement. Given the politicized climate in West Bengal he had realized this need as early as 1973 when the area-wise surveys were conducted leading to preparation of schemes and concretization of ideas. Till then the programme was not formally introduced. Finally, the West Bengal Comprehensive Area Development Act was passed in 1974.

\textsuperscript{471} Dasgupta, Pannalal, \textit{Parikalpana Rupayane Rajnitir Bhumi\textit{ka} (i.e. The role of politics in the implementation of plans). It was published by Paschimbanga Pradesh Congress Committee. Though, it does not contain the publication year, it has been found out from PD’s own hand-written script of this writing that he wrote it on 20.3.1973.
Second, CADP also represented a shift in PD's activities from his hitherto focus on small area based programmes to a much bigger and more complicated task of developmental projects in different districts covering entire West Bengal. As PD stated in an article in 1975, "Tagore Society for rural development, a non-official voluntary organization, started certain area development programmes on small-scale some years ago with the help of bank finance...This is definitely a very slow process... (So), Tagore Society, with its practical experience, influenced the State Planning Board of the Government of West Bengal to work the same on a comprehensive basis. The State Planning Board examined the potential of the areas...It was felt that with adequate inputs and services production could be increased four to five times. It was observed that all the areas did have some potential for bankable schemes and many individuals residing there were not creditworthy. It was, therefore, essential to find out a proper solution... So it has been planned to set up a statutory authority which would receive capital from banks on government guarantee, on behalf of the people in the specified areas which would generally be a compact area of ten thousand acres of cultivable land. The authority would disburse the funds on the basis of schemes envisaged for the area."  

472 Dasgupta, Pannalal, Comprehensive Area Development Programme In West Bengal. It was published in Financing Agriculture Annual 1975, p-26.
pockets gave way to comprehensive area based projects in West Bengal in mid-1970s.

The idea was to concentrate different facilities and services spatially\(^{473}\) in an area of 10,000 acres of land so as to increase agricultural productivity many times. It was assumed that on the basis of such remarkable increase in the yield it would be possible to generate enough surpluses after meeting all costs of cultivation to make each project area self-financing and viable in due course. Besides, this was expected to create positive spill-over impact on the entire socio-economic scenario of the state. PD and Professor Ajit Narayan Bose (in short, A. N. Bose) in their joint paper spoke about the significance of this programme. First, according to them, "With this transformation, there cannot be any need or necessity to keep the peasants half-fed for generating agricultural surplus for feeding the urban and non-agricultural sector."\(^{474}\) Secondly, "The existing socio-economic institutions like usury, rack-renting etc., which conspire to keep the peasants half-fed have, therefore, become unnecessary."\(^{475}\)

\(^{473}\) According to PD and A. N. Bose, "modernization involves providing facilities for irrigation and drainage, roads and transportation, power, supply of industrial goods like fertilizer etc., arranging for bank credit, arranging for organized marketing, implementing land reform proposals to distributing surplus land, organizing landless agricultural labourers and enforcing a higher minimum wage etc. Each of these activities are controlled and administered by different departments of the Government. Because of this latter fact, all the above programmes are at present conceived, planned and executed in a departmental, sectoral way. In actual life, however, if all those sectoral facilities can be provided to the peasants in an integrated and coordinated fashion, it is only then that the benefit of these facilities can be used by the peasants for maximizing production. Dasgupta, Pannalal and Bose, Dr. Ajit Narayan, CADP: Programme for Restructuring Present Society, Special Independence Number of Society & Commerce, August, 1973, p-257-8.

\(^{474}\) Dasgupta, Pannalal and Bose, Dr. Ajit Narayan, CADP: Programme for Restructuring Present Society, Reprint from Special Independence Number of Society & Commerce, August, 1973, p-257.

\(^{475}\) Ibid
But in CADP the most critical part was the methodology of dealing with the peasants who did not adopt modernization. There were two reasons for such apprehension. One was the socio-economic structure in the rural areas in which the big land owners were not likely to invest much in agricultural modernization. It was due to mahajani system of lending money which was more profitable and easier for them than the tenacity and perseverance required in agricultural production apart from loan requirement for developing agriculture.476 Secondly, the pattern of land holding in West Bengal was highly skewed. Though land reform in West Bengal was started in late sixties, the data cited by Timir Basu in his article on CADP showed that there was continuous increase in the number of landless peasants leading to concentration of land. Mr. Basu showed that the majority of the peasants, i.e. 72.04 per cent—held less than ten acres of land; but a major portion of net cultivated area—70 per cent—was controlled by a minority of about 27 per cent cultivators.477 Given this state of continuous landlessness in agriculture, increasing concentration of land in the hands of a minority and predominance of small peasant holding, CADP, for all practical purposes, could not rely much on the small and marginal farmers. Although, in theory, CADP

476 As far as rich farmers were concerned, wrote Professor Ajit Narayan Bose, it was not necessary for them to adopt modernization, there being in existence more remunerative channels, such as usury. See the essay Towards understanding the economics and politics of Indian development in a collection of articles written by Dr. Ajit Narayan Basu and entitled as Adim Swapna Natun Path, Sahitya Sansad, Calcutta, 2006, p-72.
aimed at to cover all categories of peasants, practically it had to depend largely on middle and big peasants possessing sufficient land required to maximize the benefits from use of modernized techniques. PD and A. N. Bose were aware of this problem as they stated that due to non-acceptance of modernized techniques "if only a part of the land in a village is brought under modernization, then, the overhead fixed cost (say, for bringing power-line or laying the road etc.) per acre will become relatively higher, and the volume of productivity will be lower compared to what it would have been had all the land were modernized." Hence, their reply was, "for achieving maximum possible production from a given area at minimum possible cost, all the cultivators in the given area, will have to be modernized, and this itself requires the elimination of the existing socio-economic institutions like usury, rack-renting and speculative commerce—all thriving on the basis of concentration of land ownership in few hands. It is only in this context that one may understand the necessity of a simultaneous modernization of the technological base and of the socio-economic structural base, which constitutes the main content of CADP."478

The 'comprehensiveness' of CADP could be understood from the above two points. That was to say, one aspect of the plan was a complete package of technological inputs and practices, which were sought to be

introduced for achieving highest possible level of production. The other aspect of it was a complete package of socio-economic structural reform to ‘abolish those aspects of the present society which were inimical simultaneously to an efficient use of modern technology as well as to a socially desirable system of distribution.’ Thus, CADP was conceived of as an integration of the above two packages in a space of given size which would be the spatial units of building blocks for gradually covering the whole countryside in West Bengal.

