CHAPTER II

THE POLITICAL SOCIALISERS AND

THE POLITICAL SOCIALISEES

It is common knowledge that the process of political socialisation operates in the context of society. The way the political socialiser performs his role, the extent to which the political socialisee learns the 'lessons', the content of the 'lessons' — indeed, every aspect of the process — are under various degrees of social determination. Usually, for some aspects, it is the total society which is important; for others, only some part of it. Society shapes the socialising activities of the political socialiser, for example, through his association with the subcultures, if any, of the place of his residence like city or village, or, of groups like caste, class and party to which he belongs or aspires to belong. It
is obvious that relationship between sub-cultures may take on various forms. These may not make identical and mutually compatible impact on the political socialiser. Society enters into the political learning of the political socialisee in diverse ways. Our interest is in his political learning during childhood and teenage in the hands of the family elders, particularly the father or the family head. Society gains in relevance in such early learning through the political socialisee's experiences within the family. For example, his readiness or reluctance or refusal to learn lessons on kinds of political behaviour permissible for him, from the family elders, would depend largely on his basic experiences in the hands of the elders. Usually, the elders follow the culturally prescribed way of bringing up the children. It is culture which determines the pattern of relationship between them; and, thus, the major portion of the latter's experiences within the family.

Evidently, political socialisation is intimately related to society; more so, when an essentially social institution, like the family, is involved in the process. It is felt that it would be worthwhile to know which aspects of social lives of the persons under our study, are relevant in their respective roles in political socialisation. We intend to consider, in this connection, some aspects which are common to both the political socialisers and the political socialisees. These are their caste, place of residence, economic condition, educational level, nature of interest in politics and association with political party. We also intend to characterise the family elders, that is, the political socialisers, by their occupation and attitude to their children; and the children, that is,
the political socialisees, by their age, sex and the attitudes they had towards their family elders, particularly the father and the family head. Each of these is the basis of relationship among men who have it in common. It is possible for such relationships to have distinctive sub-cultures. We want to know if, by virtue of any such relationship, the elders or the children or both of them came under the influence of concomitant sub-culture; and, if they did, whether such influence was manifest in their actions as the political socialisers or the political socialisees. This chapter contains a description of the particulars of the lives of the political socialisers and the political socialisees. The reference to their relevance to political socialisation is made in a later chapter.

Generally speaking, most of the respondents came from traditional social background. The majority (63) had spent their childhood exclusively in village; the rest had either lived in town (33) or moved from rural to urban areas (13). One third (31) of the respondents reporting about the occupation of their fathers or family heads, mentioned cultivation. The majority (60) of such elders had education upto high school level or below it. More than half of the respondents refused to mention their castes. Those who did, belonged either to scheduled caste (21) or scheduled tribes (4). Many (71) grew up in the joint family; the others, in nuclear family.
It is not assumed that such features of life are adequate and unfailing indicators of 'traditionally'; but these are usually associated with it. It may also be noted that most of them (68) were brought up, by their own admission, in middle class families.5

II

Among the family elders, the parents must have exerted major personal influence on most of the young people. In 79 cases the father and in 3 cases the mother was the head of the family;6 even in those families where the father was not the family head, he had effective share in the family decision-making in 23 out of 30 such cases. In 32 out of 48 families there was one person who usually took care of the respondents when they were children; that person was either the father (21) or the mother (11).7 When in need of something like new clothes or books, most of the respondents would, again, go to either the father (46) or the mother (48) to place their demands. This implies that the parents played a major part in child caring even in those families where many, instead of one, looked after the children or in any other arrangement. Thus the parents, particularly the father, stood out as the central figure in most of the respondents' childhood around which their conception of authority must have developed. That 63 respondents remembered the elders of the family deciding upon something for the entire family only after discussing the matter among themselves,8 cannot be
ignored. But this does not rule out the pre-eminence of the head of the family; it may be recalled that each respondent mentioned one person as the head of the family. It must have been largely the case of authority of one, qualified by due consideration being shown or conceded to the others of the family by the same authority. Incidentally, these 'others' included also the children. 90 respondents said that their opinion was sought, when they were children, when some decision was to be taken on matters concerning them, like education; and, 51 remembered their opinion being either usually taken into account (28) or occasionally so (23). These two features of structure of decision-making, however, do not warrant any reliable impression about democratic nature of the family authority. The point relevant for this study is that the respondents had experienced, in their childhood, well marked out authority in the family.

