EIGHT
Subhas Bose and Nationalist Politics, 1925–1938

The division between the Swarajists and the Gandhian No-Changers in the 1920s was succeeded by the tensions between the right and left wings of the Congress during the 1930s. The broad rubrics of left and right covered several conflicting groups, and the two wings would best be described as flexible alliances. The left, which always remained fragmented, was composed of the Congress Socialists, who crystallized into a formal group in 1934; the communists, who had to follow the turns and twists of the Third Communist International (Comintern); the followers of M. N. Roy (Royists); and a number of unattached socialist-inclined leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose. There were also mass organizations, principally labor unions and Kisan Sabhas, or peasant leagues, that often had political leaders at their head. Spurred by worsening economic conditions, Congress Socialists, communists, Gandhians, and others entered the urban and rural labor field, beginning a competition for support which continues today.¹

Socialist and communist ideas had a strong and early impact on political workers in Bengal, and numerous leftist groups concentrated their organizing efforts in Calcutta and other industrial centers. Some small leftist groups started in the 1920s, and by the mid-1930s there was a host of small parties and secret coteries at work in Bengal. The attraction of socialist ideas was felt by congressmen and ex-revolutionaries who tried to formulate an ideology combining leftist ideas and nationalism.²

In the Bengal Congress, a struggle for supremacy ensued after the death of C. R. Das. A group headed by Subhas and Sarat Bose gained
an uneasy and unstable control in the late 1920s. Gradually, however, some of Das's other recruits began to ally themselves with Gandhi and the High Command. To simplify this account, all those Bengali leaders who established close ties with Gandhi and the central Congress leadership during the period will be called Bengal's Gandhians, although the term has often been reserved for the narrower group who were wholly devoted to Gandhi's constructive program and ideology. The broader definition thus includes allies like Dr. B. C. Roy, J. M. Sen Gupta, and Nalini Ranjan Sarker, as well as the orthodox Gandhians like P. C. Ghosh, Suresh Banerjee, and Nripendra Chandra Banerji.³

THE EARLY CAREER OF SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

One of the main actors in all the different dramas of Bengal and Congress politics through these years was Subhas Chandra Bose. He was a convert to socialist ideas and a hero of students and aspiring leftists; his group became the major faction in Bengali politics to resist Gandhian control of the regional Congress organization. Subhas Bose became a representative of Bengal and of the left in a conflict within the Congress which ended in defeat for the left and victory for the Gandhian High Command at the end of the 1930s.

Although he never gained Muslim support, as had his mentor, C. R. Das, Bose was disturbed by the growing communal divisions, and once the Government of India Act of 1935 went into operation his group sought an alliance with Fazlul Huq's party. Such an arrangement was finally worked out in the early 1940s by Bose's elder brother Sarat Bose and other party leaders. The Progressive Coalition formed the ministry of Bengal from late 1941 to mid-1943 and represented one effort toward Hindu-Muslim cooperation.

Finally, Bose was the bête noire of the European officials in the government of Bengal (and the government of India as well). It was thought that Bose was in league with revolutionaries. Officials believed, perhaps correctly, that a leader without scruples about the use of violence who had mass and revolutionary support was much more dangerous than Gandhi or a Gandhian. So Bose was under constant surveillance, and officials were happier when he was not actively on the scene.⁴

Before descending into the maelstrom of factional strife and party
politics in the period from C. R. Das's death to 1940, I propose to sketch the early career of the times' foremost protagonist. A few significant themes of Bose's political and psychological life are these:

1. Identification with the young and with youth movements.
2. A tendency to rebel against many kinds of authorities, while also displaying a desire for authority, discipline, and order. Bose continued to try to be both a "good boy" and chief "mischief maker"—two important elements in his youthful self-imagery.\(^5\)
3. Frequent use of the imagery of self-immolation common in Indian religion and nationalism, although he also expressed a desire to "remain in history."\(^6\)
4. A strong identification with both Bengali and familial traditions in religion, social organization, and politics, combined with modern Western ideas about science, technology, and organization.
5. Occasional expression of a desire for a religious withdrawal but more frequent expression of a need for activism and selfless work in the world. In prison, inactivity led to illness, and upon release and recovery he became hyperactive.
6. Throughout his youth and early manhood, a desire for a guru to show him the way, first in religion and then in politics. He had difficulty moving from discipleship to leadership after the death of C. R. Das, his chosen guru.
7. From his early manhood, use of the language of struggle and battle, and considerable interest in the military. This theme continued into his later life when he became General-Officer-Commanding of the Calcutta Congress in 1928 and still later commanding general of the Indian National Army during World War II.

Subhas Chandra Bose was born in 1897, the ninth child and sixth son of Janakinath and Probhabati Bose. He was descended from two fairly prominent Kayastha families, on his mother's side the Hatkhola Dattas and on his father's side the Boses of Mahinagar.\(^7\) During his adult years, Bose expressed pride in being a gentleman.\(^8\) He demanded the privileges due to him by virtue of his "rank and station in life" while in prison,\(^9\) and together with his older brother Sarat wanted to help
bring improvements to the family's ancestral village of Kodalia near Calcutta. Subhas also wanted to extend the Kayastha marriage circle in order to make their subcaste less provincial. These small incidents, taken with Bose's prominent display of his family genealogies in an autobiography written when he was nearly forty, all point to the closeness he felt to his family and caste traditions and his sense of his own high status in Bengali society.

During Subhas Bose's early years, his family resided in Cuttack in the present state of Orissa. His father was a prominent lawyer and participated in civic affairs. Young Subhas attended a missionary school where he learned English well, and then joined the Ravenshaw Collegiate School in 1909. He was always an excellent student and stood near or at the top of his class throughout his educational career.

Equally important for his development was the education, principally religious, that he obtained outside of school. The two crucial religious educators in Subhas' early life seem to have been his mother, a strict and devoted Shakta, and Beni Madhab Das, a teacher at the Ravenshaw Collegiate School. Subhas' letters to his mother in these years concerned devotion to female deities, usually Durga or Kali, and his growing appreciation of the lives of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Although Beni Madhab Das was a Brahmo, he served as a general instructor for Subhas in Hinduism and directed him to the Upanishads and the Epics.

In these adolescent years in Cuttack, Subhas learned about Shaktism, Vaishnavism, a little about the Tantras, and came to believe in the efficacy and importance of prayer and the way of devotion. He wrote to his mother that he wanted wisdom and character more than bookish knowledge. Subhas began to meditate and to practice yoga and continued these activities throughout his life, especially when he was in prison. At the same time Subhas also picked up the activist side of Vivekananda's teaching and the idea of expressing religious feelings through service to the poor, the sick, and the illiterate. He worked with cholera-stricken villagers and with untouchables, and taught a night class for adults and children while still in his teens.

