INTRODUCTION

The communists, although a major national force in post-independence India, have, however, remained confined only to certain regions and pockets. One such region is, no doubt, West Bengal where the communists have been the most important force within the left. This naturally evokes an interest in finding out how the communists have acquired this foothold in West Bengal.

This calls for a historical study of the Communist Party and movement in India, which has a chequered history of about more than eight decades, with Bengal as its central focus. In this context it is necessary to explain the connotation of Party and movement and to distinguish the one from the other. While Party refers to an institution, movement refers to an ongoing process. Thus the scope of movement is much wider than that of Party. The Party is an actor in the movement, undoubtedly the most important and powerful actor, but not the sole actor, as other left forces, in addition to the Communist Party, contributed to the building up and strengthening of the communist movement in Bengal and other parts of India. There is, however, no dearth of literature on the evolution of the Communist Party and movement at the national level, i.e., at the 'macro level'. *Communism in India* (Gene D Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, 1960), *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism: 1917-1947: With an Epilogue Covering the Situation Today* (David N Druhe, 1959), *Moscow and the Communist Party of India: A Study in the Postwar Evolution of International Communist Strategy* (John H Kautsky, 1956), *Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy: 1920-1939* (John Patrick Haithcox, 1971), *Soviet Policy toward India: Ideology and Strategy* (Robert H Donaldson, 1974), *The Left-Wing in India (1919-47)* (L P Sinha, 1965), *The Indian Political Parties: An Historical Analysis of Political Behaviour up to 1947* (B B Misra, 1978), *Comintern, India and The Colonial Question, 1920-37* (Sobhanlal Datta
Gupta, 1980 ), Indian Nationalism Versus International Communism: Role of Ideology in International Politics (Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyay, 1966), The Communist Party of India: A Short History (Minoo R Masani, 1954), Leftist Movements in India: 1917-1947 (Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, 1977), Communism and Nationalism in India: A Study in Intercalation: 1919-1947 (Shashi Bairathi, 1987), Under the Banyan Tree: The Communist Movement in India: 1920-1964 (Sada Nand Talwar, 1985), Roy Comintern and Marxism in India (Kiran Maitra, 1991), Leftism in India: MN Roy and Indian Politics: 1920-1948 (SM Ganguly, 1984), Indian Communism. Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalization (Ross Mallick, 1994), The Communist Party of India and India's Freedom Struggle: 1937-1947 (Utpal Ghosh, 1996), etc. may be cited as certain instances of such 'macro level' study. In most cases the scope of the study is restricted to the pre-independence period; only in some cases the post-independence evolution has been taken into account. While in some post-independence studies the evolution of the Communist Party and movement up to the fifties has been covered, in some cases the period under study has been extended up to the first split of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1964 and only in certain specific cases the study has been further extended to recent times. While all these works are not of the same standard, some of them may be considered as brilliant pieces of research work.

There are also certain studies of different aspects of Bengal politics and the political movements in undivided Bengal, which make only a peripheral reference to the Communist Party and movement in Bengal, for example, Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle: 1862-1947 (Gautam Chattopadhyay, 1984), Bengal: The Nationalist Movement: 1876-1940 (Leonard A Gordon, 1979), Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Sarat & Subhas Chandra Bose (Leonard A Gordon, 1990), Bengal Terrorism and The Marxist Left: Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India, 1905-1942 (David M Laushey, 1975), Bengal: 1928-1934: The Politics of Protest (Tanika Sarkar, 1987), Bengal Politics: 1937-1947 (Kamala
Sarkar, 1990), Struggle and Strife in Urban Bengal, 1937-47: A Study of Calcutta-Based Urban Politics in Bengal (Pranab Kumar Chatterjee, 1991) and so on. Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar's In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programme: A Study in the Transition from National Revolutionary Terrorism to Communism, published in 1979, also contains some invaluable information, but the book, as its title suggests, deals mainly with the transition from national 'revolutionary terrorism' to communism. Gautam Chattopadhyay's Communism and Bengal's Freedom Movement, Volume I (1917-29), published in 1970, is the sole example of a micro study of communism in Bengal, but it is no full-length micro study as the book, as its title points out, covers the period only up to 1929 when the Communist Party was not yet properly formed in Bengal. And, last but not least, there are reminiscences written by the distinguished communist leaders of Bengal who actively participated in the movement. While most of these reminiscences have appeared in the form of books, some of them have appeared in the form of articles. Reminiscences written by Muzaffar Ahmad (Volumes I and II), Ranen Sen (Volumes I and II), Saroj Mukhopadhyay (Volumes I and II), Jyoti Basu, Manoranjan Roy, Mani Singha, Khoka (Sudhin) Roy, Muhammad Abdullah Rasul, Rabin Sen, Sudhangshu Dasgupta, Sudhangshu Adhikari, Manikuntala Sen, Hirendra Nath Mukhopadhyay, Syed Shahedullah, Tushar Chattopadhyay, Sanat Raha (Volumes I and II), Jnan Chakravarty and so on and articles written by Abdul Halim, Somnath Lahiri, Bhabani Sen, Bishwanath Mukhopadhyay, Dharani Goswami et al. are of immense value and significance as the interested readers can get sufficient information on the Communist Party and movement in Bengal from these sources, which are, however, to be cross-verified and corroborated with the help of other sources. But reminiscences can never be considered to be authentic history, although they contain material required for history-writing.