PD was not only associated with the conception of CADP, but as a member of the Comprehensive Area Development Corporation, the apex body for all these projects, he was directly involved in the implementation of the schemes which were introduced in phased manner in the selected areas in different districts of West Bengal. It may be noted here that the Corporation created under the Act was a very powerful organization. This was not merely in terms of the composition of this organization; but in terms of power it enjoyed in the rural areas under its jurisdiction. Under subsection (1) of section 18 of the Act the cultivator in the project areas were bound to follow the directions of the Project

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480 CADC was launched in 1974 and its activities began in 1975. That PD was a member of the CADC was known from the background papers on agriculture and rural credit which were prepared to serve among the members of the High-power Monitoring group on agriculture. These papers were attached to the letter number 2176/EV/4M-23/76 dated 13 May, 1976 written by the then Director of Evaluation, Monitoring and Manpower of the Department of Development and Planning, Government of West Bengal, to PD, member of SPB.
Director to adopt specific crops, cropping practices like rotation of crops, use of various inputs, construction of field channels for irrigation and such other matters which might be provided by regulations including the requirement to submit true returns of his activities to the project authority. Hence, Professor Biplab Dasgupta aptly stated in the monograph on CADC that such wide ranging powers were not enjoyed by any other organization in the state. Besides, from an official letter numbering 2176/EV/4M-23/76 dated May 13, 1976 written by the then Director of Evaluation, Monitoring and Manpower of the Department of Development and Planning, Government of West Bengal, it was clear that PD was also a member of the High-power Monitoring Group on agriculture constituted by the state government with a view to keeping in touch with the developments at grass root level in agriculture and rural credit. Even he was included as a member of the Ajoy Mukherjee Committee set up in April 1974 to come up with suitable measures after the withdrawal of cease-work by the doctors and engineers and to "look into the anomalies created by the introduction of a new/intermediate selection grade for the 10% of the incumbents and unification of certain services". All these indicated that although politically and background-wise PD was not a man of the establishment, yet at the official level he was entrusted with lot of responsibilities which were of doubtless

481 This letter was found in the personal files of PD kept in the custody of Sumita Dutta, Belgachia Villa, Kolkata.
importance to the state government. Obviously, his activities as a member of these high powered bodies indicated his position and the level of influence he had at his command at that time.

However, the area-based comprehensive development projects as he conceived of were not a structure superimposed from above. Rather, his basic idea was to build up an organization to serve people at their doorsteps. It was, in his words, “to encourage the promotion of an organization by the people themselves ...and pave the way for the peoples’ co-operatives...”\(^{482}\) So, the purpose behind CADP was to establish a new social order with co-operative efforts of the rural people precipitated by technological interventions to release the power of productivity. This would lead to the emergence of self-reliant areas being controlled by self-reliant peoples’ organizations. So, ultimately a situation would arise when CADP would no longer need the element of statutory compulsion. It became evident when he said, “The authority should aim at voluntary acceptance and self-discipline, and avoid bringing law into the picture...Legal bindings relate more to recalcitrants.”\(^{483}\)

But the stringent and coercive legal provisions in the The West Bengal Comprehensive Area Development Act, 1974 became an issue of attack by the leftists and the right- wing groups. While ‘the latter objected to

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\(^{482}\) Dasgupta, Pannalal, *Comprehensive Area Development Programme In West Bengal*. It was published in *Financing Agriculture*, Annual 1975, p-27.

\(^{483}\) Ibid
CADP on the ground that it might take away the freedom of choice of the farmers, the former felt that it would prepare the way for the entry of big capital in the agricultural sector, which, in turn, would marginalize the small peasantry. So, the leftists' fear was that CADP might drive rural economy to a capitalist path.\footnote{PD indicated these common skepticisms towards the proposed scheme in the booklet \textit{Parikalpana Rupayane Rajnitir Bhumika} (i.e. The role of politics in the implementation of plans). See p-20 of the publication. It was written by PD himself and published by Paschimbanga Pradesh Congress Committee. Though, it does not contain the publication year, it has been found out from the source of PD's own hand-written script that he had written it on 20.3.1973.} As mentioned by Professor Biplab Dasgupta, "a more serious opposition came from the left-wing parties and peasant movements. The Marxist dominated All India Krishak Sabha took the view that WBCADC was a fraud, its future target a 'fairy tale' and the main objective behind this 'show-piece' was not rural development but to divert the attention of the rural masses from more fundamental issues of institutional change and land reform and the repression of the landless and the peasantry by rich peasants and powers that be of that time."\footnote{Dasgupta, Biplab, \textit{Rural Development The CADC Experience}, Calcutta, 1982, p-9.} It was true that in early seventies Hare Krishna Konar, leader of leftist peasant movements severely criticized the concept of CADP on the ground that it was anti-revolutionary, retrogressive and a weapon to strengthen the position and power of the feudal forces in the countryside. While referring to these objections made by Konar in \textit{Compass} dated 22 December, 1973 PD wrote a detailed rejoinder. It was
published in several parts in *Compass* from December 1973 till 26 January 1974.

One of PD's central arguments vis-à-vis Konar's criticisms of CADP was that land reforms could not be the only route to agrarian revolution. He maintained that CADP, which was a complementary programme of land reforms, would objectively allow the productive forces so far untapped to expand unhindered and thus it would create possibility of change in the production relations in village setting. From this point, he opined that in the context of India land reforms and reform programme like CADP could be mutually helpful to reach the goal.\textsuperscript{486} It was clear from these writings that although PD's approach differed from that of Konar, both had a point of unity so far as the goal of promoting socialism was concerned. In fact, in PD's contemporary writings we find this distinct tilt towards socialism. This became manifest when he stated in a booklet *Parikalpana Rupayane Rajnitir Bhumika* (i.e. Role of politics in the implementation of plan) written in Bengali on 20/3/1973 that CADP had an inherent agenda of bringing about a complete socio-economic transformation towards socialism through a proper and legalized way. To quote PD, "Without this step, socialism cannot be brought about in the larger backdrop of India. There cannot be any practical programme other than this in the present circumstances if the bloody path is to be

\textsuperscript{486} Translated from the Bengali write up *Hare Krishna Konar O CADP* (i.e. Hare Krishna Konar and CADP) written by PD in *Compass* dated 22 December, 1973, p-981-2.
abandoned." This showed that unlike his earlier attachment to violent path, the trajectory of his thought during 1970s gradually leaned towards a constitutionally and legally acceptable road to socialism. It was evident from his emphasis on creating consensus in people and for conscientizing rural folk for desirable social transformation.

Unlike the antagonistic line of class struggle, PD’s model of comprehensive area development enveloped all people in the rural sector and it followed a Gandhian way of building social integrity for attaining the socialist objective. That was why, said Dr. Ajit Narayan Bose in an interview that ‘he did not press for radical form of land reform, since that was no solution for the problem of the landless agricultural labourer which was likely to exist even after implementation of land reform measures. Besides, land reform was also incompatible with the technological modernization of agriculture, unless small peasants formed groups to pool up lands for cooperative farming. PD’s was an attempt to boost up the forces of production rapidly in the project areas with the help of capital and appropriate technology. He wanted to fulfil his mission by keeping within the stream of official activities to be able to use government apparatus. This did not mean that he was an agent of the government of the day. Broadly speaking, his ideas were disposed in

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487 Dasgupta, Pannalal, *Parikalpana Rupayane Rajnitir Bhumika* (i.e. the role of politics in the implementation of plans). It was published by Paschimbanga Pradesh Congress Committee. Though, this booklet does not contain the publication year, it has been found out from PD’s hand-written script that he wrote it on 20.3.1973. See p-8.
favour of changing the relations of production through the officially sponsored programme. Consequently, he did not put stress on any such items like increase of wage, which could spoil the main thing.  

Keeping this in perspective if we turn our attention to a publication of State Planning Board—*Comprehensive Area Development Programme: A New Strategy For Development* (1973) we could probably get an idea of the then members on the board including PD’s thinking on this subject. To quote a portion of the aforesaid publication, “The type of economy visualized by CADP is a small and middle peasant economy...The perspective before this economy is to develop the small peasant economy so that instead of getting transformed into a capitalist economy, it gradually gets transformed into a Co-operative Socialist economy of a new type in which private ownership of small plots of land by the small but no longer poor peasants can be guaranteed”\(^{489}\). In fact, going through PD’s writings at that time one would come across his frequent reference to this point. In *Parikalpana Rupayane Rajnitir Bhumika*, for example, PD made clear that “CADP would not do away with the rules of the capitalist system, but it would not also allow uneven and free expansion of unregulated capitalism in agriculture like that in Punjab and Haryana. Here emphasis is put on protection of the holding of the small peasants

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\(^{488}\) Views expressed by Dr. Ajit Narayan Bose in an interview at his South Kolkata residence with the researcher on 18/4/2004.

