Preface

In this thesis I have investigated the responses of different sections of the Congress party to the new constitutional arrangements introduced by the Government of India Act, 1935.

Chapter 1 places these responses against the background of the political situation prevailing in the period 1934-36. It also charts out the different modes of relating to social conflict that emerged within the party in this period. These differences were expressed during the formulation of the Congress's economic programme and in the conceptions of how the party's relationship with its mass support could be dynamised. The differences charted out here, between the Gandhian Right Wing and the Congress Left, provide a necessary background to the discussion of the attitudes of these groups to the question of office acceptance under the 1935 Act (Ch. 2) and to their practice under the Congress Ministries of 1937-39 (Ch. 3), especially in terms of the tensions that would develop between constitutional and extra-constitutional methods of functioning.

Chapter 2 starts with a description of the peculiarities of the 1935 Act and of the British intentions underlying its formation. It then moves on to analyse the fears, expectations, tactical and strategic formulations that constituted the Congress response to the Act. This chapter concludes with an account of the Impasse of March-July 1937, the period in which the Congress deferred acceptance of office because of disagreement with the Government over the status of the constitutional safeguards which provided for the Provincial Governors' right to interfere in ministerial functioning. This phase is analysed
in terms of its ideological and political implications, and also in terms of the Congress understanding that popular attitudes compelled office acceptance.

Chapter 3 investigates the different compulsions of ministerial and legal functioning, on the one hand, and of extra-constitutional agitation, on the other, which characterised politics under the Ministries, and draws out the implications these tensions had in terms of an overall strategy for power. This problem is examined in the context of the Madras, Bihar and U.P. Ministries, which present an index of the range of contrasting political conceptions that were operating and of how, inspite of these differences, an underlying, unifying pattern was in evidence. Here, as throughout the thesis, the clash of political forms and the articulation of popular initiatives is discussed in relation to the peasant movement.

Chapter 4 deals with the way in which Gandhian political strategy responded to the related issues of the movement for responsible government in the Princely States and the Federation section of the 1935 Act. Chapter 5 examines the reaction to the leadership's Federation policy, and to the overall pattern of Gandhian strategy, represented in Subhash Bose's victory in the Tripuri Presidential election. In the process it also traces the evolution of different left-wing responses (Nehru, the CSP, the CPI) to this strategy and attempts to see whether a coherent alternative political strategy was presented in leftist disagreements with the Gandhians.

The structure of the thesis has been shaped by the objective of discovering the inner logic of the politics of different
groups in the Congress party. There has been a tendency in much recent historiography of nationalism to subordinate such questions to a focus on how external factors - mass movements and local and provincial factional struggles - determined these political patterns. I have tried to avoid such a priori formulations about the political process. My use of the standard sources for the political history of the period - private and organisational papers, newspapers, party journals, government reports - hopefully bears out the objective of trying to unravel this particular conceptual universe.

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(Ravi S. Vasudevan)