After standing second in the matriculation examination for Calcutta University in 1913, Subhas Bose entered Presidency College. His family's base was still in Cuttack, but they later purchased a house in Cal-
cutta, and the family gradually came to be identified with Calcutta rather than with Cuttack.\textsuperscript{17} At Presidency College, Bose studied philosophy, paying little attention to his studies and focusing most of his energy on his religious interests.\textsuperscript{18} During his first year at college, Bose and a friend left on a pilgrimage to find a guru in North India. Without leaving word where they were going, they traveled to Hrishikesh, Hardwar, Brindaban, Banaras and Gaya, but never found the spiritual teacher they sought.\textsuperscript{19} The journey may be seen as a religious quest and also as an expression of feelings of rebellion against his parents. He had come to feel “more at home when away from home,” \textsuperscript{20} and his long trip to North India was a signal to his parents that he wished to travel on his own without abiding by their authority, although at the same time he wished to be a good boy and to do well by the standards of accomplishment of his day.

While at Presidency College, Subhas made one close friendship that was to endure throughout his life. This was with Dilip Kumar Roy, a man who has put the biographers of Subhas Bose in his debt by writing an insightful memoir, \textit{The Subhash I Knew}. Describing the Subhas Bose of Presidency College days, Dilip recalled his energy, laughter, his capacity for leadership without condescension, and his aristocratic generosity. Dilip also mentions that Subhas was stiff with women and naïve about sex until later in life.\textsuperscript{21} That Subhas was so naïve seems open to question, but it does seem clear that he was awkward with women and troubled by his sexual desires. In order to deal with these desires, Subhas tried to follow the course suggested by Ramakrishna. One was to think of every woman as one’s mother and not as a sexually desirable or attractive creature.\textsuperscript{22} This led Bose to the idealization of women, to the identification of the ordinary women in his life with the Mother Goddess, and to an arduous effort to suppress all sexual desires. Since Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had identified the Mother Goddess with the nation, young men like Subhas Bose so identified their own mother or the mother figures in their lives.\textsuperscript{23} Two further points about Subhas’s relations with women may be added here. First, no direct statement of his indicates that he was or determined to be a brahmacharya (in student stage of life or celibate). Although some of his followers claimed that he privately vowed not to marry until India was free, it appears that these supporters imagined this declaration as implicit in
the fact that Subhas did not marry while in India. The transformation of Subhas Bose into a mystic, a sadhu, and a brahmacharya seems part of the effort by some of his followers and friends to make him over into even more of a religious man than he actually was. In an interview in early 1965, the widow of C. R. Das, Basanti Devi, who had been close to Subhas from 1921, said that Subhas had never indicated that he would not marry. She and her husband had teased Subhas about getting married during the Noncooperation period. It is more likely that Subhas simply concentrated all his energies on national work and did not think to get married. His dependence on his family for economic support, even when a grown man, may also have had something to do with his single state. Second, all the prominent friendships he formed with women until he was at least into his middle thirties were with older, married women, including Mrs. Dharmavir, Mrs. Naomi Vetter, and Mrs. Kitty Kurti. Bose finally did marry Miss Emilie Schenkl when he was in his forties. She had assisted him in the preparation of several of his books in the 1930s and they were married when he returned to Europe during the Second World War.

A major event in the life of Subhas Bose and one which brought him considerable attention in Bengal took place while he was a student at Presidency College in 1916. This was the Oaten Affair. A number of students at the college beat up a professor, E. F. Oaten, who it is alleged, had insulted India and "manhandled" Indian students at Presidency College. It has never been clear whether Bose was one of those who actually hit Oaten or whether he "masterminded" the attack, as some have alleged. In his autobiography, Bose says that he was an eyewitness. Whatever Bose's actual role in the affair, he openly admitted his participation. After testimony in the case was heard, it was decided, inter alia, that Bose was to be expelled from Presidency College. The punishment was harsher than Bose had expected. He had written to his friend Hemanta Sarkar before the hearings that, "I am well-known as a 'good student' . . . the vast majority of the public feel that I am innocent, Ashu Babu knows of me personally and the evidence of the orderly against me is much too weak. So, there is every possibility of my being found innocent and let off." Long after the event, Bose's friend Dilip Roy wrote that the affair made Bose a hero and a marked man. Writing later, Bose gave the incident a crucial significance in his own development:
Little did I then realise the inner significance of the tragic events of 1916. My Principal had expelled me, but he had made my future career. I had established a precedent for myself from which I could not easily depart in future. I had stood up with courage and composure in a crisis and fulfilled my duty. I had developed self-confidence as well as initiative, which was to stand me in good stead in future. I had a foretaste of leadership—though in a very restricted sphere—and of the martyrdom that it involves. In short, I had acquired character and could face the future with equanimity.\textsuperscript{32}

Although it may well be that this was the most important event in Bose’s late adolescence, it does appear that writing twenty years after the event, he was playing down the fears he probably had about his future career and was making a smoother connection with his future nationalist career than existed. This was another instance in which one who had been “a good student” thought that this reputation would make the punishment for his “mischief” lighter. In contrast to his sneaking away in search of a guru, this rebellion had an element of nationalism in it. It was directed against one who was felt to be a cold, harsh representative of the British educational system in India. A year later, Bose, with the assistance of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, was permitted to join Scottish Church College to finish his college education.\textsuperscript{33} Two elements of later rebellions are foreshadowed here. Bose wanted to achieve within the system and yet to rebel against it. The ambivalence he had about the educational system of British India he later showed toward Western culture in general, the ICS, and the Congress.

During 1917 to 1919, Subhas Bose attended Scottish Church College and gained his B.A. with honors in philosophy, standing second in the first class. He then joined the postgraduate class, reading psychology.\textsuperscript{34} At this time, Subhas and some other students petitioned the government to obtain a University Military Training Corps.\textsuperscript{35} Although he said he had unfortunately neglected sports as a youth, Bose eagerly sought military training both in India and later when he was at Cambridge.\textsuperscript{36} This marks a lifelong fascination with the military and the theme of strength and weakness. Bose accepted the British assessment of the physically weak condition of Indians and Bengalis, but he insisted that it was due completely to lack of proper training. Thus he seized the opportunity for military training and later called upon others to do likewise. Bose believed that military and technological skills and proper methods of organization were the most important lessons that Indians
could learn from Europeans.\textsuperscript{37} The worship of the goddess Kali as
power and his admiration for the military might of India's European
conquerors seemed to flow together into a single channel. Although he
believed that Indians had a spiritual message for humanity and had
gone further than Europeans in developing their inner resources, he
was concerned about meeting Westerners on their own terms. Bose did
not believe, like Gandhi, that inner strength should be emphasized al-
most to the exclusion of the physical capabilities of man. His quest for
military training and his aim to meet the British equally in a military
context started with this rudimentary course during his World War I
student days.