\(^{489}\) *Comprehensive Area Development Programme: A New Strategy For Development* published by State Planning Board, Govt. of West Bengal, p-48.
and that of the rights of the share-croppers. We have not recommended forming a quadrangle in the lands of those who have their plots contiguous in one and the same field so as to increase the strength of the jotedars. The reason for it is that even after having quadrangles the land could be further fragmented afterwards according to hereditary division.

Secondly, the big farmers would not be interested to cooperate with the small peasants if they could obtain a large portion of land wholly in one place. Besides, an additional safeguard would be put in place in terms of restriction on selling of land in the project areas. For this, it would not be possible to dispose of land by anybody without informing the project authority so that comparatively big farmers could not become bigger jotedars by concentrating the lands of the small poor peasants. In that case the project authority would be empowered to intervene to arrange for giving the land to the poor and landless agriculturists. By these PD meant to indicate both the legal side as well as the thoughts underlying the CADP to ensure that land ownership would remain in the hands of the farmers, and the latter would receive loans for cultivation in their land, thus establishing a bridge between the real cultivators and the banks as funding agency.

490 Translated from Parikalpana Rupayone Rajnitir Bhumika (i.e. the role of politics in the implementation of plans) by PD and published by Paschimbanga Pradesh Congress Committee. Though, this booklet does not contain the publication year, it has been found out from the source of PD’s own hand-written script that he wrote it on 20/3/1973. See p-20-1.
It could be said on the basis of above accounts that PD’s thought of socialism through CADP was not categorical but vague. Timir Basu in his article described the concept of approaching socialism through CADP a contradiction in terms. Having said that the purpose of CADP, related to agro-industries, being ‘modernization’, Mr. Basu wondered ‘would capitalism be arrested with the help of capitalism’. CADP’s emphasis, first of all, was on creating conditions for production boom, but it could not bring socialism by itself. This lopsidedness in the conception of CADP could be understood if it was viewed from the angle of much thrust put on supply of inputs, especially the tools of modern agricultural technology. But collective ownership of land and more importantly, the issue of equitable distribution of benefits were some of the points which remained largely neglected in the conception of the scheme. It did not speak of abolition of the system of private ownership of land in agriculture. Of course, that could not be done due to the political reality in the state at that time. Given the political happenings in West Bengal in early seventies, abolition of private ownership of land or anything short of it like abolition of jotedars could have serious political repercussion for the newly installed Congress regime in the state.

No doubt, CADP was a bold step on the part of the West Bengal government to infuse new ideas in agriculture and the process of industrialization. But this government did not take upon itself the
responsibility of implementing thorough reform measures. For example, the government sponsored programme of CADP did not look into the need of strengthening government run public distribution system for proper distribution of surplus produce. It was a subject within the purview of the state government and much depended on the efficacy of distribution network so far as equitable distribution of produced food grains was concerned. PD was against the distribution through general market for its inherent exploitative character that took advantage of poor labour and also because it kept men unemployed for many days a year. But this did not make clear what would be the mechanism of fair distribution except through some co-operatives and government agencies. The project authority in CADP areas was only powerful in monitoring and enforcing the cultivators to adopt the improved agricultural practices without keeping their land fallow. But it did not clarify the system of distribution of benefits except his thought that ‘a separate market for people themselves’ had to be created to cater to their daily and basic needs.

This, however, did not mean that PD wanted to immediately discard the usual market. “The new type of activity”, said PD, “that we have in view can be developed only gradually, by raising the level of consciousness and the worth of the masses and by widening the scope of co-operation among themselves. At the present time, the people of an area may be
producing certain things for national or international markets or for the city market. They will continue to produce these things, keeping in view the demand for these things in the respective market, but then the money received in exchange of these articles will not be used to buy their necessities from outside the area; their need for articles of use will have to be met with goods produced in the area or, at most, in a neighbouring area.”491 Thus, he wanted to develop a production system which could rapidly increase productivity and also that could provide employment to the idle manpower in village.

But in the face of the opposition of the peasant organizations and that of the right wing forces, the objective of desirable transformation through CADP was not easy to achieve. On the contrary, his reformative approach to socialism and ‘simple-minded practically cost-less solution to the long-standing problems of poverty and backwardness’ appeared unrealistic. The initial problem centered round the difficulty regarding the timely supply of adequate industrial inputs like fertilizers, power etc. The question was how far the projects could take off the ground without corresponding drive towards suitable industrialization. In *Compass* dated 26 January, 1974 PD commented that CADP was not only about devising project for agriculture, but it was also an industrial programme and a programme of re-building the country as well. In that article he admitted

the necessity of a drive for agriculture oriented industrialization. Simultaneously, he pointed to the overall crises situation in the country at that time related to the problems of import of fertilizers and the crisis of crude oil in the world. Objectively all these did not bode well for the programme, though he was optimistic that the way out of the economic crises lay in creating a massive pressure by such a huge action-oriented programme.492

It appeared from different publications on CADP, as well as PD’s own writings in newspapers like the Amrita Bazar Patrika, Ananda Bazar Patrika in 1975-76 that there were some lacunae in the scheme, particularly those which arose at the time of implementation. One was related to the crucial need of subsidy which was important to make the efforts meaningful to the small peasants who were economically weak. But, in practice, the emphasis in the programme on economic viability, bankability and self-reliance was so much that soon the project authority started charging the full cost from the beneficiaries for products and services. As Professor Biplab Dasgupta mentioned that the project authority did not probably understand the implication of ‘full cost recovery’. “So when the Corporation”, said Professor Dasgupta, “began charging for irrigation water a price five times higher than the subsidized rate charged by the government owned tubewells and the farmers began

492 Dasgupta, Pannalal, Hare Krishna Konar O CADP (6). It was published in Compass dated 26 January, 1974, p-1109.
protesting against this 'discrimination', the enthusiasm of the government members on the board declined". Professor Dasgupta further stated that the approach of PD and Dr. A N Bose, the twin architects of the CADP, were greatly influenced by the World Bank.

The above criticism was partly justified as substantiated from de-emphasizing the importance of subsidy. The plan running through the scheme was to obtain fund from banks on credit. It was assumed that under CADP "the production would grow so fast that the farmers would face no difficulty in repaying the loans". But these considerations by the then members of CADC including PD could not properly measure the needs of rural farming population, especially the poorer section amongst them, who were in need of government subsidy.

Clearly, there were some problem areas in CADP. PD himself was worried due to the unwillingness on the part of the Reserve Bank of India and that of the finance department of the central government to directly release fund. This apart, the dawdling attitude of the banks created doubts about timely supply of required amount of loans to the CADP. Without this financial back up, the future of the projects was likely to be in disarray. In his writings in the Anada Bazar Patrika dated 24 June and 26 June, 1975 PD expressed his dissatisfaction over this point that made clear non-cooperation from the central government and CADC’s helpless

493 Dasgupta, Biplab, CADP Today. Though this publication does not carry the publication year, it appears from perusal that probable time of its publication was December 1979. See p-2.
dependence on banks for investable capital in agriculture. If the timing of these writings was taken into account it could be definitely said that indifferent attitude of the central government towards CADP in West Bengal during 1970s had acted as a teething problem for successful implementation of the programme. However, it was not appropriate that PD did not fully realize the importance of subsidy. It appeared from his different writings that he sought to minimize the dependence on government subsidy because he wanted to bring in a self-sustaining model of rural development. In contrast to temporary relief to poor villagers, his idea was to help village people attain self-reliance. That was why CADP was drawn with an eye to comprehensive area-wise planning, not as a wholly subsidised programme. In PD's own words, it was “both man-power planning and consumption planning according to a very modest scale of living sustainable by available resources.”

