Chapter One
INTRODUCTION

This study covers the election campaign of 1937, the Individual Satyagraha and the Quit India movement in the colonial province of Central Provinces and Berar with particular focus on peoples' participation at the grassroots level. It is a general misconception that the Central Provinces and Berar was a politically placid state. There is sufficient data, which this study has drawn upon, to affirm that Central Provinces and Berar was a vibrant, animated and politically volatile province pulsating with the strong sentiment of nationalism particularly in the Gandhian era.

There has been surprisingly little detailed research so far on the nature and course of Indian National Movement in the province of Central Provinces and Berar. The only detailed account of Central Provinces and Berar in the modern period is by D.E.U. Baker. According to Baker, there was no growth of national consciousness in this province, rather, it was political consciousness on the lines of caste, language and region. He contends that the dominant identity was not that an identity of nation, rather the province was divided by Hindi, Marathi, Brahmin-Marwari, Brahmin- non-Brahmin, Kanyakubj-Konkanastha and even Khare-Shukla, Shukla -Seth Govind Das and Tilakite- non Tilakite conflicts. It was a house divided against itself. The book traces the rise and growth of Hindi regional power politics and the consequent marginalization of the Marathi region and Marathi politicians symbolizing the fading out of Tilak's influence at the national level. According to Baker, what existed was only a political power game; there was no movement, no nation. There were only power groups eager to expand their influence over various social groups. However, from my study it is clear that terming the national movement a power game is a trivialization of the spectacular role played by the masses.

1 The election campaign in the CPB assumes the proportion of a mass movement. It forms the public sphere where all social, political and cultural categories were represented animated in correspondence to a wider and deeper category of nationalism.

Indian National Movement, Nation and Nationalism become a non-event in Baker’s work. Despite evidence presented by the official History of the Freedom Movement in Madhya Pradesh, Baker argues that the Gandhian movement in 1919 hardly got off the ground in the Central Provinces and Berar and that Gandhi failed to mobilize the support of the regional elites in the Hindi and Marathi districts. The leadership of both the regions were engaged in developing their political careers in the Congress by counter-balancing their respective zones of influence. The entire political process in the province encouraged the provincial leadership divided along the lines of community, caste, sub-caste, class, region and profession, seek the support of their “fellow clients” for eventual domination in the province. Baker contends that by 1939, the Congress, led by Gandhi, was the most successful of all parties in manipulating these connections, its politicians doing so at the levels of the tehsil, the town, the district or the region and the province itself. Congress provided these contacts to the middle-class politician to develop a following in the rural areas and labour sectors. The political process in the province of Central Provinces and Berar was a contest for leadership in the Congress party, leading to the growth of factions from 1919 to 1939 ultimately leading to the domination of the Hindi group in the Congress. While, Baker’s argument is that the ‘national movement’ did not happen in the CPB, my sources reveal that the movement was extremely widespread.

"Saffron versus Green 1919-1947" by K.Majumdar, is based on a wide range of archival data and first hand information from contemporary leaders and bureaucrats. ‘Saffron Versus Green” seeks to analyze the role of British colonialism and the involvement of its politically ambitious collaborators in the evolution of Muslim and Hindu political activity. The narrative unfolds in the backdrop of Bhonsale rule and harmonious intercommunal relationships. This amicability continued in the first four decades of the British rule despite the ‘Urdu- Nagari’ and ‘Cow Protection’ movements of 1880s and 1890s. After Non-

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4 Kanchanmoy Majumdar, Saffron Versus Green, Communal Politics in the Central Provinces and Berar 1919-1947, Delhi, Manohar, 2003.
cooperation and Khilafat this social fabric was torn apart, with the Muslim League attracting by making the cards of Muslims religious identity loyalism. Simultaneously the birth of RSS (1925) and its gradual ascendancy as the core kernel of Hindu Mahasabha accentuated Muslim fears and separatist tendencies.

The relationship of the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS with British colonialism in the province during the ministry period is presented as that between a scene of the two warring parties with a promoter and protector. Muslim League magnified the imagined and real fears of Hindu majority rule and publicized them to the hilt. On the other hand the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS combine propagated ‘Hindu Sangathan’, ‘Shuddhi’ and ‘Hindutva’. The narrative corroborates the argument of Muslim League in that it does not recognize Congress as a secular party and sees it as being in league with Hindu communal forces with partisan interest.

However, one problematic aspect of the book is that it does not deal with communalism as an ideology with economic and social underpinnings. On the contrary, it identifies communalism as essentially arising from religious differences and being a joust for power between minority and majority. The author dismisses the early phase of the growth of communalism as law and order problem erupting due to clash of elite interests in the province (Pp.236). The basic flaw of the book lies in the total negation of the dominant force of nationalism in the province. He does not recognize that nationalism was a predominant ideology, strategy and movement in waging struggle against colonialism and communalism simultaneously. The book fails to recognize to mark the inherent antagonism between the two ideologies, nationalism and communalism.

