Preface

Those were the days when Fathers, Joseph Van Troy (d.1991), C. De Brower and L. Francken, all my teachers in St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, told us that entering into history classes were not like visits to the Waxworks or the Region of the Dead. History, they told us, is not dead knowledge of what happened to have happened. It is knowledge which guides, the language which emits hope. Arun Topno, Praveen George Shail, Malavika Mallick (d.1985), and Bibhuti Bhushan (d.1989), all my friends, shared those thoughts along with me. I remember them with a sense of gratitude for helping me believe both in history and hope.

Then one day a big red house collapsed. We felt sad. A man from a white and small house soon declared that he would rule the world. Proclamations of the death of history followed and the chronicle of the impending clash of civilisations was foretold. It was the time when millions of the suppressed were trying to raise their voices that on a very normal day a very old house close to home was razed to the ground. Anguish and helplessness hit us. Ajay Jha, Sanjay, Sudip Mukhia, Shubhojyoti Ray, Ujjayini Basu Ray, Vikram Menon, Kailashpati Jha, Amitabh Tripathy, and Mahesh were there to share those moments of helplessness. I am indebted to them.

The days passed by. We tried to interpret meanings, explore author's intentions and excavate fragments. Ideology was debunked and the principle of pleasure crowned. We coronated confusions. And confusions radicalised slogans and declared that whatever said hitherto was wrong. We witnessed the suppressed, for whom slogans of emancipation were produced periodically, joining forces with those who wanted to raze to the ground some more old houses. These were the times when the present engagement with ideology and politics in pre-independence Bengal saw me in constant dialogue with facts which most of the time stared at me with their brutal frankness.
The Directors and staff of the National Archives of India (New Delhi), West Bengal State Archives (Writer's Building, Calcutta), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi) and the P. C. Joshi Archives on Contemporary History (J.N.U., New Delhi) helped through their ready assistance in establishing this dialogue. I am extremely grateful to them. I am also indebted to the Librarian and the staff of the National Library (Calcutta), Central Secretariat Library (New Delhi) and Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, for their efficient help. I acknowledge with thanks Dr. Asim Samanta, the then Director General, Intelligence, West Bengal, for allowing me access to the intelligence files under the custody of his office.

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Rajesh Batabyal