Hardly had Bose settled into his postgraduate studies when his father
urged him to go to England and prepare for the Indian Civil Service
examination. He expressed doubts about going to England in a letter to
Hemanta Sarkar:

\begin{quote}
I am facing a most serious problem. Yesterday the family made an
offer to send me to England. . . . My primary desire is to obtain a uni-
versity degree in England; otherwise I cannot make headway in the
educational line. If I now refuse to study for the Civil Service, the
offer to send me to England will be put into cold storage for the time
being (and for all time). . . . On the other hand, a great danger will
arise if I manage to pass the Civil Service examination. That will mean
giving up my goal in life.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

He decided to take his family's offer and he sailed for England to pre-
pare for the examination at Cambridge, where he studied history and
politics, became a leader of the Bengali students in England, and learned
about English life and people at first hand.\textsuperscript{39} Some seventeen years
later, Bose wrote:

\begin{quote}
During the six terms that I was in Cambridge the relations between
British and Indian students were on the whole quite cordial, but in few
cases did they ripen into real friendship. I say this not from my per-
sonal experience alone but from general observation as well. . . . The
war undoubtedly had its effect. One could detect in the average Brit-
isher a feeling of superiority beneath a veneer of bon-homie which was
not agreeable to others. On our side, after the post-war events in India
and particularly the tragedy at Amritsar, we could not but be sensitive
(perhaps ultra-sensitive) with regard to our self-respect and national
honour. . . . We were politically more conscious and more sensitive
than we had been before.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}
Here Bose touches upon a major social and psychological problem for himself and for many other Indians who lived under British rule, the question of inferiority and superiority. Dilip Roy has written that Bose had malevolent feelings toward the British when in college.

How Subhash used to curve his firm lips in strong contempt whenever he intoned the word sāhib in a tone in which one pronounces vermin. And youth is a prolific season when seeds of contempt and rancour once sown multiply like mushrooms.41

And again in a letter of Bose’s from Cambridge to Hemanta Sarkar in 1919:

Whether one will it or not, the climate of this country makes people energetic. The activity you see here is most heartening. Everyman is conscious of the value of time and there is a method in all that goes on. Nothing makes me happier than to be served by the whites and to watch them clean my shoes. Students here have a status—and the way the professors treat them is different. One can see here how man should treat his fellow man. They have many faults—but in many matters you have to respect them for their virtues.42

Bose appears to have had a deep-seated ambivalence toward the British, compounded of admiration, envy, and hatred. Although Bose did not make any close English friends, he did maintain respect for certain Englishmen as individuals. He disliked the English people as a general category for what he believed that they were doing and had done to Indians, but he was sensitive enough to appreciate individuals for themselves when circumstances permitted. Bose studied hard in England and spent a good deal of time with other Indians, including Dilip Roy and Mr. and Mrs. Dharmavir. The Indians in England, like the British in India, made little communities among themselves which served as a shield against a potentially hostile native population.

Bose’s high need for achievement, particularly by British standards, led him to work hard for the ICS examination, and he finished fourth.43 Then, after a good deal of self-searching and exchange of letters with his family and with C. R. Das, he decided to resign from the ICS and take up “national service,” that is, to join the national movement in some suitable capacity.44 He had wanted to gain respect from the British by excelling in an examination prescribed by them for their elite service in India, but he then expressed his personal and nationalist an-
tipathy to them by resigning. Following the paradigm suggested before, Bose was again the good student and the rebel.

Bose corresponded about his desire to resign with his older brother Sarat, rather than writing directly to his father. He had a warm relationship with Sarat and often used the latter as a buffer in dealing with his parents. Sarat wanted him to take up the ICS career for which he had qualified, but Subhas was a strong-willed young man and he chose to chart his own course. The ICS decision was a rebellion both against the British and against his own parents.

In Bose’s last year in Cambridge, C. R. Das became a central figure in his life. Das had become the leader in the national movement in Bengal in the years when Bose was finishing college and heading for England. In 1921, Das had given up his legal practice, and this sacrifice served as a model for Bose.

If C. R. Das at his age can give up everything and face the uncertainties of life—I am sure a young man like myself, who has no worldly cares to trouble him, is much more capable of doing so. If I give up the service, I shall not be in want of work to keep my hands full. Teaching, social service, cooperative credit work, journalism, village organization work, these are so many things to keep thousands of energetic young men busy. Personally, I should like teaching and journalism at present. The National College and the new paper Swaraj will afford plenty of scope for my activity. A life of sacrifice to start with, plain living and high thinking, whole-hearted devotion to the country’s cause—all these are highly enchanting to my imagination and inclination. Further, the very principle of serving under an alien bureaucracy is intensely repugnant to me. The path of Arabindo Ghosh is to me more noble, more inspiring, more lofty, more unselfish, though more thorny than the path of Ramesh Dutt.

From Cambridge, Bose wrote two letters to C. R. Das asking the latter if he had a place for him in the national movement. These letters contain numerous suggestions by Bose for improving and expanding nationalist activities. Although we do not have the answer that Das sent, Bose does mention in a later letter to his parents that Das had described the possibilities of a nationalist career.

Rejecting the advice of his parents, Bose returned to India later in 1921. En route he stopped off in Bombay to see Mahatma Gandhi. He later wrote that he found the Mahatma’s program and strategy fuzzy,
but this evaluation was probably the fruit of later reflection. Upon returning to Calcutta, Bose met with Das and was shortly given a number of fairly important assignments in the Noncooperation campaign in Bengal, particularly for one so young. Bose worked in the National Education College, and he helped to organize the hartals against the Prince of Wales’ visit. A little more than two years later he became an advisory editor of *Forward* and chief executive officer of the Calcutta Corporation.59

More significant than the actual assignments was the fact that Bose felt that he had found in Das the guru he had been searching for. Bose was moved by the warmth, charm, religious fervor, and nationalist passion of Das and took Das as his model of a leader when he himself was called upon to lead. Bose wrote that Das was tied to the masses of Indians by bonds of love and devoted himself to them as had Swami Vivekananda.50 He also grew close to Basanti Devi, Das’s wife, and some have suggested that he was closer to her at this period of his life than to his own mother. Bose called Das his guru throughout his life even though Das died only five years after the relationship began, showing how complete and intense this tie of guru to pupil or leader to follower can be. In effect, Das was Bose’s teacher, leader, and guide. Mr. and Mrs. Das together became to a certain extent his chosen substitute parents.51 Bose remained in intimate touch with his real family and was especially close to Sarat throughout his life, but he had only one guru.

