CHAPTER V

AN EPILOGUE
The main impact of British rule in India was felt at a time when the Industrial Revolution was in full swing and the forces which had been released by it in England began to operate also, though with less intensity, on the primarily agricultural economy of India. Their first effect was the break down of the old self-sufficiency of rural India.

The colonial government harnessed various agencies in right earnest to take away from India all the surplus available in agriculture and made the country—a platform for supply of raw materials and in return, a good market for foreign-made goods. Soon a drain of wealth was cut to Great Britain and rightly so "... India presented a paradox of a poor people living in a rich country." It was basically under these conditions: "So far from peasant farming developing a depeasantization took place that reduced the mass of agriculturists to cultivators working for the barest subsistence return under a form of debt-peonage." The village community was further reduced to "... a headless disorganised body in which most of the population was poor, degraded, and helpless." The masses seethed with discontent under the alien rule and precisely it led to the birth of nationalist movement in due course for the achievement of independence under the banner of the Indian National Congress. With the passing of each phase of this movement the colonial regime got more and more alarmed while doubting the true intentions of the
nationalist leadership. At times while it took resort to adoption of repressive measures in order to silence them, it also wanted to soften and allay the moderate and liberal opinion in the country in favour of the continuance of the British Raj; its tenacity of purpose and sincerity in administration notwithstanding. Mixed with it was the broad concept of administrative convenience and it was in this backdrop that it took to the legislative chamber to introduce certain reforms. In fact, it was with this design that the Orissa Tenancy Act came to be passed in 1913 which had, of course, many lacunae and as a result, could not meet fully the popular and nationalist hopes long entertained in this important respect. In 1929, a further amendment to this legislation was effected for the sole purpose of facilitating consolidation of raiyati holdings, the nationalist leaders from Orissa adopting a positive role on both the occasions.

The world economic crisis of the late 1930s had a profound economic impact on the Indian agricultural classes, who lost so heavily "... due to the catastrophic fall of prices of agricultural commodities that during the period from 1929 to 1936 their total indebtedness rose to the staggering figure of about Rs. 1,800 crores". Immediately, it let loose a chain of events, which ultimately led "... to locking up interests in land, credit contracted, forced sales increased, and Governments began to consider the need for special measures to help the agriculturists to tide over the depression."
Under these gruesome conditions, the Congress nationalists were called upon to form a ministry and accept responsibility of office in Orissa in 1937, on inauguration of a separate Legislative Assembly following the formation of Orissa into a separate province. Inspired with the reformist zeal they made serious as well as sincere attempts to introduce agrarian reform measures in the Assembly and passed certain important acts mainly pertaining to the accrual of tenancy rights in lands and curb the moneylenders’ fraudulent practice of usury capital by way of granting permanent relief to the agriculturist-borrowers; besides, lowering the land revenue rate and further augmenting the co-operative movement in the province.

In its bid to introduce certain socio-economic reforms through legislation the Congress Ministry in Orissa was, however, forced to strike at the very roots of the citadel of old reactionary and feudal systems of the land which in turn generated sharp reactions from the landed aristocracy as well as the big money-lenders of the province, who "...exploited the economic helplessness of the peasant with the thoroughness of the traditional Shylock." On occasions more than one the colonial power was found in league with these reactionary forces. The excessive dilly-dallying and ultimate rejection of the Madras Estates Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill of 1937 in 1941, after being duly adopted by the popularly elected members of the Assembly, was the best possible example which could be cited in this connection. For a better understanding of the behaviour
shown in this regard by the colonial bureaucrats an inference is sought from a passage written by Jawaharlal Nehru:

We find the British, the most advanced people in Europe at the time, ally themselves in India with the most backward and conservative classes. They bolster up a dying feudal class; they create landlords; they support the hundreds of dependent Indian rulers in their semi-feudal states. They actually strengthen feudalism in India... It is not difficult to understand why the British acted in this way in India.... They could not possibly make friends with the masses, for the whole object of their presence in India was to exploit them. The interests of the exploiters and the exploited could never be the same. So they, the British, fell back on the relics of feudalism which India still possessed.

The rift inside the Congress party forum which gradually led to some kind of dissident activities also caused a good deal of annoyance and trouble to the Ministry. As Rajendra Prasad, who was conducting an investigation into the charges levelled against Biswanath Das and his ministerial colleagues, put it:

It is much to be desired that there is intense party faction in Orissa. There has been consequently a great deal of mud-slinging and allegations have been made absolutely without foundation in many cases and in others unwarranted conclusions have been drawn from innocent acts. I am fully satisfied that there is no justification for the charges made and for the press campaign which has been carried on against the ministers...

In addition, the Ministry was called upon to work under certain administrative and financial limitations. The inherent problem of evolving a new system of administration...
out of widely different conditions in which the people lived prior to 1936 was a difficult problem to reckon with. Besides, the task of making the pre-nationalist machinery work in welfare-oriented programmes and that too, under a changed circumstance posed a formidable problem. Over and above, a low key budget amounting to a gross income of 1.66 crores of rupees from all sources taken together including 40 lakhs of rupees as subvention from the government of India stared at the face of the Ministry whenever it desired to take a step in the popular direction. The Premier in observation of all these things told the House during his budget speech for 1938-39:

Our wants are many while our resources are limited. The evolution of a new system of administration under widely different conditions requires careful thinking. Added to these, the tremendous political awakening in the country combined with mass consciousness puts immense strain on the wheel of administration. This again, in its turn, throws a heavy responsibility on the Ministry. It is their hard lot to reconcile these two conflicting outlooks, the politically-minded masses surging with hopes and aspirations and the officials with their old outlook.

A popular Ministry has necessarily to welcome the awakening of the masses whose representatives they happen to be in the Cabinet. Nor is it their desire to disown the officials but to secure and make use of their full co-operation in carrying out their popular programme. The Ministry has, therefore, to overcome everyday conflicting cries from opposite directions. While one feels that an action taken is radical, the other feels that it is too moderate.

The Congress Ministry in Orissa thus put up tremendous efforts to brace up with various odds and oddities that came in its way during the initial stage of its acceptance.
of office. It took up with varying degrees some of the most important and pressing problems affecting the economically weaker sections of the society, such as, reduction of land revenue and rent, fixity of tenure and abolition of illegal exactions, ban on evictions and curbing of moneylenders' nefarious activities, regulation of the flow of credit transactions and provision for cheap credit facilities by developing the co-operative movement. These reforms, however popular, could only partly fulfil all the promises made on the eve of the elections held in early 1937, since it did not remain in power for too long to take full action in this regard; its period of stay at the helms of affairs being cut short in the month of November, 1939, when it decided to give up office following the directive of the A.I.C.C. to do so on British declaration of unilateral commitment of India to the World War. It is difficult therefore to pass a firm remark on its over-all performance, but this much can be told that the work done by it definitely helped the constructive programme of the nationalist leadership as a whole and contributed immensely to the stirring of the nation for the ultimate aim of achieving Purna Swaraj or full independence in not so distant a future.

***
REFERENCES

5. Discussed in Chapter III, p. 177.
6. Ibid., p. 185.
9. Vide Chapter I, p. 75.
10. Vide Chapter III.
11. Vide Chapter IV.
12. Vide Chapter II.
13. Vide Chapter IV.
19. Vide Chapter I, p. 79.
21. Ibid.
22. Discussed in different chapters.
23. The Samaj, op. cit., 6 November, 1939.


25. India achieved her independence on 15 August, 1947.

***