

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE BENGAL PACT AND THE BENGAL TENANCY ACT: THE UPLIFT OF THE MUSLIMS AND SUPPRESSION OF THE HINDUS IN LATE 1920S BENGAL

Tapan Kumar Das
Asst. Prof. in History,
Khandra College,
Khandra, Burdwan

Chitta Ranjan Das (1870-1925), better known as C. R. Das and popularly known as *Deshabandhu*, was of the most dynamic political leaders of the 20th century in Bengal. The emergence of C. R. Das as the leading personality in Bengal has been a scholarly discussions. C. R. Das came to dominate Indian politics during the last few years of his life. Chitta Ranjan Das pointed out that the agitation against the British colonial rule was first launched in Bengal; this influenced other provinces later and the entire country as a matter of course.¹ He was never a believer in the policy of wait and see. Bengal, like other parts of India, was created a new excitement by the Gandhian movement during 1920-1922. Gandhi stated the Non-cooperation resolution under the Presidentship of Lala Lajpath Rai at the special session of the Congress which held in Calcutta (1st September, 1920). Bengal politicians like Bipin Chandra Pal, Motilal Ghosh, Byomkesh Chakravarti and C. R. Das were against inauguration of Non-cooperation. His main view of opposition to Gandhis programme became the boycott of councils. The emergence of C. R. Das experimentations with politics stated new excitement in Bengal. Under the leadership of C. R. Das the Bengal Congress launched a revolutionary mass movement. It seemed that ‘in any angle Das was not anti-Gandhi or his movements rather Das’s own approach towards the movements’.²

In this situation Gandhi decided to suspend the non-cooperation movement in February, 1922 because the incident of *chauri chaura*. The Non-cooperation movement was withdrawn in February 1922, was followed by the Gandhi was arrested on March 18, 1922; he was imprisoned for six years. Das and Motilal resigned from the Congress and on 1st January, 1923 the Swaraj Party was organized, Das was the President and Motilal was the Secretary of this party.³ The Swaraj Party accepted the Congress programme as a whole except take part in elections. It declared that it would adopt ‘a policy of uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction within the councils, with a view to make the Government though the council’s impossible.’⁴ On 22 February, 1923, the Swarajists Manifesto, adopted at Allahabad, it was stated that: “The Immediate object of the party is the speed attainment of full Dominion Status -----The party will set up nationalist candidates throughout the country to contest and secure the seats in the legislative council and the Assembly-----They will, when they are elected, present on behalf of the country, its legitimate demands as formulated by the party----for their acceptance and fulfilment within a reasonable time by the Government. If the demands are not granted----occasion will then arise, for the elected members of the party, to adopt a policy of uniform,

continuous and consistent obstruction within the council, with a view to make the Government through the councils impossible- -⁵

C. R. Das felt strongly without Muslims support, he could not capture the Bengal council. He tried to sketch a plan for Hindu-Muslim alliance in Bengal through the Swaraj Party accepted it in Calcutta Conference (Dec, 1923). Later on, this document was renowned as the name of Bengal Pact. This pact deals with the question of representation on local bodies, proportion of appointments in public service and cow-killing etc. The Bengal Pact was published on 18 December, 1923. The pact stated in its preface that ‘in order to establish real foundation of Self-Government in this province it is necessary to bring about a pact between the Hindus and the Mahomedans of Bengal dealing with the rights of each community when the foundation of Self-Government is secured.’⁶

The Swaraj Party have felt that they had made a change for their success in the forthcoming elections in Bengal. Bengal middle class Hindu votes understood fully need but C. R. Das realised that without the proper helped of the Muslims no party could get majority in the Bengal Legislative Council. It was stated that C. R. Das was engaged to promotion his council entry programme in Bengal. He made sketch his programme in Alipore jail-where they had been imprisoned.⁷ After securing Muslim support in Bengal legislative politics, C. R. Das tried to strength the Hindu-Muslim political alliance in Bengal for this purpose he supported the Khilafat-Non-cooperation movement. In other parts of India during 1922-23 created some local irritants which was weaken the basis of Hindu-Muslim alliance and provided communal tension. In this period several issues like cow sacrifice and music before mosque were provoked and new issues like *Shuddhi* (purification) or *Tabligh* (the Muslim conversion movement) and *Sangathan* (Hindu revivalist organization) or *Tanzim* (Muslim revivalist movement) were developed the situation very communal consequences.

C. R. Das and his party, the electoral battles of 1923 started vow of the Swaraj Party: our aim is not this or that reform, our aim is Swaraj. The Bengal Pact had not introduced properly yet the Muslims became allies of the Swaraj Party in the election in late 1923. It intended that every seat would be contested “to capture the council.”⁸ In this respect, the Swaraj Party declared that it had 57 nominees, 34 in the non-Muslim and 23 in the Muslim constituencies.⁹ Many constituencies the Swaraj Party gave no candidates, few independent candidates assured from the party.¹⁰ C. R. Das and the Swaraj Party won majority seats including 75 per cent of the non-Muslim and over 50 per cent of the Muslim seats in the Bengal council.