The experience of discipline exercised by the father or the family head is a major factor in creating authority image in the children. The discipline generally experienced by the respondents was strong. But it was strong in its persistence and comprehensiveness, not so much in terms of the method of enforcement. The majority (68) said that, in case of misbehaviour, they were advised against this and let off; 32 of the respondents were scolded and only six of them were severely punished. That the father or any other male surrogate had pre-eminent authority to enforce discipline over the children was brought home by the fact that the mother usually followed up with confirmation of the appropriateness of any punishment given by any male adult to counter the child's misbehaviour; the mother usually
upheld the male elder's scolding of the child when the latter would approach her with complaint or for comfort; here, again, the major (70) procedure was one of advising against any repetition of the misdeed. In a few cases the mother inflicted another round of punishment or scolding (5 and 18, respectively). In 13 cases, the mother consoled the punished child by saying that she would look into the matter. This can be interpreted in more than one way: perhaps it was an otherwise busy mother's way of evading a complaining child; or, an usual method of diluting the severity of psychological injury of the child; or, simply a mother's way of reacting.11 Whatever may be the case, this cannot be construed as a split within discipline enforcing authority. Only three respondents recalled that their respective mothers became angry with punishment given by some male adults. Unity among the principal incumbents of the familial authority makes for well-defined awareness of authority in the child.

The emotional support which the parents extend to the child is an equally important referent for him as he develops his conception of authority in the family and his attitude toward his elders. To a child, discipline is an expression of restrictive authority. At every home, this is usually accompanied by parental affection for and interest in the child, which is easily intelligible to him. The respondents generally experienced warm emotional relationships with their parents. The majority of the parents or the family heads showed affection and consideration to the respondents during their childhood; 48 of them received these always, 37, often, 20, sometimes; three, seldom, and one never. Again, 45 of them had parents or heads
of family who used to take great interest in matters concerning the children; 47 experienced moderate interest; for the rest, it was either not "very much interest" (7) or 'little interest' (8) or "none" (1). As regards parental appreciation or lack of it for the child's behaviour, once again, a larger number of respondents experienced the likeable side of it. It would be unusual for the parents or the family heads never to complain against or to praise liberally their children's conduct always; only four of them had so behaved. 47 of them had often showed pleasure to their children and often praised them, and 46 were not very critical of and not particularly pleased with, their children. Eight respondents found their parents or family heads critical and often not pleased; four had parents who were always critical and never pleased with the children's behaviour. The emotional support from the parents was usually accompanied by their attending to the needs of the children. 73 of them mentioned that their parents or family heads had met their childhood needs for the most of the times; 35 mentioned, sometimes. Only one remembered that his needs were never met. It seems that most of the respondents had usually satisfied childhood.

The preceding discussion focuses on the nature of authority in the family which the respondents had generally experienced. The question arises as to how they had reacted to such authority.

Child's compliance or non-compliance of the elders' directives in respect of proper behaviour is an important ingredient. It is, therefore, a good indicator of his attitude toward the family authority.
Related as it is to child's personality trait, it also involves social learning. As our data indicate, only a minority (23) had refused to abide by the directive received from the parents or the head of the family regarding certain things they were asked to do; 36 respondents reported to have complied readily and 36, irregularly; a few (6) obeyed, lest failure to comply would bring punishment. Notably, this difference in predisposition to compliance is not related to severity or liniency of discipline as such or as method of its enforcement, to parents' emotional support or its absence, and to experience in need satisfaction during their childhood. It may be recalled that there is little significant difference among the respondents on these three facets of authority behaviour, as described by them; but their predisposition to compliance varied. The source of variation must, then, lay elsewhere.

The same holds true of incidence of the respondents' expression of displeasure with injustice perceived in the behaviour of the familial authority towards them. As our data show all the respondents have implied that they had sometimes felt being wronged in their childhood by the parents or the heads of family. However, only 35 of them registered their displeasure and the remaining respondents either thought it was better not to register displeasure (28) or were uneasy about doing so (46). The majority (91) of them expressed displeasure with such adult behaviour only sometimes, eight respondents, usually, and ten, never. Evidently, psychological strain involved in the manifestation of displeasure had not generally inhibited incidence of occasional expression of the same; nor its absence had facilitated such expression. The respondents' childhood compliance with the
family authority and showing of displeasure with the behaviour of its incumbents did not have roots in the family authority's behaviour towards the children. Nor, does the respondents' childhood estimate of the parents' attitude to the children offer any explanation. Their "estimate" is taken as an indicator of intensity of the children's emotional response to the parents or the family heads. A large majority (88) expressed very high estimate. As persons the fathers or the heads of family were remembered as possessing many admirable personality traits.

It is interesting that while the majority of the respondents would appear to be emotionally so close to the family authority, particularly the father, yet few would choose him as a model person to be emulated. Only 45 respondents said that they, while children, had desired to be like some elder in the family in their own adulthood.