Seen from that perspective, the plan of comprehensive development was connected to his vision of life based on fulfillment of basic needs of all rural people. Since rural economy was principally agricultural, he emphasized agriculture in comprehensive sense including cultivation of crops, and increasing its productivity to the utmost level using technological know-how. He also viewed diverse allied activities like poultry farming, animal husbandry,

494 Dasgupta, Pannalal, Food For Work A way to utilize surplus stock, see Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 9, 1977, p-4.
digging of new ponds and reclamation of the old ones which were all very important to employ surplus labour in village for raising the earning capacity of the rural people throughout the year. This, in short, according to PD, was 'man-power planning' in rural sector. For 'consumption planning', he proposed construction of grain golas or *dharmagolas* from which villagers could get 'consumption loan'. He thought that by encouraging savings this would free them from their dependence on the village rich and traders for advance on adverse terms.\textsuperscript{495}

In PD's scheme there was an alternative conception of capital. It was food and such productive activities organized around agriculture. He believed that this would reduce dependence on money if these activities were performed within local village community by people themselves. That was why, in CADP the focus was on the village-level activities. It meant that the need of initial capital for development would likely to be very less. To quote PD, "In our country food should be taken as the main capital for work and not money. The capital for stocking grain golas need not be all dependent on government's capacity for deficit financing as at present for the FCI. People may be encouraged to gradually build up their own stock, or co-operatives can come into the picture."\textsuperscript{496}

He also insisted "to create a new social climate in people. The people should be made proud of their own produce or goods and feel no

\textsuperscript{495} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{496} Ibid.
inferiority complex to use their own goods. A real spirit of Swadeshi and self-help shall have to be ushered in, a kind of cultural revolution in the consumption pattern and style of life...gradually uniformity in consumption pattern and style of life can be built up with a great cultural movement for the entire country."497 This meant creation of a normative orientation among village people and dissemination of co-operative spirit among them cutting across class divisions, social and political cleavages. If this could be done then motivation for initiating work at the grass root level would be higher and correspondingly the need of institutional subsidy would be less. PD's whole idea concerning comprehensive area development hinged on this crucial value orientation in peoples' minds. It was crucial because it was directly connected with the moot point of changing the mind-set of all people in rural society so as to create a sense of co-operative community. For this in his contemporary writings in Compass he urged the political leadership of all political parties to create necessary consensus among people in rural society. It was clear from this that comprehensive rural development was not an elitist vision to him, but he understood the need of promoting consciousness of rural people as prerequisite to the effective mobilization of their mental and material resources.

497 Ibid.
In the book *Production By the Masses And The Philosophy Of Charkha*, PD admitted the failure of CADP. To quote him, he said, "It has been our experience that the programme fails to channelize the people’s lives into new directions, to enhance their spirit of enterprise or to add substantially to their income...Some extra mandays may be generated by the digging of ponds...but these cannot be a perennial source of employment. So people who may be employed in these projects soon find themselves out of employment...Some money may be received on loan, but the loan often remains unrepaid. In consequence, it becomes impossible to cultivate the land in the second year and the land may have to be secretly mortgaged to the old owners or money lenders. The poor generally have no rights to the pond, so that digging of ponds does not benefit them either in the sense of making a permanent addition to their income...The additional production that results from the ponds and the plots of land, viz, the extra yield of fish and the extra yield of crop, drifts to the ordinary market and so make no change in the consumption level of the villagers. There is no effective demand in the villages for the extra foodgrain, vegetables, fish, milk, eggs produced there, for the purchasing power of the rural people has registered no rise. All extra produce finds
its way to the city markets... This accounted for the shift in his thought from CADP since early 1980s.

During the period 1972-1977 his emphasis was more on production rather than distribution or consumption. It seems from his writings in Bitarka (i.e. Debate) that unlike the situation in developed western countries where ‘limits of growth’ became the buzzword in the mainstream development thinking, it was not yet relevant to set a limit to production in the countries like India due to problems of low productivity in land and poverty. It was probably the reason which lay behind his distinct emphasis on enhancing agricultural production during 1970s to tackle poverty. But his analysis of actual state of affairs in the project areas in early eighties led him to make up the flaw by thinking as to how the income generated by optimizing production in the project area could be retained for benefit of the people within the area. From this point he proposed in his book Production By The Masses And The Philosophy Of Charkha that the income and capital of each area should not go out of the area, but they were to be put to use within the area over and over again.
But the question was how it could be done. This necessitated an analysis of the consumer demands of the rural people, which was integrally connected with the issue of inculcation of new values in their minds for bringing about desirable transformation.

According to PD, the income generated in an area had the tendency to go out of that area because of two interrelated factors, one being the craze for buying consumer goods viz, textiles, soap, oil etc. manufactured in urban areas or in foreign countries. The other factor was an attitude of aversion to locally produced goods.\(^{501}\) Since his main aim was to create self-working and self-reliant village, he proposed to “use consumer goods produced within the area and not go in for goods coming from outside”\(^{502}\). He stated that “The people will have to rest content with things produced within their own area although these may not be of a high quality. This will surely require a high degree of self-restraint in lifestyle and also in their day-to-day behavior.”\(^{503}\) He called this loyalty to one’s own area ‘love for the indigenous (or swadeshi)’. But, in the modern context of information revolution and consumerism, such restraint and indigenous orientation of economic activities seem largely unrealistic. In economic terms, development involves more production,
growth and technological intervention which are not accessible in self-reliant economy.

From above it was clear that PD's CADP brand of socialism was a distinct type. Arrangement-wise it had room for cultivation by individual owners of land, but the emphasis was on mutual sharing and co-operative spirit among rural people. It raised the issue of value orientation of the rural folk which he thought to be very crucial for instilling a sense of self-reliance in local village society. Conceptually, it was a form of micro-socialism in rural areas springing from people's participation, their moral force and a resolve to attain a self-reliant condition free from misery and exploitation. Such a society in which people would mutually co-operate for fulfillment of their basic needs, not for luxury items was one that PD had sought to achieve. For this, in his contemporary writings he emphasized the need of bringing about substantial change in the approach and attitudes of the rural people. In this context his observations in the book *Production By The Masses And The Philosophy Of Charkha* seems particularly worth-mentioning. He said, "It will not suffice to have monetary capital and technology alone. Without a moral commitment and a moral capital, a truly new, self-reliant society will remain unattainable. In other words, in all such work of daily life as production, consumption and distribution, this new attitude, values and morality will have to be
brought into play.'"\textsuperscript{304} It meant a new outlook which involved a feeling of attachment to one's local area and peoples' involvement in the production of their daily necessities. This would require them to exercise self-restraint to check consumerist habits, thereby charting out the path of self-reliant production and mutual distribution.