Thus, from the foregoing discussion it appears that no full-length research-based micro study of the evolution of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal has so far been undertaken, nor is there any such research-based micro
study which more specifically makes this evolution in some of its districts its central focus.

In the absence of any such full-length research work at the 'micro level' the present researcher has made an attempt to study the development of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal during the period from 1930 to 1947, with three districts — Calcutta, Howrah and Murshidabad, as his focal point. The present researcher has chosen the period from 1930 to 1947, since the communist movement in Bengal took an organized shape around 1930 and the span of the present study is intended to cover the period up to independence. Moreover, the present researcher has selected these three districts for different reasons. Calcutta was the birth-centre and main hub of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal. Furthermore, Calcutta was the strongest base of communist activities in all their class and mass fronts, excluding, of course, the peasant front. So Calcutta stands as the unique model of the strong urban communist movement. The district of Howrah was characterized by the existence of both industry and agriculture side by side. The communists in that district were strong in both trade union and peasant fronts, and so Howrah stands as the peculiar model of both the urban and rural communist movement which can be considered to be more or less strong. Murshidabad, purely an agrarian district which was characterized by the near absence of industry during this period, stands, by contrast, as a model of a weak communist movement on the whole, which was essentially rural. The present researcher intends to argue that the theoretical generalization about the Communist Party and movement at the 'macro level' would be meaningful only if such 'micro level' studies are undertaken, which are supposed to provide hard facts as regards the Communist Party and movement.

In the present study the researcher has also made an attempt to find an answer to the question related to the entire period, namely, whether the Indian communists were able to provide an 'alternative leadership' to, or at least to leave a 'proletarian impress' upon, the anti-imperialist struggle in pre-independence India. The question can also be posed as whether the communists
at all seriously attempted to provide such a 'leadership'. As the following discussion shows, this question confronted the communists in different phases of the movement. As is obvious, this 'macro issue' affected the development of the communist movement at the 'micro level'.

At the outset the researcher frankly admits that the present research work which attempts to trace the history of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal from 1930 to 1947, with three districts — Calcutta, Howrah and Murshidabad, as its central focus, is primarily a descriptive-analytical study, based on data collected at the micro level. He believes that such historically descriptive-analytical studies undertaken at the 'micro level', as the present one, which deals with the problem at the grassroots level, are essential, since theoretical generalizations about the Communist Party and movement at the 'macro level' will emerge as meaningful only if such empirical studies are taken in hand.

The researcher has followed the method adopted in the past by the scholars who have either studied the evolution of the Communist Party and movement at the national level, i.e. communism in India, or have studied the evolution of the Communist Party and movement at the regional level, i.e. at the provincial level, e.g. in Punjab, Kerala and Bengal from 1917 to 1929, or have studied different aspects of Bengal politics and the political movements in Bengal during the pre-independence period. This method may be termed the historical method.