III

The level of political interest and participation of the family elders is more directly relevant in the determination of the nature of their political socialiser role. Their children have themselves recognised its importance. One boy observed: "Participation by my father and grand father in freedom movement and welfare movement has significantly influenced me". A girl remembered: "Elder brothers from their boyhood days went to join various party meetings. Through their various social works they led me in their direction." Another
boy reported: "one of my elder brothers was an active supporter of Netaji's (Subhas Bose's) party; so were my maternal uncles; of the latter, one now supports the C.P.I.(M) and another the R.S.P." Still another could give details: "Almost everyone in my family have inclination towards Congress. My elder brothers, too, have similar inclination". Then, referring to a certain change in loyalty to party on the part of the elders, he continued: "However, when we lived in Tamluk (a town in Midnapore district) my mother and grandmother tended to support the Bangla Congress". One girl knew something which must have happened before she was born: "The elders supported the anti-British (role of) the Congress (Party) and deeply admired Netaji's activities. My grandfather did not support Gandhi much; of course, my father did". It will be found from later reference that some respondents could perceive absence of any interest in politics on the part of the elders. Generally, however, most of the family elders had low interest in politics or did not actively participate in any political movement or party politics. In 34 cases, they had, at the time when the respondents were children, only some interest in politics; only eight of them were much interested and ten had no interest. Again only 36 fathers or adult members of the family had taken active part in the affairs of any party. 32 respondents could remember the parties their elders used to support: 16 supported the Congress Party, 14 the Communist parties, two, others.

In contrast the majority (67) of the respondents reported high level of interest and participation in politics on their own part. Almost all (105) had interest in politics. This is in keeping with
the impression shared by many that, depending on the degree of urbanity, the youth in West Bengal are politically-minded; they keep informations on politics, discuss political issues, and demonstrate sympathy and support or hostility and opposition to governmental or political decisions. Two respondents did not have any interest in politics. But they tried to rationalise their lack of interest. One boy appeared to be convinced: "it would not make any difference whether or not I participate in politics". Another boy observed: "Today, politics is the other name of selfishness". This orientation to politics is obviously a result of political socialisation. Probably they were using some elders' "judgement" which they might have overheard. That the average age of the respondents is 19.5 years would make the interest of the majority in politics seem natural. Age apart, a bit of psychology is presumably involved in this: one is likely to feel uncomfortable at the possibility of becoming known to one's friends as being disinterested in politics inspite of being young, particularly when one is a college student. This may happen not only when one is within one's academic peer group. In fact, one respondent mentioned: "When I found my relatives of my own age had some interest in politics and discussed politics even if they did not have enough information on politics, I would think myself a fool at not doing the same (taking interest in politics and discussing politics)". Still another said: "Even when I was somewhat grown up, I did not have knowledge about politics and felt ashamed for this as I found that the others in the family had it."

For a majority of respondents, the period between ages 15 to 20 years was the time for developing interest in politics, active
political participation and the beginning of support to a political party (see table 2.1).

TABLE 2.1

Respondents' Age at the Time of Beginning of Interest and Active Participation in Politics and of Support to Political Party

<table>
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<th>Number of Respondents</th>
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<td>Before 15 yrs.</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest in Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active Participation in Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support to Political Party</td>
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While 88 respondents mention themselves as party supporters, 99 mention the age of beginning of such support. The difference can be explained by reference to the possibility that five respondents discontinued support to any party.

The majority (58) had been interested in politics for periods between three to four years. A greater majority (63) said that their interest in politics had increased over the initial level.
One girl traced this increase to her own efforts: "I try to increase my interest in politics day by day". The number (37) of the respondents who actively participated in politics and of those (38) who were active supporters of political parties almost tally. In 30 cases they were the same respondents. This implies that active political participation develops in the context of party support. Only a minority of respondents (38 out of 105 politically interested and out of 80 party supporters) reported active support to any party. It is a common notion that one's interest in politics, however, intense is not enough to turn one into an active party supporter. But if one is strongly socialised into loyalty to some political party and if the conditions are propitious, one can become quite an active supporter of a party. Even a girl confronted with the elders' unwillingness to allow her an active political role, said:

I do whatever I can as a supporter (of my party). I selfishly do whatever little I can do on behalf of the party. I usually read various party pamphlets, texts of speeches etc. About sometime ago, I took an active part along with my elder brothers in a demonstration against the B.D.O. (Block Development Officer).