For three years after leaving Cambridge, Bose threw himself wholeheartedly into “national service.” He received much praise for his work on the hartal, in directing flood relief in northern Bengal in 1922, and in the Calcutta Corporation.52 He had always expressed some admiration for the revolutionaries of Bengal, and rumors passed about that he was in league with them. The government of Bengal arrested him along with many others suspected of collusion with the revolutionaries at the end of 1923, basing its evidence on that of its informers within the movement.53 Bose spent the next three years in prison, most of it under arduous physical conditions in Mandalay Jail. To deal with what they thought to be a severe threat to their rule, the governments of India and Bengal put into effect what the nationalists called “lawless laws.” These were laws and regulations made, the government said, to deal with abnormal conditions.54 Bose and all the others held under
these regulations never knew when or if they would be released, and their attempts to have the charges specified were usually futile.

**PRISON EXPERIENCE**

The prison experience of those thousands of Indian nationalists who often willingly and sometimes unwillingly went to jail from the late nineteenth century until independence has not been systematically analyzed. Men like Subhas Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Mahatma Gandhi, and many others spent a good part of their lives in prison. The experience of incarceration offered opportunities for degeneration, boredom, growth, reflection, and scholarship. It seems possible to examine the functions and dysfunctions of imprisonment for the individuals and groups held during the nationalist movement. Some tried to continue their work and to further political activity outside prison. Others used the opportunity to develop and reinforce political contacts and to recruit new members, particularly to a different ideological persuasion. Many took the period of confinement as a time for thought, writing, research, and meditation. A few studied prison conditions and the life and motivations of the ordinary, nonpolitical prisoners. The prison experience of Subhas Bose should be examined with these possibilities in mind.

Bose's health usually deteriorated during periods of captivity, although he usually recovered upon release. But even with the loss of weight and disturbing symptoms that accompanied imprisonment, Bose tried to read, write, and continue his political work. In Mandalay Jail he worked to continue and complete what he described as his “sadly neglected” education.55 Surendra Mohan Ghose, imprisoned along with Bose in Burma, said that Bose concentrated especially on Indian history and philosophy.56 Bose felt his “colossal ignorance of Bengali literature.” 57 He wrote home for books on Indian philosophy, Tantric texts in particular, and for works of Bengali and European literature. At the same time, Subhas wrote a number of essays, took notes on his reading, sketched plans for longer pieces on nationalism, prison life, and municipal problems.58

Among the topics Bose reflected upon in prison was his view of the Bengalis, although a number of comments that we consider here were made earlier or later than his imprisonment. Bose's view on Bengal, her
past, present, and future, are intermingled with perceptions about India as a whole. But in the 1920s, particularly, he showed a special interest in Bengal. Writing about Bengal before the British conquest, Bose described the glories of ancient Gaur and of the cultural center at Navadhipa. Bengal was a region in which several cultural traditions mingled, including Vedic culture, Tantrism, Vaishnavism, and Nyaya logic. Bengal had created a unique synthesis, he believed, but he was aware of the ravages and vagaries of time. Bose also mentioned the natural beauty of Bengal and the physical vigor of its inhabitants in past ages. Bengali literature in the past had been a common bond connecting high castes and low.\textsuperscript{59}

Although he is nowhere specific on the matter, it appears that he believed that the decline of Bengal from its ancient heights had begun with the coming of the British. In one of his fragmentary writings of 1925, he said,

Hundred and fifty years ago it was the Bengalees who betrayed the country to their foreign enemies. The Bengalees of the twentieth century certainly owe it to themselves to atone for that great sin. It will be the duty of Bengal's men and women to revive the lost glory of India. How best to accomplish that end is Bengal's greatest problem. . . . Bengal may be lagging behind in other spheres of life but I am firmly convinced that in the fight for Swaraj she goes far ahead of others. . . . Although Mahatma Gandhi, who is the sponsor of the national movement, happens to be a non-Bengalee, still no other province can claim national activities on such a tremendous scale as Bengal.\textsuperscript{60}

With the entry of the British into India, the Bengalis had committed the grievous sin of collaboration and had further declined into ridiculousness and weakness. Accepting the British stereotype of the babu, Bose berated his fellow Bengalis for becoming physically weak, for lapsing into pettiness, and for tearing selfishly at each other rather than uniting and rebuilding.\textsuperscript{61} Even Bengali literature, commented Bose after reading some works of Dinesh Chandra Sen on modern Bengali writing, had become enmeshed in "Feringi" or Anglicized Bengali:

Present-day Bengali is somewhat Feringi Bengali . . . and because of this factor this literature has remained confined within the confines of a few English-educated Bengalis. Among the common people, this literature has not been widely circulated. . . . The literature seems to be unreal; it has not been able to establish an intimate relationship with
the heart of the society. . . This kind of intimate relationship . . . should be reestablished. Stories of happiness and miseries in society, and of ambitions and ideals—even the merits and demerits of its accepted customs—should again be reflected in its literature. And only then will the literature become a living one. From this kind of literature, everybody irrespective of caste will derive aesthetic pleasure and delight . . . themes of the modern age should be circulated among the common people. 62

The revival of a purer Bengali literature and its spread to a wider circle of readers was part of the program which Bose laid out for Bengali readers and listeners.

Some of his proposals for the revitalization of Bengal were addressed to students and contained an assessment of contemporary student life. Bose seemed especially concerned to illustrate the shortcomings of the so-called good boy, by which he meant those who only did well in examinations, won scholarships and medals, and then obtained high positions on the basis of their academic achievements. Such students should, he said, "be called misguided, worthless, invalids." 63 He continued,

Those who are considered good boys in the society are in fact nothing but eunuchs. Neither in this world nor in any other has any great work been achieved or will any great work be done by these people. These boys somehow or other reduce their burden of sin and they follow the track of the most orthodox people like a herd of sheep. Throughout their most prosaic life there is no taste of anything new or novel, there is no outburst of full-hearted laughter, there is no inspired self-sacrifice . . . the Bengali will never become manly unless the so-called good boys are totally uprooted . . . and unless a new race is born in India. One has to love new things, one has to grow mad for the unknown, one has to express himself in the free wind and under the open sky by breaking through all the barriers of life and by razing them to the ground. 64

In opposition he set up a countermode of the robust, socially concerned, adventurous young man, giving as inspiring examples one P. R. De, who had walked alone through the hills from Calcutta to Rangoon on foot, Lord Robert Clive, Sir Francis Drake, Shivaji, and Tennyson's Ulysses. "We have altogether given up the practice of latbi play and gymnastics in fear of the police or for the sake of gentility." 65 Perhaps
in reaction to his own unathletic youth and to the continued derision by the British of the effete Bengalis, Bose stressed the physical and masculine side of human development. At an earlier time in his life, he had written to his mother that the strength to change Bengal was in its mothers. After the death of C. R. Das, Bose wrote to Das’s widow that she, as a kind of fulfillment of the female power energizing the world, would have to lead the Bengalis. But in most of his writing and speaking, Bose laid his emphasis on the tough, determined, courageous male ideal. He was, in effect, accepting the terms for cultural and individual achievement laid down by the Bengalis’ British tormentors.