6. Like PD's ideas behind CADP, his views and activities in backward tribal and refugee villages in Dandakaranya areas in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh during the period from 1978 till early 1990s was integrally connected with his vision of introducing an inclusive, cooperative and self-reliant society. Going through his writings during this period on Dandakaranya both in \textit{Compass} and in other magazines like \textit{Desh} one could glean his distinct emphasis on undertaking constructive works to develop the backward tribal and forest land into a 'cooperative socialist society' against what he perceived to be the prevalent tendency in big metropolitan centres towards exploitative, pro-capitalist developments. Keeping this in view, it would not be pertinent to delve deeper into the details of influx of people from East Bengal to West Bengal as early as in 1946 that continued through 1950s and 1960s. Suffice to say that a large number of these refugee families lodged in different temporary camps brought forth the question of their shifting and rehabilitation in the tracts


327
of undeveloped and sparsely populated tribal areas in Dandakaranya. For purpose of background information, it seems important to mention in this context that towards the close of 1957 an elaborate bureaucratic arrangement including the institutional agency like Dandakaranya Development Authority (in short DDA) was set up to conduct the implementation of the schemes made for the refugees. This had a crucial bearing on the whole process of rehabilitation in the area in terms of both progress of resettlement work and also its failures.

In this perspective we would examine PD's role as a social activist in the process of rehabilitation of Bengali refugees at Dandakaranya from 1978 till early 1990s. His connection with this place, however, could be traced back to his enthusiastic visit to this area soon after release from jail in August 1962. It seems important to find out his ideas at that time without which his post-1978 engagement at Dandakaranya could scarcely be fully understood. So, following the time scale, his thought and activities centering Dandakaranya could be analysed in two parts, one concerning his initial and short-lived interest in Dandakaranya in 1962 and the other, the more sustained one that began with his intervention in the problem in 1978 in the backdrop of mass exodus from Dandakaranya to Marichjhapi in West Bengal.

To begin with, his association with Dandakaranya dates back to his visit in the area during September–October 1962. To know as to what
motivated him to visit the area it seems important to reiterate as he reminisced in his writing on Dankaranya published in *Desh* that during imprisonment in the fifties his attention was seized mainly by two events of the day. One was Binoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement and the other was resettlement of the Bengali refugees from East Bengal in Dandakaranya. To quote him, “The saga of success of the Bhoodan movement came to me as surprising news and a challenge at that time. Those land-owners, who were not willing to part with even a minute portion of land without a difficult and bloody conflict, were donating their lands liberally in response to Binobaji’s calls. This being the case, was a matter of big challenge to those like us who believed in class struggle. In case of Dandakaranya the entire district of Koraput was donated under Bhoodan.”

However, he observed that the true application of the Gandhian ideal of *Sarbodaya* could not be pursued in Koraput due to multiple reasons. So when Bengali refugees were shifted to this area since 1957-8 where DDA as a powerful central agency was created to initiate rehabilitation work, this naturally attracted his attention during 1960s.

Thus, in contrast to his interest in violent communist revolutionary movement during 1940s, his attention shifted to the mobilization of people through voluntary land-gift movement and the creation of a ‘new

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505 Dasgupta, Pannalal, *Dandakaranye—Nirbasan Na Punarbasan?* (i.e, In Dandakaranya—Whether Transportation or Rehabilitation?), *Saradiya Desh* (1394 BS), Calcutta, 1987, p-246.
society' permeated by the spirit of cooperation and hard struggle by the refugees in Dandakaranya during 1950s. It was a clear indicator of a crucial transformation in his views in favour of building an exploitation-free society in a peaceful fashion. This showed that although he continued to believe in socialism, the hitherto radical trappings in his approach had changed from one of ushering in revolution from above in the government and institutional fabric of society through armed struggle to that of a reformed agenda—effecting change in the value framework within people at the grass roots level. In the period subsequent to his release in August 1962 he showed active interest in the events in Dandakaranya to find out whether the work of refugee resettlement could open up the possibility of bringing about the ‘co-operative socialistic society’ he had envisioned. This also explains his later concerns to visit the island of Marichjhlanpi in Sundarban area and also Dandakaranya in 1979 to see what led the Bengali refugees already resettled at Parolkot and adjoining areas to move frantically to the uncertain destination in West Bengal amidst firm opposition from the state government to allow them to stay there. To him, Dandakaranya was a land of struggle, a pocket of experiment for realizing a cooperative socialistic society. His writings in *Compass* throughout 1978 and in *Desh* in particular in 1987 bore testimony to this feeling as also a strong socialist orientation in his ideas. From this angle, the episode of mass desertion of Dandakaranya by
the refugees in 1978 got the possibility of crucial experiment of refugee settlement in Dandakaranya ruptured midway.

According to his writing in Desh magazine in 1987, his visit in Koraput after touring some places of Bastar and Pakhanjore area in Dandakaranya region in 1962 could not last long due to the incursion of the Chinese army in India. This crisis situation led him to rush to Assam. From 1962 - 1978 he could not keep in touch with Dandakaranya due to his involvement in constructive endeavours in different rural pockets. To quote PD, “I assumed that in this long time those people must have been resettled in that area.” But it proved wrong when the massive exodus of the refugee settlers from Dandakaranya crashed in Marichjhanpi area in Sundarbans in 1978. According to him, “This revealed the long suppressed problem in Dandakaranya which had assumed the form of a furnace of fierce discontent. At that time administration of the central government and police forces of different states were deployed to stop their migration to West Bengal. But all these efforts to prevent their continuous inflow were in vain...The left front government in West Bengal also did not hesitate to take recourse to coercive methods like lathi charge and firing on the refugees. An impossible situation was created in Basirhat and Hasnabad where the masses of thousands of desperate refugees began to assemble. They almost occupied the island.

506 Ibid, p-248
called Marichjhanpi. What a desperate attempt on their part to clear forest to make room for their habitation in spite of the inclement weather of the rainy season, the fear of insects etc. The state government was also adamant not to allow them to settle down there by any means."507

All these showed how administration at different levels especially West Bengal government took a very narrow approach in dealing with the situation of mass migration. On the other, it was also clear from above that the inner feelings of alienation and unattended grievances of the Bengali refugees at Dandakaranya caused tremendous frustration amongst them and made them extremely desperate. It was this reason that led PD to combine both the material and the psychological aspects in the gamut of the rehabilitation programme. One could clearly see from his writings in *Compass* where he urged different parties—concerned state governments, administration of the DDA, the local organizations, civil society and people at large—to put stress on both these aspects during his post-1978 engagement in Dandakaranya. His was of the view that it was possible to work out amicable solution of the problem through in-depth study, spot visits, sensitive response of all people, of concerned governments, officials, organizations and their mutual sharing, coordination and comprehensive integrated approach in stead of fragmented and ad hoc arrangements.

507 Ibid, p-248

332
PD's stress on the twin aspects of rehabilitation work was an upshot of his visit of Marichjhanpi to personally see the conditions of the refugees at the height of the tension in 1978-9 in the face of strong resistance put up by the police. To him, it was not the question of allowing or disallowing the migrant refugees to settle down at that place. But the issues of fundamental importance, according to him, were the reasons behind their mass desertion of Dandakaranya and the form of society required for their rehabilitation. Both these aspects received importance in his thought. In the editorial of *Compass* dated 27 May 1978 he stressed the need of socio-economic reconstruction in Dandakaranya for proper rehabilitation of the refugees in that new society. From this aspect he raised the question squarely, "Where will they be resettled? In the same old society, can the re-introduction of class-ridden, caste-ridden, unequal feudal society be fit to be called rehabilitation? Why in that vast tract of land the issue of resettlement of those lakhs of refugees in a new, co-operative and socialist society could not be considered?"\(^{508}\) In this context, he also referred to the argument of the critics as to whether there was any real scope of construction of a new socialist society in isolated pockets like Dandakaranya given the country-wide situation confined in semi-feudal, semi-capitalist system. In response to it, his view was that