It is likely to be mentioned that the Swaraj Party captured the Bengal Congress committee in September, 1923.¹¹ Swaraj Party started a programme of council entry to obtain the support of the Muslim leaders. In the session of Gaya Congress (1922), C. R. Das pointed out that ‘each should be prepared to undergo some kind of sacrifice in favour of the other.’¹² Though the Bengal Pact was an agreement for safeguarding the rights of Hindu-Muslim community and there is no doubt that the idea of the pact had played a significance role. The pact was necessity to develop Hindu-Muslim amity towards the idea of *Swaraj* and the pact was nothing more than a mere ‘contract’. In this perspective, C. R. Das remarked that ‘wanted to make this certain that whenever a promise was made it was with a view to achieving some really high idea towards the fulfilment of National destiny. So the idea of a Hindu-Muslim pact contained nothing harmful particularly towards the promotion and elevation of Hindu individualism.’¹³

C. R. Das firmly fixed Hindu-Muslim unity any other political in Bengal. The middle class Bengali Hindus opposed the pact because they seemed that the implementation of this pact because less their power in Bengal politics. C. R. Das thought that without Hindu-Muslim unity

‘Swaraj’ not come this stance was supported Congress leaders like J M Sengupta, Subhas Chandra Bose, Kiran Shankar Roy, Anil Baran Roy, Birendra nath Sasmal and Pratap Chandra Guha etc. It is important to look over that with draft plan Abdul Karim met C. R. Das and Das agreed it and also remarked that ‘apprehended calamity of violent rupture between the two communities.’¹⁴ A promise of the Bengal Pact was taken by C. R. Das on side of the Hindu community. The Hindu-Muslim unity was reasonable when every Hindu and every Muslim attention himself an Indian or a Bengal first and next intention was Hindu or Muslim.¹⁵ The Bengal Pact was an agreement to prepare the Hindu and the Muslim Swarajists work unity in the council.¹⁶ But a Hindu paper resorted ‘The Sincerity of Muslim members of the council in joining the Swaraj Party may well be doubted. They joined the Swarajists, because the Swarajists offered them a pact which would consolidate their position.’¹⁷ For safety internal organization and political power were considered necessary. In this respect, a Calcutta paper remarked: “Have the Hindus any leisure at present to waste their time over discussions on the share of government posts? Have they not yet been cured of the charm of such slavery? Strengthen yourselves if you want to live.”¹⁸ In the connection the *Tabligh* and *Tanzeem* movements were brought back to consciousness as a formed of *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan*.¹⁹ The *Shuddhi* movements in Bengal were not welcomed in Muslim press because there were ‘thousands of ignorant and illiterate Muslims’ and were ‘likely to be carried away by the enticement of *Shuddhi* preachers.’²⁰ Under the circumstances, the community-based organizations developed in Bengal. A Calcutta Paper wrote that ‘Hindu-Muslim unity would remain brittle if the Hindus, without first strengthening themselves, continued to make one sided concessions to the Muslims.’²¹ But Hindu community-based organization played the role for formation in Bengal very slowly.

On the other hand the Tenancy Act Amendment Bill introduced in the Bengal Legislative Council in late 1928. The Bill involved issues like first, it arose the question of the rights of sharecroppers as they consider as tenants, second, the position of the under *raiya*ts were recognised and lastly, this bill had restrained the problem of transferability of holdings.²² According to the Bill focused as drafted to beat a nice balance between the relation of tenants, landlords and under tenants. In this situation, the bill was brought in the council, under the leadership of Nawab Habibullah of Dacca who protested in contrast on the basis of the rights of *zaminars*.²³

In the issue of the Tenancy Act Amendment Bill voting purpose, three different blocs –

1. Muhammadan bloc and allies (21members) including one or two isolated Hindu members,
2. The Swarajya bloc and allies (42), most of the members elected from the non-Muhammadan seats related with a small number of landholders, nominated members and few elected from different organizations, and
3. The official and European bloc with allies (37 members).²⁴

Let us now look upon the three blocs: so far as the pattern of voting was consent, the Muhammadan blocs supported the *bargadar* and underraiyat and against the landlord. In this respect Syed Nausher Ali remarked: “It can never be expected that in the very document, creating a Bargadar tenancy, the Bargadar should be ‘expressly’ described as a tenant. If we accept the amendment, the result will be that a Bargadar will never be in a position to prove that he is a tenant.”²⁵ The Swarajya bloc supported the landlord against *bargadar* and underraiyat. The third block was the official and European bloc did not favour in any amendment to the original draft of the Bill. The newspapers played a significant role towards the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill. The newspapers like the *Statesman*, *Forward*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and others were strongly supported the Bill. But most of the Muslim newspapers like the

Muhammadi, Mussalman etc and nationalist papers like *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and the *pro-communist Ganavani* openly abused the Bill.