The author projects Congress as an elite institution (Pp182), whereas, on the contrary, Congress influence in the province had percolated down to the lowest level of society, transcending caste and class hierarchies. The massive participation at the grassroots level in Individual Satyagraha and the Quit India movement in the Central Provinces and Berar bears testimony to this fact.
Communal forces remained aloof from Individual Satyagraha and Quit India movement.

There are a number of books in Hindi, like J.P. Sharma's 'Madhya Pradesh Mein Rashtriya Aandolan, 1920-1947', 5 'Madhya Pradesh Mein Azadi Ki Ladai Aur Adivasi' 6 and many other publications. 7 Though these books based on folklore, folksongs contemporary newspapers, gazetteers and interviews portray the vibrancy of the movement, they miss the overall view, as they have not consulted institutional and government sources.

The following account of the background of the Indian National Movement is largely based on the interviews of the freedom fighters. 8 The first signs of national awakening became noticeable in Central Provinces and Berar from the early years of the twentieth century. The first sparks of nationalism lit the dark interiors of the province during the Swadeshi movement. Educated town dwellers and middle class people were taking interest in the Congress activities. During 1907-08, a dramatic play 'EKKA' suggesting that unity can even replace and kill a king became very popular among the youth and later on was even banned. Hind Kesari, Sumati and Tarun Maharashtra were popular newspapers. 'Kesari' proved a great vehicle of dissemination of nationalist ideology and awareness in the province. The powerful tone of 'Kesari' inspired and influenced the educated people to a great extent. Police threatened readers of 'Kesari' and its circulation was banned.

The session of the Congress at Nagpur in 1920 can aptly be described as epoch making in multiple respects. One ashram was established in Nagpur as a centre for Congress constructive programme that later on proved the backbone for the entire gamut of Gandhian movements. The Nagpur session and the launching of non-

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6 Saxena, Sudhir, Madhya Pradesh Mein Azadi Ki Ladai aur Adivasi, M.P. Hindi Granth Academy, Bhopal.
cooperation movement had a deep impact on evolution of Indian National Movement in Central Provinces and Berar. Khadi pheris, bonfires, Ganesh festivals became popular methods of mass mobilization. People from many different sections of society were attracted towards the Indian National Movement.

National awareness did not remain confined only to urban areas. Congress workers organized Kisan Parishads. Forest Satyagraha during civil disobedience movement was very powerful in the province. Prabhat Pheries became a strong medium to spread national awakening. Rich Malgujars and merchants funded Congress. They helped Congress with resources whenever necessity arose.

In Chapter Two I discuss the different aspects of the election campaign of 1936-37 in the province. An attempt is made to assess the position of the Congress in comparison with other political parties in the province. The chapter also traces the revival of the Congress organization on the eve of 1937 elections. The election campaign is examined in detail treating it not just as an election campaign but as a process of mass mobilization. The chapter ends with analyses of election results and the difficult process of ministry formation.

In Chapter Three, the focus shifts to the first Congress ministry in the Central Provinces and Berar. The discussion is organized in three sections: (a) the Congress work outside the Legislative Assembly, i.e., mass mobilization. (b) Congress work inside the Legislative Assembly, passing of the new laws and implementation of Congress programmes of prohibition, education and rural development (c) The Khare Crisis, which brought infamy to the Congress by exposing factionalism and indiscipline. It resulted in the exit of N.B. Khare, a veteran Congress leader who later on joined the Hindu Mahasabha and turned a British loyalist.

Chapter Four deals with the background, nature and the course of the Individual Satyagraha movement in Central Provinces and Berar. This chapter discusses the long-term dynamics of the Gandhian strategy manifested in constructive work and preparation for the Individual Satyagraha, in which grassroots participation under
Gandhian ideology comes alive. This chapter also attempts to focus on the ground level mobilization of the Left groups and parties. Individual Satyagraha is also studied as a precursor to the August Revolution.

The Quit India Movement was the most dramatic and spectacular campaign launched by the Congress. The study of the Quit India Movement remains a challenge for historians. In some of the recent studies, it has been analysed on the basis of the two hypotheses on the nature of the outbreak, which present it as purely spontaneous or as a ‘dual revolt’. However, other studies reject these two theories on the basis of lack of supportive evidence. The chapter Five attempts to analyse the nuances of the Quit India Movement as the final phase of the long-term strategy of sustained struggle against the Colonial rule. It focuses primarily on grass root participation and demonstrates that Gandhi’s insurgents of 1942 in Central Provinces and Berar like E.P. Thompson’s bread rioters had their own notions of righteous and unrighteous behaviour.

In Chapter Six, the emergence and growth of Hindu and Muslim communalism is discussed. I explain how Hindu and Muslim ground level communal activism nurtured communal ideology and fed each other. The multiple examples given in this study reveal how in a communally surcharged locality even a small spark proves explosive. The chapter ends with a discussion on the role of the Congress and the British government in the context of growing of Hindu and Muslim communalism.

In this study, the formulation and implementation of British policy at the provincial level has been dealt simultaneous with the different themes, for example the Congress, mass mobilization, Individual Satyagraha, Quit India

movement and the Communal problem. Since the Indian national movement was operating within the framework of the colonial state hence British politics had to be examined with reference to their understanding of and impact on the ongoing movements.