Moreover, for all his disparagement of the good-boy mentality prevailing in Bengal and with his sense of the divisions among Bengalis themselves, he still thought of Bengal as the premier province in India. He realized that Gandhi and his followers were leading the national movement, but he still gave Bengal first place in the struggle for swaraj. He also maintained, in answer to charges that he was a Bolshevik agent, that his interests and work were completely in Bengal. An official in the Home Department acknowledged that “we did not regard him as an international anarchist, but as interested mainly if not entirely in the revolutionary national movement in India.” During the earlier part of his political career and up to the time he served as Congress president in 1938, Bose rarely roamed to other parts of India except for Congress meetings and an occasional speech. He tried to develop a political base and build the Congress political organization within his own region. He was perhaps more concerned with Bengal’s needs and fate than with those of India.

While in prison during this period, Bose put down some thoughts on religion. He wrote a rough draft of an essay entitled the “Failure of Buddhism” and compared Christianity, Vaishnavism, and Islam. Although his claim that he was exposed to a variety of religions in his youth, including Christianity, many forms of Hinduism, and Islam, may have been historically accurate, his religious feelings seem to have been aroused primarily by the predominant sects of Hindus found in Bengal, the Vaishnavas and the Shaktas; and his links to other faiths were through their similarities to Hinduism. Thus Christianity was a devotional faith stressing the principle of love, as did Vaishnavism.
Bose was struck by the fact that believers in Christianity and Islam had built empires and converted large numbers to their faiths, and he devised a plan for spreading Hinduism to Africa as one part of making India a great nation once again. Religion and politics, for Bose, were often closely related, especially through devotional and patriotic songs, which he wrote down in his prison notebooks. These included songs and poems of Rabindranath Tagore, D. L. Roy, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and older religious lyrics both Vaishnava and Shaqta. These songs as sung, transcribed, and reflected upon represent the quiet, meditative side of his personality.

In most of his writings and even in the fragment from his prison notebooks on good-boy types, Subhas Bose obviously preferred an activist philosophy, religion, and view of the world. He criticized those who "ran away from the world" and was harsh on Aurobindo Ghose and his retreat, although he admired Ghose greatly as a political leader. He was upset by the decision of Anil Baran Ray, a Bengali Congress leader, to follow Aurobindo to Pondicherry and tried to get Ray to return. He wrote that he himself had run away as a youth, but he would never run away again. Writing to Dilip Roy in 1925, Bose commented:

the active side of a man might get atrophied if he remained cut off for too long from the tides of life and society. This need not, indeed, apply to a handful of authentic seekers of uncommon genius, but the common run, the majority, ought, I think, to take to action in a spirit of service as the main plank of their sadhana. For a variety of reasons our nation has been sliding pauselessly down to the zero line in the sphere of action; so what we badly need today is a double dose of the activist serum, rajas.

For a man used to activity and advocating energetic and goal-directed work, the long years in prison must have been terribly galling. There were few ways in which he could express his passion for action while still imprisoned. One method was to keep in touch with his political and social concerns through letters. He did this as best he could through his brother Sarat. Bose gave opinions and advice on political questions and municipal affairs within the limitations imposed by the government censor who read all his letters. After some deliberation and
urging from outside, Bose, while still imprisoned, stood for election to
the Bengal Legislative Council in 1926 from a North Calcutta non-
Muhammadan constituency and was elected. He led a hunger strike in
Mandalay Jail during 1926 directed toward obtaining greater allowances
from the prison officials for the conduct of religious activities inside
the prison.

The event which struck Bose the hardest while he was imprisoned
was the death of C. R. Das in 1925. Bose was heartbroken personally at
losing his leader and guru whom he had found only after long years of
searching. And he felt that the consequences for Bengal and for India
would be incalculably high. In Mandalay Jail, Bose sat down and com-
posed a long tribute to his mentor and wrote letters to Das's widow,
Basanti Devi, asking her to take up the political mantle of her fallen
husband. He described her as a goddess and the mother of Bengal.
Even after she had declined the call to political leadership, Bose, shortly after leaving prison, asked her,

Please give some thought to the duties and tasks awaiting me. When I
see you, my first question will be about this. I hope you know how
highly I value your opinion. I do not wish to take up any work now
without consulting you.

This letter has overtones connecting it to the letters to C. R. Das from
Cambridge in 1921 when Bose asked Das to assign him some work in
the national movement. Bose found it hard to make the transition to
leadership, even though he felt especially chosen by Das to take up the
work and the leadership role left by him. While in prison, Bose had
decried the factionalism rampant in Bengal. After his release he
thought that the Congress in Bengal was languishing and blamed par-
ticularly J. M. Sen Gupta and Kiran Sankar Roy. What was needed,
he believed, was one strong man to settle factional differences and
make one unified national party in Bengal. After leaving prison, Bose
stayed outside the factional conflicts momentarily while he began to
get reacclimatized. He tried to work with all parties, but given the fa-
tionalism already rampant in Bengali Congress politics and the fact that
his older brother, a personal and political confidant, was involved, Bose
could not and did not remain outside Congress conflicts.
POLITICAL GROUPS IN BENGAL

The simple dichotomy between Gandhians and the Bose faction, although a relatively accurate description of the situation at a high level of abstraction, does not do justice to the richness and complexity of Bengali politics from the late 1920s to the 1940s. Although the Gandhian High Command was the dominant faction at the center of the Congress organization and the Boses were most often the dominant faction in the Bengal Congress, Bengali politics was a tangled web of shifting alliances. Bengal was known for its factional politics; after the death of C. R. Das, no individual or single group was able to control all the factions.82 A serious and humorous commentary on the factional situation and on the motivation of the political actors in Bengal was offered near the end of this period in Forward. A columnist calling himself “Wayfarer” began a piece entitled “In Lighter Vein” in this way:

I was enquiring of a Congress friend of mine about the number of parties or groups within the Congress in Bengal and about their ideological differences. My friend mentioned Full-Khadi, Half-Khadi, King’s Own, Royists, C.S.P., and C.P., indicated the particular characteristics of each and lastly mentioned the C.O.P. Having been unfamiliar with the term “C.O.P.,” I looked askance at my friend. My friend explained that C.O.P. was an abbreviation for “Congress Opportunist Party,” which had been the majority party in the Congress for the last 52 years. Explaining the present object and programme of the C.O.P., my friend said that this party had absolute faith in the creed of attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means. But the party’s interpretation of the words “peaceful” and “legitimate” was quite different from their ordinary meanings. “Peaceful means” implied entry into the Legislatures and the Calcutta Corporation at any cost and “legitimate means” implied securing seats in the different committees of the Legislatures and the Corporation by means fair or foul. The Programme of the party was as simple as it could be, namely, to pay visits to Jhowtola at 7 A.M., to “Ranjani” at 8 A.M. to Wellington Street at 9 A.M., and to Woodburn Park or Elgin Road at 10 A.M. It is no wonder that a party with such a noble and patriotic objective has the largest number of adherents and is gaining strength day by day.83

Even before the death of C. R. Das there had been some jostling between his followers for official and Swarajist posts. For example, there was a contest for Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation, when disgruntled Calcutta residents put up Subhas Bose against the
older leader from Midnapur, B. N. Sasmal. Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, a Congress worker at the time and biographer of C. R. Das and Subhas Bose, claims that the backers of Bose did not want a mofussil resident like Sasmal becoming chief executive officer of their city government.84 This tension between city and countryside was to appear again as one of several factors dividing the Bengal Congress.

Upon the death of C. R. Das, J. M. Sen Gupta, a barrister from Chittagong, was backed by Mahatma Gandhi for the so-called “Triple Crown” that had been worn by Das: mayor of Calcutta, president of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, and leader of the Swaraj Party in the Bengal Legislative Council.85 But even before the crown had been firmly fixed on Sen Gupta’s head, those who felt he did not deserve it began to make their feelings known in public or in private.86 Sen Gupta had returned to his legal practice before the boycott of law courts ended, and some argued that for this reason he should not be president of the BPCC.87 But there was no immediate opposition to Sen Gupta.

At about this time, two groups within the Congress began to exert their influence. The first was called Karmisangha (Workers’ Society), and was formed from among released political prisoners in the Calcutta area. This group chose Amarendra Chattopadhyay Chatterjee as its president and Suresh Das as secretary.88 The second group was a rather loose, temporary coalition that was a group more in name than in fact: Dr. B. C. Roy, Tulsi Goswami, Nalini Ranjan Sarker, Sarat Bose, and Nirmal Chunder Chunder. They all had wealth and connections in Calcutta; Priyanath Gupta in his Statesman column “Indian Comment” had labeled them the “Big Five.” They served on the Board of Directors of Forward and as trustees of the Deshbandhu Village Reconstruction Fund.89 By early 1928, within the three years after Das’s death, both these groups supported Subhas Bose and eventually succeeded in making him president of the Bengal Provincial Congress, thus cutting back Sen Gupta’s political support in Bengal.90

The divisive rivalry with Sen Gupta was still submerged; Sen Gupta served as president of the Bengal Provincial Conference in 1928. At a meeting held at Basirhat in early April, Bose moved a resolution calling for complete independence for India. The conference, following the lead of their provincial Congress president, passed the resolution.91 The
conference also passed a resolution introduced by Gandhian Satis-
Chandra Das Gupta calling for people to use the spinning wheel to re-
vive the country. While the conference also passed a resolution call-
ing for communal harmony, it was apparent that most of the Muslim
members of the Congress and of the Swaraj Party had left these organi-
zations and that the Bengal Pact was dead.

In the same year, Bose became a candidate for mayor of Calcutta.
Sen Gupta withdrew his own candidacy and started to help Bose. But
B. K. Basu of the Liberal Party was elected mayor, and some recrimi-
inations against different groups began to circulate in the Bengal Con-
gress. It seems, however, that at this point Sen Gupta was satisfied
with his position in the Bengal Legislative Council and left Congress
business to Bose and to Kiran Sankar Roy, who was then secretary of
the BPCC.

Both Bose and Sen Gupta, as well as dozens of eminent leaders from
all over India, met at the All-Parties Conference held in Calcutta in
early December 1928. They were all brought together by common op-
position to the Indian Statutory or Simon Commission formed to con-
sider constitutional advances for India, but they were unable to agree
to a joint positive plan for constitutional advance. The proposal of-
fered by the Congress was the Nehru Report, the result of the deliber-
ations of a committee headed by Motilal Nehru, Congress president in
1928. The Muslim League, with Mohammad Ali Jinnah as a chief
spokesman, presented fourteen points on which the league wanted
agreement before it could go forward in step with the other parties
present. The Nehru Report called for joint electorates with reserva-
tion of seats and Jinnah, still in a conciliatory mood, pressed other
Muslim leaders to accept this provision if other demands of the Mus-
lims were met. But the Congress and Hindu leaders at the All-Parties
Convention would not agree to reserve one-third of the Central Legis-
lature seats for Muslims, nor to other points in their program. It was
evident from discussions at the Bengal Muslim All-Parties Conference
held at the end of December 1928 that many spokesmen for Bengali
Muslims would not take less than the percentage of seats due to them
in the Bengal Legislative Council by their numerical weight in the
population of Bengal. Some historians have seen the meetings and
failures during December 1928 as a crucial turning point in Hindu-Muslim and Congress-League relations in India.98

At the Calcutta Congress held in December 1928 after the All-Parties Convention, Bose came to national attention by pressing for adoption of an independence resolution passed by the Bengal Provincial Conference.99 Bose was opposed by a phalanx of older Congress leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Motilal Nehru. The Nehru Report recommended dominion status for India, and this was as far as Gandhi and the elder Nehru were prepared to go at this moment. Bose had strong support from most of the Bengali delegation and from some of the younger congressmen, but it was not sufficient to override the opposition. Bose maintained that Britain and India had nothing in common and that India should forsake the Commonwealth and become the leader of Asia.100 Jawaharlal Nehru made a speech supporting Bose’s position, and then Gandhi spoke.

Replying to the debate, Mahatma Gandhi said that his remarks were principally addressed to young Bengal and if they considered for one moment that a mere Gujarati could not understand young Bengal, then I say that Young Bengal would commit a most serious blunder.101

Gandhi argued that calling for independence at this point was merely to mouth a hollow phrase. As he had done in 1920, Gandhi said, “If you will help me and follow the programme honestly and intelligently, I promise that Swaraj will come within one year.”102 Bose’s amendment lost, 973 to 1,350 votes. About two-thirds of the Bengali delegates supported Bose’s view.103 Bose was on his way to becoming a spokesman for what he believed were the young and radical forces in the Congress.