Most of the party supporters (54) said that they had been supporting the same party. Some respondents (42) mentioned their reasons for not continuing to support the same party they had supported at the beginning. Some (21) of them felt that the parties they had changed over to were more interested in people's welfare than those they had previously supported; for some, it had to do with leadership of the parties they had ultimately abandoned; some emphasised policy difference with leaders (14) or dislike of some leaders (4); three had other reasons which they did not specify.
But there is absolutely no relationship between reasons for developing an interest in politics and those for withdrawing their support to the parties which used to receive it previously. The same major reason, namely, interest in people's well-being had reportedly motivated 36 respondents into taking interest in politics; for others, it was either their faith in some political ideology (12) or sheer fascination for politics (16). "Interest in people's well-being" seems to be the most prestigious and legitimate concern in this connection. However it might have included, one might speculate, a concealed concern for the respondents' own welfare; and, reference to that of the community might have been made to rationalise the position. In fact, one male respondent said:

At present, everyone is participating in politics with a view to bring about social and economic changes. I, too, believe in a particular ideology and I am strongly determined to improve my poor economic condition through (use of) politics. The economic and social condition (of our family) in my childhood and at present has led me to this ultimate decision.

One girl remembered:

I had to grow up amidst growing deterioration of economic condition of our joint family. I voiced little of my personal needs, but very strongly expressed my displeasure at the suffering of my younger brothers and sisters. My question was why this should happen.

According to another boy who exhibited a fondness for metaphors:

The economic condition of our family has been very bad. When I first became conscious of my life (condition), it created an adverse reaction in my mind; and, naturally, I developed, first, some wonder about, and later, a sense of vengeance and hatred for the rich; and my mind began to suffer from a sense of incompleteness due to want in every level of my life. In this way, a needy mind slowly began to become unruly; but the unruly (mind) is to be (disciplined and) utilised in slow steady movement in the establishment of the state for the have-nots.
Another boy was led to the same conclusion by a similar experience: "Since my boyhood days, we are clearly convinced about the difference between the middle class and the rich. I believe, for that reason I am, to-day, interested in class struggle and the establishment of equal rights, economic and political."

In the course of political participation, the respondents had developed, presumably among many facets of political orientation, an orientation to political authority. Aggregatively, this was characterised by high expectation from the political authority but low evaluation of its actual performance and weak affective bond with it. It is interesting that the nature of their affective bond does not relate to fulfilment or non-fulfilment of respondents' expectation from the political authority's performance. Growth of affective bonds with the political authority exclusively on the basis of examination and empirical verification of its every performance is rare even among adults. Many political agencies tend to impinge or individuals' predisposition and induce tendentious judgements, usually accompanied by certain a priori legitimacy. It is, however, wrong either to believe that such are unalterable in any situation or to ignore the probability of counter-socialisation, particularly in a social situation characterised by social and economic disparity among individuals.

Maturation, when accompanied by growth of intellect, often equips one with the capacity to get over the propensity to give tendentious judgements on political and politically relevant issues;
or, to counter such judgements put forward to one by interested persons or party. It has been found that in case of the respondents there was no correlation between their experience of fulfilment or of non-fulfilment of their expectations from the political authority and the nature of their affect toward it. This would suggest that the respondents might have been socialised into affective orientation to the political authority rather than taught to develop this after objective examination of political authority's performance.

No attempt was made to know the names of the parties the respondents supported at the time of the survey, lest it would inhibit their answers to other questions. But, through inference, the identity of parties some (19) of them used to support, was found out. The supporters of either of the Communist parties (10) were more socialised to politics by their families than those of the non-Communist parties (9). The former were, also, more interested and active in politics. As far as orientation to the political authority was concerned, the Communist party supporters had more expectations from the political authority and as well as greater satisfaction in its performance. At the same time, however, they demanded a more rigorous adherence on the part of the incumbents of the political authority positions to the norms of the offices they held (see table 2.2).
TABLE 2.2

Difference Between Communist and Non-Communist Respondents

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<th></th>
<th>Mean Scores of</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communist Party Supporters</td>
<td>Non-Communist Party Supporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Political Socialisation by Family</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Interest and Participation in Politics</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations from Political Authority</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Political Authority's Performance</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruence between Expectation and Experience</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Toward Political Authority</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>23.8</td>
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But again we find that there is no relationship between one's experience of the political authority doing something which are in keeping with
one's expectations from it and one's 'affect' towards the political authority. This seem to strengthen the impressions that the respondents were unable to base their affective relationship with the political authority exclusively on experience of its performance conforming to their expectations as to what those in political authority positions ought to do. One may be inclined to take this as indicating lack of congruence between aspects of orientation to the political authority. Such incongruence is not unusual in average individuals. But it is difficult to feel certain about such interpretation; for, we have no information about the exact process by which the respondents came to acquire different aspects of their orientation to the political authority.