In order to collect necessary material for this research work, the present researcher has consulted the Home Department (Political) Files of the Government of India, preserved in the National Archives of India, New Delhi. He has also consulted the police records of that period, which include both the Special Branch Files and the Intelligence Branch Files kept respectively in the Special Branch and the Intelligence Branch, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta. He has also consulted various Communist Party documents and has made a close scrutiny of the Communist Party pamphlets, party newspapers, party journals, party letters, party leaflets, etc. He has also made use of the
international communist journals, contemporary daily newspapers, contemporary journals and intelligence reports published by the Government of India. Besides these, he has collected information from both the published and unpublished reminiscences written by the distinguished and even not so distinguished Communist Party activists. All these taken together constitute the primary source of information. Apart from those primary sources mentioned above, the present researcher has also collected necessary material for his research work from numerous books, articles, journals and periodicals which constitute the secondary sources of information. In addition to all these sources which fall within the category of the desk-work, the method of oral history has also been adopted. In order to collect necessary material for his research work, he has exhaustively interviewed many well-known and even not so well-known communists who were very active in the communist movement in Bengal during the period from 1930 to 1947. He has also interviewed some persons who took a very active and often leading part in the communist movement during that period, but have subsequently left the party for reasons — ideological-political-organizational as well as personal. The pieces of information collected from these interviews have always been cross-checked and corroborated with the help of other published and unpublished sources. The present researcher has gathered valuable information from all these interviews which also come within the category of the primary sources. Interviews with the participants in the communist movement have been unstructured.

The present study consists of seven chapters.

In the first chapter a brief outline of communism in India from 1920 to 1947 has been drawn. As there is no dearth of literature on communism in India, i.e. the evolution of the Communist Party and movement at the national level, the researcher has not made any detailed discussion on this theme and presented only a brief outline. While the first three sections (Sections II, III and IV) of the first chapter, in addition to the very first introductory section (Section I), deal with the period from 1920 to 1939, the next three sections
(Sections V, VI and VII) cover the period from 1939 to 1947. The outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939 is the dividing line between the first three (Sections II, III and IV) and the next three (Sections V, VI and VII) sections. The span of the seventh section of the first chapter has actually been stretched up to the Second Congress of the CPI, which met in Calcutta from 28 February to 6 March 1948, and formally pronounced the 'militant' line which led the CPI to give the call for an 'armed insurrection' and was thus a watershed in the history of the party.

In the second chapter the present researcher has made a study of the development of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal since its inception up to 1937-38, i.e. in this chapter he has studied the formative period of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal. The discussion has been traced back to the advent of communism in Bengal in the early twenties. While the period up to 1925 has been discussed briefly only in order to give an idea of communism in Bengal during this period, which thus provides the background, the detailed discussion on this theme begins from 1925. Although there was no CPI in Bengal in 1925, still 1925 has been considered as the starting point, because the first Workers' and Peasants' Party, which was, in fact, largely controlled by the Communists and which paved the way for the subsequent formation of the CPI in this province, was formed in Bengal on November 1, 1925. The CPI assumed further strength after the release of most of the political prisoners in 1937-38, as a sizeable section of the former national revolutionaries joined the CPI after their release. As a result the CPI could make its existence felt in almost all parts of Bengal during this period. The period of 1937-38 thus marked a watershed in the history of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal. Hence, the span of the second chapter has been stretched up to 1937-38. As Calcutta was the birth-centre and nerve-centre of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal and was the strongest base of the communist activities, any discussion of the activities of the communists in Bengal then essentially implies the discussion of the activities of the communists in Calcutta. The study of the evolution of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal up to 1937-
38 made in this chapter is thus at the same time a study of the Communist Party and movement in Calcutta up to this period.

In the third chapter the present researcher has studied the evolution of the Communist Party and movement in the district of Calcutta from 1937 to 1947. As the study of the development of the Communist Party and movement in Calcutta up to 1937 has already been included in the second chapter and which deals with the evolution of the Communist Party and movement in Bengal up to 1937-38, in the third chapter 1937 has been presented as the starting point in order to avoid repetition. As Calcutta was the main sphere of activities of the Bengal communists, so the study of the evolution of the Communist Party and movement in Calcutta and the discussion of the activities of the Bengal communists and their reactions to different national and international events overlap in the second and third chapters. The chapter is thus as much a study of the activities of the Bengal communists and their reactions to different national and international events as of the Communist Party and movement in Calcutta.