In describing another aspect of that Congress, Nirad C. Chaudhuri has written:

The first expression of Bose’s militarism was seen at the session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta in 1928. For it Bose organized a volunteer corps in uniform, its officers being even provided, so far as I remember, with steel-chain epaulettes. Bose designated himself as its General-Officer-Commanding, G.O.C. for short and his uniform was made by a firm of British tailors in Calcutta, Harman’s. A telegrain addressed to him as G.O.C. was delivered to the British general in Fort
William, and this was the subject of a good deal of malicious comment in the Anglo-Indian Press. Mahatma Gandhi, being a sincere pacifist vowed to non-violence, did not like the strutting, clicking of boots, and saluting, and he afterwards described the Calcutta session of the Congress as a Bertram Mills circus, which caused great indignation among the Bengalis.104

Although Bose continued to work within the Congress and cooperated with Gandhi and the other leaders until 1940, he seemed marked as a troublemaker within the organization. Unlike his mentor, C. R. Das, Bose was not a peer of Gandhi and Motilal Nehru in age or political experience. For all his public remarks about his feelings for Bose, Gandhi never had the same respect and affection for Bose that he had had for C. R. Das. In addition to an ideological gulf which widened over the years, there was a generation gap which Gandhi successfully bridged in his relationship to Jawaharlal Nehru but never with Subhas Bose. And for his part, Bose did not harbor what Gandhians felt was the proper respect for the Mahatma of the nationalist movement.105

In March 1929, Bose served as president of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Rangpur and extolled his native province in the address:

Bengal has a message of her own to deliver to the world. That message is the sum total of life and history of Bengal as a whole, and as she tried in the past to make that message heard, was doing it even now. She would continue to do so in future. That message was ingrained in the character of Bengal. . . .106

Giving an abundance of examples of this point, Bose went on to attribute to Swami Vivekananda and C. R. Das crucial roles in the development of modern Bengal.

In the work of man-making, Swami Vivekananda did not confine his attention to any particular sect but embraced the Society as a whole. His fiery words—"Let a new India emerge through the plough of the cultivators, through the baskets of the fishermen, cobblers, and masons, through the workshop and from the huts and bazaars"—are still ringing in every Bengalee home. This Socialism did not derive its birth from the books of Karl Marx. It has its origin in the thought and culture of India. The gospel of democracy that was preached by Swami Vivekananda has manifested itself fully in the writings and achievements of Deshabhandhu Das who said that Narayan lives amongst those who till the land and prepare our bread by the sweat of their brow,
those who in the midst of grinding poverty have kept the torch of our
civilisation, culture and religion burning.

The first step towards nation-building is the creation of true men
and the second step is organisation. Vivekananda and others tried to
make men while Deshabandhu tried to create political organisation and
he created such an organisation that extorted the admiration even of
the Britishers.107

Although he had begun to emerge on the national political scene, Bose
still had firm roots in Bengal and a strong concern for the common
man.

The 1929 provincial conference passed a resolution calling for closer
ties between the Congress and “the peasants’ and labourers’
organisation.”108 Following C. R. Das’s example, Bose began to take an
active part in trade-union work and served as president of the All-
India Trade Union Congress in 1929.109 He was much in demand as a
speaker at meetings of youth and student organizations. Bose and
Nehru were heroes for nationalist youths.

Unfortunately for Bose and the Bengal Congress, however, the year
1929 was marked by serious factional struggles and the emergence of
conflict with Sen Gupta, both within the Bengal Congress and in a
Bengali election dispute that came before the national organization at
the end of the year.110 The rivalry between these two men and the
various groups that supported each was to continue until the death of
Sen Gupta in 1932 and Bose’s temporary exit from the Bengali scene,
which began in that same year. Several explanations have been offered
for the Bose–Sen Gupta competition: that Bose was a Calcutta Ka-
yastha and Sen Gupta an upstart from the mofussil, an East Bengali or
“barial”; that Sen Gupta believed in nonviolence and had Gandhi’s
support and that Bose did not; and that the important revolutionary
groups in the Bengal Congress lined up on different sides for their own
reasons.111 All these factors undoubtedly had a place in the conflict,
but one informant has suggested that it was fundamentally a clash of
personalities and a struggle for power.112

At the end of the year there was a controversy over Bengal’s mem-
bers in the All-India Congress Committee. Dr. B. C. Roy tried to work
out a compromise, but Bose and his followers stormed out of the meet-
ing. Bose made a public statement challenging the authority of the
Working Committee of the Congress. Later he returned and clarified his statement satisfactorily, but Sen Gupta rejected the compromise offered by Dr. Roy.\textsuperscript{113} The Working Committee finally made a settlement in the dispute deciding who should be the Bengal members of the AICC. In the aftermath, Gandhi named the Congress Working Committee members for 1930; Sen Gupta was selected, while Subhas Bose was not. There was an attempt to have Bose added to the committee, but Gandhi wanted those representing what he called the “minority” left off.\textsuperscript{114} The support at the center of the Congress organization which Sen Gupta enjoyed probably helped him with some groups in Bengal, but it hampered him with many others to whom he simply became a spokesman for Gandhi in Bengal. Piqued at his treatment by the national Congress and wishing to express his political opposition to the majority, Bose formed the Congress Democratic Party, but it disintegrated while Bose was imprisoned during 1930.\textsuperscript{115}

As has been mentioned, in 1930 Bose was elected mayor of Calcutta, and in his acceptance speech he recalled the municipal aims of C. R. Das and his own long-standing civic concern. As a disciple of Das, Bose said, “I have tried to follow the torch that he held aloft for the nation with all the reckless abandon of which a sentimental Bengali is capable.”\textsuperscript{116} Bose put forth a program for education, medical care, and aid to the poor as well as plans for establishing improved transportation and administration. He stated:

if I may put his [Das's] policy and programme in modern language, I would say that we have here in this policy and programme a synthesis of what Modern Europe calls socialism and fascism. We have here the justice, the equality, the love which is the basis of socialism, and combined with that we have the efficiency and the discipline of fascism as it stands in Europe to-day.\textsuperscript{117}

From this point in his career, Bose began talking of this synthesis, which was to be tailored to meet Indian conditions and traditions. He was one of the few Indian leaders who expressed admiration for fascism and he was to encounter both Hitler and Mussolini on their home grounds. However, Bose's estimate of the blessings of fascism was tempered by his encounters in Europe during the 1930s.