\(^{508}\) Dasgupta, Pannalal, Editorial article in *Compass*, May 27, 1978, p-258.
in the large land in Dandakaranya the task of rehabilitation in socialist line and the programme of creating a strong pocket of new social formation could by no means be utopian or unreal. In that sprawling land, not only the Bengali refugees, but also the aboriginal tribes and the poor people of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh could be rehabilitated. It is possible if the leadership has imagination and sincerity. This leadership cannot come from bureaucracy.⁵⁰⁹

It was from this angle he criticized the activities of DDA in his Note on the Dandakaranya Project though he seems to be against its abolition from the point of its development potential. He criticized the faulty approach of the centre and the absence of overall plan. He commented in the aforesaid note “It is surprising to see that there is no such concerete plan for Dankaranya, although it has been widely taken for granted that there is such a plan. The task does not appear before the Planning Commission and the Parliament has yet no such paper to discuss and give sanction. It is yet a vague conception—a desire to develop an undeveloped area lying in its natural wastefulness and negligence for thousand of years. Whatever little development has been undertaken, has been done by different unco-ordinated interests…There is perhaps no co-ordinated understanding between the refugee rehabilitation schemes, development of local tribal population etc…This leads to the most

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid

334
pertinent question, what is the future of the DDA itself, how long will it exist, is it a temporary authority or a permanent one?...In the absence of an overall plan for DDA, it now concerns and confines itself only with the question of rehabilitation of East Bengal refugees and a fraction of local tribes contiguous to refugee rehabilitation centres. And this task is necessarily taken as a temporary one and as soon as this task is taken for completed, the DDA itself will wound up...From the above consideration about the uncertainty of the longevity of DDA, an administrative weakness persists all along its development. The entire enterprise lacks purposive zeal, vision and definite attitude among the officers and the staff...

In a special article on Dandakaranya published in Desh (1987) he also said that ‘these people languishing in different refugee camps in the area were not only very poor, but also their educational standards were substantially low. Consequently, they lacked in capability and organization to properly represent and communicate their demands to the authority. In the circumstances, it was difficult to establish sincere interactions between these people and the officers of the DDA who hailed from different linguistic and caste background. So they could not understand the critical need and problems of the refugee population. This

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added to numerous other constraints and credibility gap for appreciating the gravity and significance of the overall situation.511

It was clear from his observations that there was no integrated and co-ordinated long-term planning for balanced and comprehensive development of the area and of the lives of the refugees and the aboriginal tribes inhabiting Dandakaranya. Second, the focus of DDA’s activities was narrow since the tasks it performed were mostly related to exercises at physical infrastructure and economic rehabilitation of some refugee families and not the total development functions of the vast area as PD repeatedly emphasized. But most importantly, there was a cultural and communication gap between the Bengali refugees and the local tribal population on the one hand, and also between the refugees and the project authority on the other, which raised doubt on the credibility of the entire effort. This produced a psychological feeling of alienation among the refugees for which they could not identify themselves with this distant land and its demography and topography were alien to them. PD nicely put it in his writing in Desh “The refugees have been dispatched to a faraway area—the forest of Dandakaranya in which Ram Chandra (the great mythological character) spent the long years of his exile. This was no rehabilitation, but exile or penal transportation, which indeed became

511 Dasgupta, Pannalal, Dandakaranye—Nirbasan Na Punarbasan? (i.e, In Dandakaranya—Whether Transportation or Rehabilitation?), Saradiya Desh (1394 BS), Calcutta, 1987, p-252.
the conviction of the refugees." This showed how Dandakaranya instead of becoming a well-arranged rehabilitation plan had assumed an anti-people orientation in the perception of the refugees. This was enough to frustrate the programme as was evident from the large scale desertion of the Bengali refugees resettled at Dandakaranya in 1978. This indicated that despite attempts at the official level to arrange possible rehabilitation for these refugees, the latter, according to PD, could not psychologically accept Dandakaranya as their own homeland. In this background he set out to visit the area and gradually felt the need of starting voluntary initiatives in different refugee and tribal hamlets at Parolkot, Malkangiri etc. in Dandakaranya region. His writings in various issues of Compass at the time revealed different strings of thought regarding the changed scenario after the return of the refugees, the outlook of the concerned states to this reversion and above all, the dip in the mental strength of the refugees when the work in Dandakaranya had to be started anew. In his words, the refugees who had returned from West Bengal were extremely demoralized because at the time of leaving their settlement at Dandakaranya they had sold out all their possessions like shelters, cattle, implements etc. which they gathered over a long time. Their faith in the efficacy of the DDA had also exhausted

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512 Ibid
513 Ibid, p-248
completely. Even it was not only the question of demoralization of the refugees because the DDA, the chief development agency in the area also had fallen in a state of frustration due to the mass desertion by the Bengali refugees. Hence, his priority area was to create a sympathetic approach among all concerned parties and state governments to the miseries of the disheartened refugees coming back from West Bengal to Dandakaranya. During his visit in the area PD therefore met a number of government leaders like the then Chief Minister of Orissa, the minister from Koraput district, state officials like the Chief Secretary of Orissa, litterateurs, journalists, and also leaders of different left parties to discuss different aspects of this complex problem and to form a holistic approach to the issue of refugee rehabilitation and of the total development of the area.

On these PD’s views and suggestions were related to three salient points. First, he repeatedly stressed in Compass that agriculture in the area, if supported by irrigation projects in the river of Poteru, Satiguda etc. could be a means of economic recovery for the refugees. But most noticeably, he emphasized that “Mere material conditions not enough to rebuild the broken minds of these uprooted peoples. A tremendous psychological fillip is needed to combat their defeatism and frustration and mental

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weakness. A very careful, sincere and intimate approach is needed in every major officer recruited for the purpose. The recruited officers must undergo social welfare training in the context of resettlement of displaced persons...The feeling of separation and of being lost in the immense distances of Dandakaranya must be combated. The refugee villages are at the distance of 70, 80 and even over hundred miles from one another. Even in the same area, villages are away from one another by 8 to 10 miles. In between them lie jungles and uncultivable land so that even in distant future these villages cannot come closer by extension of habitations...DDA cannot have as much land as it wishes to construct contiguous clusters of villages to bring about a compact picture and integrated wholesome psychology in the refugees...Thus these villagers live a kind of exiled and interned life not only away from Bengal but also away from one another even in Dandak. The separation is a patent factor in their life and mind. They are not only separated from Bengal, but separated from themselves and ...perhaps away from India herself...Thus a sense of vacuum, loneliness and separation is a killing chronic factor in their mind...Strange as it is, there has not been any provision for transistor or battery set radio in these villages. A community radio can do a lot to combat this sense of separation.”

Second, he made it clear that any scheme of rehabilitation in Dandakaranya could not be a mere affair of the Bengali refugees. Although he did not deny the special need of the Bengali refugees, he was categorical about harmonious and integrated development of the area including all people whether Bengalee, or local tribesmen. To quote him, “The myopic view or sentiment of the Bengalees that Dandakaranya should be a closed preserve for the Bengali refugees only and that DDA should develop the area as another Bengal is extremely ludicrous and dangerous for the refugees themselves. As I have shown above, all India will never sanction the necessary expenses...if DDA is meant and confined to the interest of Bengalee or even other refugees only. A day is sure to come, sooner than later when the refugee question will be closed—rehabilitated or unrehabilitated. How and where do these stranded families lie then in the fastness and vastness of hostile forest region? ...To my view, the salvation lies in making the other states and India more and more interested and involved in the total development of the area, in which the refugees can settle down in peace and prospect along with others.”