It is likely to be mentioned that the nationalist Muslim leaders like Ashraf Ali Khan Chowdhury, Syed Nausher Ali, Asimuddin Ahmed, A.K.Fazl-ul-Huq and Shamsur Rehman etc. voted against the amendment Bill.²⁶ The amendment bill was renounced by 53 votes to 51 but still the *zamindars* and Bengal Congress leaders, including Sen Gupta and the Bose brothers voted for the bill.²⁷ In this perspective it is important to look over that the *Zamindari* interests supported through the Hindus and the Muslims resisted against the amendment, but it led to rise Hindu Nationalists in behalf of *Zamindars*. The Congress leaders like Subhas Bose, J. M. Sen gupta, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Bidhan Chandra Roy were in favour of the *Zamindari* interests.²⁸ During the 1928 Muslim Congressmen like Maulana Akram Khan, A. K. Fazl-ul-Huq, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Tamizuddin Khan and others collapsed relation with Bengal Congress. They found a party called All Bengal Praja Party and also support of such personalities like Dr. Naresh Sen Gupta, Atul Chandra Gupta, Dr. Benoy Sarkar and J. L. Banerji etc.²⁹

After the death of C. R. Das, this pattern of approach led inevitable through the leadership of the Bengal Congress. It was stated that the Bengal Pact in 1926 was the first approach to destruction of Hindu-Muslim unity in Bengal and the Tenancy Bill in 1928, was the final step towards this calamity. After the division was completed between Bengal Congress, we may quote here J. M. Sen Gupta who remarked: “Now we have lost support not only of Muslim Bengal, but also of the peasant masses of Bengal”³⁰ It is clear from the above analysis that the Swarajists trend towards *Zamindar* were exposed in 1928 during the debate on the Tenancy Bill through this bill the Congress and the Muslims in Bengal were divided into two blocks. Thus it can be said that the Bengal Pact and the Bengal Tenancy Act both were encouraged to the uplift of the Muslims and suppression of the Hindu in late 1920s Bengal.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. See, Tapan Kumar Das, *Chittaranjan Das's Thought Regarding Hindu-Muslim Unity and its Relevance in Modern Times*, in Gour Chandra Ghosh (ed.), *Trends and Developments in Science, Social Science and Humanities*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2016, pp. 163-170.
2. Koushiki Dasgupta. *Minor Political Parties and the Politics and the Politics of Late Colonial Bengal (1920-1947)*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi 2013, p. 14.
3. For details see Bipan, Chandra. *India's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books India (Pvt.) Ltd., New Delhi, pp. 235-36.
4. Indian Annual Register, 1923, vol. 2, pp.143-44.
5. AICC File no.: 13/1923, Nehru Museum, New Delhi.
6. Dilip Kumar Chatterjee, *C. R. Das And Indian National Movement: A Study of His Political Ideals*, The Post-Graduate Book Mark, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 132-33,
7. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. *India Wins Freedom*, Orient Longman Limited, Madras, 1988, p. 16.
8. *The Forward*, 25 October, 1923.
9. Ibid, 3 Noverber, 1923, the names of the Swaraja Party candidates were published.
10. Bengal Administration Report, 1922-23, p. 22.
11. G. B. Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1923-24, p.15.
12. H.N. Mitra (ed.) Indian Annual Register, 1923: Indian National Congress, 37th session, Gaya 1922, p. 828. (Henceforth referred to as I.A.R).

13. Dilip Kumar Chatterjee, op. cit., p. 134.
14. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, op. cit., pp. 1-3.
15. *Swaraj*, Calcutta, 19 December, 1923, RNPB.
16. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 19 December, 1923, RNPB.
17. *Swatantra* (Calcutta), 24 February, 1924, RNPB.
18. *Sarathi*, Calcutta, 3 January, 1924, RNPB.
19. IAR 1923, 2, p. 59; The *Hanafi*, Calcutta, 16 April, 1928, RNPB. The *Tabligh* and *Tanzeem* movements both were not of recent origin like the Hindu *Shuddi* and *Sangathan*.
20. *Moslem Hitaishi*, 20 July, 1923, RNPB.
21. *Bansari*, 12 May, 1923, RNPB.
22. Partha Chatterjee. *Bengal 1920-1947: The Land Question*, K P Bagchi & Company, Calcutta 1984.
23. *The Statesman*, 8 August 1928.
24. Partha Chatterjee. *Bengal 1920-1928: The Land Question*, op. cit., 88.
25. *Proceeding*, BLC, 13 August 1928, p. 121.
26. Ibid.
27. *Proceedings*, BLC, 14 August 1928, p. 163.
28. Bengal Legislative Council *Proceedings* 4th September, 1928, pp. 927-928.
29. Abul Mansur Ahmed. *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar*, Dacca, 1970, p. 61.
30. Ibid. p. 62.