In the fourth and fifth chapters the present researcher has attempted a study of the development of the Communist Party and movement in the district of Howrah up to 1947. The scope of the fourth chapter includes the discussion of the Communist Party and movement in the district of Howrah from the very initiation of the communist movement in the district to the beginning of the Second World War.

In the fifth chapter the discussion of the case of Howrah starts from the very beginning of the Second World War and it continues up to the transfer of power in 1947 and is also stretched up to the shift in the party line from 'moderation' to 'militancy' taking a formal and concrete shape at the Second Congress of the CPI in 1948, followed by the imposition of the ban on the CPI in West Bengal and the consequent arrest of the communists all over the state including the district of Howrah. The discussion made in the fifth chapter is thus actually the continuation of the discussion in the fourth chapter.

In the sixth chapter the present researcher has dealt with the evolution of
the Communist Party and movement in the district of Murshidabad up to 1947.

In Chapters III, IV, V and VI which deal with the evolution of the Communist Party and movement in the districts of Calcutta (Chapter III), Howrah (Chapters IV and V), and Murshidabad (Chapter VI) respectively, the study has been stated to end in 1947 as the span of the present study is intended to cover the period up to independence. Although the period up to independence has been studied in details in these four chapters, as it is the theme of the present study, the span of all these chapters, in the interests of the comprehensive discussion, has actually been stretched up to the imposition of the ban on the CPI in the state of West Bengal by the Congress government of this state on 26 March 1948. On that very day the arrest of the communists all over West Bengal took place on a large scale, as a sequel to the imposition of the ban on the CPI, which was the governmental response to the CPI's call for an 'armed insurrection'.

In the seventh and last chapter the researcher has made his concluding observations.

The present researcher would like to submit that like all other communist parties, in a monolithic party like the CPI the line of action was decided by the central leadership, i.e. at the central level, and the party line was then implemented by the communists at lower levels, i.e. at provincial and district levels. The party line obviously remained the same for the whole country and the communists carried on their activities in different regions, i.e. in different provinces and districts, within the broad framework of the same party line. The communist activities that took place in different regions had, however, certain regional variations. The party line also varied from one period to the other. During the 'imperialist war' period the line of the CPI took a particular form, and there was a complete change in the party line during the 'people's war' period, while there was once again a thorough change in the party line during the post-war period. While discussing the activities of the communists in different districts like Calcutta, Howrah and Murshidabad in different chapters, the
present researcher, in the interests of comprehensive discussion in each particular case, first briefly refers to the party line that prevailed during each particular period, i.e. the 'imperialist war' period or 'people's war period or post-war period, and then discusses how the communists implemented that particular party line and carried on their activities within the broad framework of the same party line in their respective districts, which had their own regional variations. Moreover, as the party line remained the same for the whole country during every particular period, the activities of the communists carried on within the broad framework of the same party line in different regions shared certain common broad patterns and exhibited certain common features. Thus, during the 'imperialist war period the communists all over India, following the party line, opposed the 'imperialist war' and attempted to resist the British war-efforts; during the 'people's war' period they, once again, following the party line, offered their unconditional support to the war in order to ensure the defeat of fascism; and, during the post-war period, they once again actively participated in the anti-imperialist struggles for freedom. Finally, the communist activities in different districts like Calcutta, Howrah and Murshidabad and the anti-imperialist struggles in which the communists participated were on most occasions interrelated. The anti-imperialist struggles in general first started in Calcutta and then had their impact on other districts and spread in those districts. Thus a discussion of the role of the communists in these anti-imperialist struggles in other districts cannot exclude a brief reference to these struggles and the role of the communists in these struggles in Calcutta. As Calcutta and Howrah were adjacent to each other, the activities of the communists and the anti-imperialist struggles in which they participated in these two districts were almost on all occasions interrelated and often integrated. Moreover, the trade union activities of the communists and the strike-struggles of the workers in which the communists participated and which were often led by the communists in these two districts were almost on all occasions interrelated and often integrated.

The chapters that now follow have been framed in the light of the perspective outlined in detail in this Introduction.