The same feeling as above ran through his another writing on Dandakaranya. In the booklet entitled *Dandakaranya: Natun Samajer Jonno Prochesta* (i.e. Dandakaranya: effort for new society) he stated

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distinctly that “if the Bengalees willing for resettlement in the area could not unite with the local tribes and others, if they, led by their small interests, did not take the total picture into account and also thought in selfish terms of their own good without striving for the benefits of others, then here only poisonous seeds would be sown. No way could it usher in a new society or civilization and one day this poisonous tree would plunge everybody’s life into grim darkness.”\textsuperscript{518} This effort, according to him, required a sense of value and an awakening to change the orientation of thought and role of the young Bengali boys and girls. This would lead the new generation of the refugee Bengali population towards the direction of playing a historical role which they could take up as a challenge in the remote land to set an example before the entire country. In the programme of such nature and gigantic proportion naturally money or economy was not the real issue since in his opinion the task was mainly to take the tribal people into confidence. He argued that different state governments, the central government as also banks were interested in the investment required for elevating the tribal masses from their backward state of living through impetus like improved agriculture, animal husbandry and education. But the question was whether the tribals were willing to accept all these or not. This shows that he was aware of the problem that the tribals might feel threatened in their own land since

\textsuperscript{518} Dasgupta, Pannalal, \textit{Dandakaranya: Natun Samajer Jonno Prochesta}, Tagore Society for Rural Development, Calcutta, year of publication not mentioned but it seems to be written in early 1980s.
their natural habitat and forest were being destroyed to introduce a civilization altogether different from them. Hence, in his view the main task was first to remove this fear and apprehension and not financial investment. The nature of the task involved was ‘social’ and ‘motivational’, not pecuniary.\textsuperscript{519}

Third, from the above it was clear that his emphasis was on creation of awakening in people for bringing about a co-operative socialist society with the voluntary collaboration among people at the grass root level. Given this overall social objective, he believed that it could not be fully accomplished by the government. For this he envisaged important role for the voluntary agencies. But in the Bengali booklet on Dandakaranya published from TSRD he made no bones about telling the fact that the efforts of voluntary organizations would likely to be in vain if people’s own organization could not be developed.\textsuperscript{520} It indicated that he had a definite plan of development in Dandakaranya area. TSRD’s projects in different villages in the area were the means of his sustained engagement at constructing an inclusive and self-reliant society. To quote a portion from the report of TSRD in this connection “Tagore Society joined hands with AVARD, Gandhi Peace Foundation, Rural Development

\textsuperscript{519} Dasgupta, Pannalal, \textit{Dandakaranya Natun Samajer Janna Prochesta} (i.e. Dandakaranya Endeavour for New Society), Tagore Society, Calcutta, p-13-4. This Bengali booklet does not carry the year of publication. However, it seems from its content that it was written by PD in the 1980s when he played a crucial role in TSRD’s pilot projects in this area.

\textsuperscript{520} Ibid, p-17
Consortium and other voluntary agencies, Dandakaranya Development Authority, Local Government and the people in trying to alleviate the sufferings of these unfortunate people. It was agreed in a meeting at Delhi with AVARD and other organizations...to identify the problems and work out the strategy for development under the guidance of Shri Pannalal Das Gupta, General Secretary, Tagore Society. While working in the area the Society was convinced that the problems of displaced families could not be resolved in isolation and that their rehabilitation depended on an integrated development of the area and their integration with the most neglected local tribal population.\textsuperscript{521}

However, the development narrative of PD was not without limitations. So far as his thought on development in Dandakaranya was concerned his emphasis as stated above did not envisage the critical need of politics. He was largely reticent on political aspect of development at the grass root level. Under his stewardship TSRD became an important actor in local development—irrigation, improved crop farming and provision of other services which involved decisions about who got what and how, i.e. allocation and delivery of these goods. These functions were political in nature, and the consensus, meeting, field visits, persuading government, formulation of policies, issue of public funding etc. were all related to the

\textsuperscript{521} Tagore Society For Rural Development A Report on Ten Years of its working published by TSRD, Calcutta. This report does not spell out its year of publication. However, it seemed from its content that it might be published around 1980-81, p-25.
complex political process at different levels. While PD was involved in all these, his views seemed to be deficient for ignoring the political element in the development programme in the area. In other words, it was important for the local tribes and poor refugees to acquire political power to be able to influence the policies of the central government and respective state governments rather than remaining at the receiving end. From PD’s views, however, it appeared that he did not consider area development from this perspective. The treatment of the Dandak refugees in West Bengal, if juxtaposed with the insensitive line of thinking of the central government, inclined to winding up DDA, suggested that the situation could lead these people to their political mobilization. This, in turn, could leave positive impact on the development of the people of the area. But this angle was conspicuously absent in his thought on Dandakaranya.

From 1979 till 2011 is not a short period for evaluating the programme started by PD in this area. It is an important aspect of the present study in the sense that it may be reckoned as an index of continuation of the work after his demise in 1999. It appeared from the reports of TSRD that initially from 35 villages in Malkangiri and Korakunda blocks of Koraput district of Orissa in 1979, activities of TSRD expanded to three projects in this region suggesting spatial spread covered by these projects in 2011. However, none of its annual reports in recent time dwelt on effectiveness
of various programmes in bringing about a qualitative shift in the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the tribal and refugee population in this area. It was true that PD's views on development at Dandakaranya region revealed his broad attitude for favouring harmonious development of all people of the area. But it did not match with the reality where there was parochial attitude in the DDA, and also provincialism in the minds of the people of the concerned states. So, his ideal of building a regenerated society seemed to be far from reality and the goal remained unrealized in action. In the article *Natun Jibaner Janno Andolan* (i.e. Movement for new life) in *Compass* 20 June, 1987, he did not conceal his inner dissatisfaction that voluntary social agencies as he conceived could not create a movement of strong, self-supporting and constructive activities in society. They, in his opinion, fell far short of the role to act as an instrument of emancipation. They also were not able to get over the hackneyed course of market-oriented developments and state sponsored programmes, and were unable to provide a vista different from what was in vogue. It made clear his feeling of disappointment over own programmes and broad agenda of ushering in a transformation in society at large from the grass root level.

Finally, during the period from 1988 till early 1990s one major plank of his thought and activities was related to the shift in his ideas on agriculture. As regards agriculture his views during the period from 1969
till 1985/6 were in favour of use of improved inputs like seeds, fertilizers, technological implements for cultivation, irrigation etc. It seemed to have stemmed from his belief in improving the productivity of soil as an answer to food problem and the problem backwardness of rural areas as a whole. The CADP episode was a case in point. However, the decisive shift in his ideas became clear since late 1980s in the context of his continuous engagement in agricultural activities, interface with nature and his growing awareness of the deleterious impact of the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on ecology and environment. After meeting with Masanobu Fukuoka, a Japanese advocate of natural farming, his ideas concerning agriculture underwent complete reversion. He tried to understand Fukuoka’s thought which aroused his interest for its comprehensive scope covering philosophy, nature and god than mere agriculture. Consequently PD’s views of natural farming were not a subject of pursuit isolated from a vision of life and society. As he said in the introductory comments in the translated version of Fukuoka’s book that it did not only contain discourse on agriculture, but a philosophy of life, religion, science, society all had been combined in an ‘integral approach’ in the work.322

322 Fukuoka, Masanobu, Ekti Trina Khande Biplab: Prakitik Chaser Prastabana (i.e. The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming), TSRD, Calcutta, 1989. See the introductory comments by PD.
Here a word about natural farming would not be out of place. According to Masanobu Fukuoka, it was all about maintaining balanced field ecosystem through four principles—'no cultivation', use of 'no chemical fertilizer', 'no weeding by tillage' and 'no dependence on chemicals'. The underlying concept was "Nature, left alone, is in perfect balance." In other words, it was a way of farming that evolved naturally according to the natural conditions of land and took a distinctive form unlike exploitative farming practices. "Ultimately", said Fukuoka, "it is not the growing technique which is the most important factor, but rather the state of mind of the farmer." This pointed to the deeper aspect of the natural farming experiment that entailed change in human mind from manipulative tendency to accept nature and to be guided by it. This could be done by nurturing a non-winning and non-opposing state of mind vis-à-vis nature. To quote Fukuoka "To believe that by research and invention humanity can create something better than nature is an illusion. I think that people are struggling for no other reason than to come to know the vast incomprehensibility of nature. So for the farmer in his work: serve nature and all is well. Farming used to be sacred work. When humanity fell away from this ideal, modern commercial agriculture rose.

523 Ibid, p-27-8
524 Ibid, p-28
525 Ibid, p-39
When the farmer began to grow crops to make money, he forgot the real principles of agriculture.”

Fukuoka’s concept was essentially a philosophy of living in harmony with nature. This probably led PD towards the realization that agriculture in the present form was not at all conducive to sustainable way of life. Deeply inspired by Fukuoka’s holistic concept of natural farming, PD strongly felt the need to move in this direction and started experimenting with these differently conceived ideas of agriculture during the period 1988-1990. But here again the experience of the effort was disappointing, because it could not enthuse the peasants *en masse* to shift to this form of cultivation despite PD’s optimism regarding the outcome of small-scale application of this method. To quote Ashok Ghosh of SEVA “Pannalal encouraged experimental farming following Fukuoka’s line in TSRD’s farm at Chota Simulia. Later, TSRD gave up this programme. His ideas did not conform to the orchestration of profit and loss of the organization.”

No doubt, it was a setback for PD. Seen in the context of his vision of future social order, his interest towards natural farming was closely connected with the programme of rural reconstruction that he had been

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526 Fukuoka, Masanobu, *The One-Straw Revolution*; it was edited by Larry Korn, Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa, 2010, p-113.

527 Views of Ashok Ghosh, General Secretary of Society For Equitable Voluntary Actions (SEVA) expressed in an interview at his residence with the researcher on 26/1/2012. Shri Ghosh as indicated before was a close associate of PD in his various voluntary initiatives and constructive activities in village.
talking since late sixties. But the point was that he could not conceive of
the difficulty involved in persuading the peasants to adapt to this farming.
To the peasants, it was not simply a matter of switching over to a
different farming method, but it was tied to crucial issues of earning from
market, maintaining families and repaying loans. So, there was a wide
gap between the reality and the daily struggle of the poor peasants on one
hand and PD's thought on the other. In the essay Abar Charkha Keno (i.e.
Why Spinning Wheel Again) published in 1988 PD's views as quoted
below revealed this gap. In a portion of the said essay he stated "In
village it is important to pay attention to agriculture. But it should aim at
self-reliance of the villagers in food and not for commercial farming.
Today cultivation is done for market alone and not for the consumption of
the peasants. In farming the priority should be to meet the demands of the
villagers and their consumption needs. It is commercial farming which
requires chemical fertilizers, poisons, implements etc. But we need to
gradually move towards the path of natural farming shown by Masanobu
Fukuoka." 528
Underlying his urge to natural farming there was his idea to develop self-
sufficiency in basic crops at village level, and not mass production for
sale in market. Economically this was cheaper than commercial farming.
But could it provide with a full-fledged alternative to market, if so, the

528 Translated from PD's article Abar Charkha Keno (Why Spinning Wheel Again) published in Compass dated 18 June, 1988.
time required for the transition, and in that case, what would be the freedom of choice of farmers to grow crops for market were some of the sticky points plaguing his ideas. Besides, plausible explanations also varied about his intention. According to Biplab Halim, "Natural farming goes against the industrial-capitalist class. In this system labour-saving implements like tiller, tractor, pump set etc. would not be sold. It would thus help strengthen alternative values, alternative to capitalism." But PD’s shift in thought concerning agriculture, according to Biplab Halim, was not consciously designed for socialism. Rather, from his experience of working with PD, Halim observed, “PD’s changing activities were permeated by ideas of human welfare. He did whatever he thought beneficial for nature, environment and mankind.” So, to him, natural farming was a universal class-neutral exercise for welfare of all villagers. As such, there was ample scope of doubt whether his interest in natural farming could be considered a step towards socialism.

On the contrary, it seemed from PD’s ideas that he moved away from common understanding of socialism as a class doctrine towards a benevolent approach to nature and mankind. What lent complexity to PD’s ideas at the fag-end of his life was his intention of forming a co-operative socialistic society by people themselves at the grass root level,

529 Views of Biplab Halim, president of Institute for Motivating Self-Employment(IMSE), expressed, in an interview at the South Kolkata office on 24/2/2012.
530 Ibid
united by values and ties of mutual sharing. But how it could be realised in the context of socio-economic divisions was again a complicated issue. This probably led him to shift position from one to another field in search of solution.

Besides, the problem with natural farming was that it was hardly intelligible to the common farmers who were traditionally used to chemical fertilizers, pesticides etc. Natural farming was not only different from standardised mechanized form of farming, but the philosophical part of it—the creation of perfection and holistic approach in human beings—which attracted PD’s attention seemed to be intellectually high-flying for the ordinary peasants. It was doubtful how far the peasants, without sufficient orientation, could grasp the meaning of no tilling, no chemical agriculture. In the age of rapid scientific progress it seemed to be to recourse to semi-wild manner of crop production. All these explained why his energetic experiments in natural farming and his efforts at propagating this concept could not translate in evoking wide response in practice.

The narrative of PD’s thought and activities presented above revealed the complex process through which his thought and activities had evolved in the post-incarceration period from August 1962 till his death in January 1999. The process of his soul-searching started in prison when he was attracted by Gandhi’s ideas and voluntary land gift movement during
1950s. This left indelible impact on his mind at that crucial phase of his life and formation of ideas. On release from prison he began editing a little magazine called *Compass* from February 1964. Though it was avowedly non-partisan, analyses showed that it was not a-political as evident from PD’s editorial writings during the food movement in West Bengal in 1966 which carried political overtone. Under the pressing demand of local people of Bolpur PD participated in the mid-term Assembly election in 1969 and became elected. But he did not stay in politics for long as he found it to be incompatible with his changed ideas concerning peaceful social re-construction. The distinct dimension of his activities concerning rural re-construction was that he talked about instilling values of co-operation, self-reliance and restraint on consumerist tendency among people and advocated for their active role in making a co-operative socialistic society in stead of falling back on capitalist market economy. All these showed the genesis of PD’s thought and activities in course of 1960s and 1970s from one end of radical left politics to the diametrically opposite side of introducing change in society in peaceful ways by inculcating new value-orientation in people. However, the problematic aspect of his loosely conceived ideas of socialism became clear from his simultaneous interest towards the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore. Like Tagore, he understood the necessity of institutionalizing the efforts at rural re-construction. This resulted in the
foundation of Tagore Society, a NGO. During the period from 1969 till early 1990s his role as crystallized through his interventions in diverse fields from comprehensive area development programme to refugee rehabilitation at Dandakaranya and his experiments in natural farming were all channelized through this agency. But, on the whole, nothing very positive had emerged since during this long period of his activities PD could not motivate the masses with the spirit of what he called the movement for ‘new society’. This perceptible lack of response to his ideas and his continuously shifting position from one to another field of activities seemed to be inextricably interconnected. This led to the issue of marginalization of his ideas and role.