From 1923 on, Bose took a special interest in the welfare of his native Calcutta. He visited other cities both in India and Europe to seek
out models for civic improvement.\textsuperscript{118} One observer who was close to the Bose family has suggested that Bose’s involvement with the corporation was not a successful experience:

When Subhas Bose came back to the Calcutta Corporation after his release from detention, he became more and more a prisoner in the hands of the hard-boiled and worldly middle-class of Calcutta, to whom civic welfare meant the welfare of their class. Still, Bose could never shed his infatuation for this Delilah. He showed his man-of-action’s bias in preferring practical power in the Corporation to ideological power in the Congress Working Committee, and until he left India to find salutary release from it, the Calcutta Corporation remained a millstone around his neck.\textsuperscript{119}

The corporation, nonetheless, was one of the few places in which the Congress retained some power and patronage.\textsuperscript{120} With the resignation of congressmen from the legislatures, together with the Swarajist antipathy to holding office in the Das era and the later refusal of the Congress to form a coalition ministry in 1937, the Congress had effectively handed over whatever power and patronage could be gained through the Bengal Legislative Council to other political groups.

After failing to gain the concessions they wished from the government and refusing to attend the First Round Table Conference, the Congress undertook a campaign of civil disobedience in 1930. Because of the split between the forces behind Sen Gupta and those marshalled behind Bose, these two led different organizations into the fray.\textsuperscript{121} Both men and many others were arrested and spent about half of 1930 in prison. The Bengali Congress leaders claimed that they were beaten in prison and from 1930, Sen Gupta’s health began to deteriorate.\textsuperscript{122}

Also in 1930, there was a revival of revolutionary activity in Bengal, marked by one of the few large-scale operations of the whole revolutionary movement. Since 1923 repression by the government of Bengal had stopped the revolutionaries temporarily. In prison, a split developed between the younger men and the more experienced revolutionaries, the former calling themselves the Revolt or Advance Group.\textsuperscript{123} Some of the revolutionaries held a secret meeting at the time of the 1928 Calcutta Congress and the following year made plans for uprisings in Chittagong, Mymensingh, and Barisal.\textsuperscript{124} They were successful in mounting an uprising only in Chittagong. With many revolutionary
dals cooperating, the Chittagong Armory Raid began on April 18, 1930. Taking the officials and European community by surprise, the revolutionaries captured and destroyed the armory, the communications center, and other buildings. They seized arms to carry on the fight. They received some popular support and much silent acquiescence from the district's inhabitants. Through several errors, however, a large group was killed by government forces and the rest fled to the forests, from which they carried on guerrilla warfare for several years. The leader of the uprising was Surja Sen; he eluded his pursuers for almost four years and was finally captured in 1933, tried, and hung in 1934.125

Other changes had taken place in the revolutionary movement. Most of the religious trappings had been dropped. A more secular pattern of organization was adopted, and women were recruited into the movement. Furthermore, many revolutionaries were turning socialist, and gaining a wider social and international perspective.126

Between 1930 and 1934, some Bengal revolutionary groups continued acts of political assassination and robbery. The Chittagong effort, which included proclamation of a free government in the local area, was the only partially successful attempt to create a larger uprising in hopes of setting off large-scale revolution. By crushing the Chittagong groups and cracking down on those groups attempting assassinations, the government of Bengal had again brought the movement to a halt by 1934.127 From this time many of the revolutionaries turned to the Congress and to the small leftist parties that were beginning to form in Bengal. Secret terrorism was for the most part left behind, and a future of more open political work in the Congress and the left-wing parties lay ahead.

In 1931 Gandhi and Irwin agreed to a political rapprochement between the Congress and the Government of India. Gandhi decided to attend the Second Round Table Conference in London later that year, and the civil disobedience campaign was placed in abeyance. Sen Gupta was given the difficult task of defending the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in Bengal.128 Bose criticized its terms and Gandhi's wish to be the sole Congress representative in London.129 The governments of India and Bengal were determined not to release those Bengali prisoners whom they considered revolutionaries or in league with the revolutionaries.
Though Gandhi succeeded at this time and later in obtaining the release of those held for civil disobedience, he could not gain the release of other political prisoners; in Bengal it was charged that he did not try but bargained only for those who worked within the bounds of his strategy. Whether this was true or not, the charge helped increase the unpopularity of Gandhi and those allied with him in Bengal.  

In London, from September to December 1931 Gandhi served as Congress spokesman and claimed to represent all the Indian people. Dozens of other Indians speaking for other groups and interests denied Gandhi's claim. This question was never resolved, and Gandhi did not obtain the concessions from the government for immediate steps toward independence that the Congress wanted. With Gandhi's return to India after his failure in London, the Congress began civil disobedience again and hundreds of congressmen, including Gandhi, Sen Gupta, Bose, and Jawaharlal Nehru, were arrested. In August 1932 the government announced the Communal Award, which split the caste Hindus and the untouchables into separate electorates. In protest, Gandhi undertook his famous fast while imprisoned that September. An agreement, the Poona Pact, was reached by the government, Gandhi, and the Congress with the representatives of the untouchables. It provided for joint electorates of caste Hindus and untouchables, with a large number of reserved seats for the latter. According to this agreement, 30 of the 78 seats for non-Muslims in the proposed Bengal Legislative Assembly were to be reserved for the untouchables or "scheduled castes" of Bengal. The Assembly was to have a total of 250 members. When the provisions of the Poona Pact became known in Bengal, there was considerable dissatisfaction among Bengali caste Hindus, and they organized the Congress Nationalist Party to defend the rights and interests of caste Hindus in their province. Although the Congress Nationalists never became a great force, they and the Hindu Mahasabha furthered the polarization of communal groups in India.

In 1933, Mahatma Gandhi suspended civil disobedience and undertook one of his several withdrawals from the Congress organization. During the same year, Bose, in poor health after another period of imprisonment, left India under government supervision to seek medical treatment in Europe. He was to spend the greater part of the following five years in exile in Europe.
One politician who worked closely with Subhas Bose has suggested that Bose had significant support among the revolutionaries and ex-revolutionaries who had moved into the Congress organization in the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{134} Satya Ranjan Bakshi has maintained that Bose had strong support of this kind in East Bengal and in Nadia, 24-Parganas, and Midnapur. A historian of Midnapur has written that C. R. Das and later Subhas Bose had widespread support in that district and that congressmen and revolutionaries worked side by side, with the Bengal Volunteers serving as an organizational meeting ground.\textsuperscript{135} Such relationships undoubtedly changed through time, and the connection between the Bengal Congress and the Midnapur DCC was weakened when B. N. Sasmal left the Congress and ran as a Nationalist candidate against the Congress in a 1934 election. After the death of Sasmal that same year, political organization was in disarray in the district until 1937, when Bose came in to help reorganize the district Congress Committee.\textsuperscript{136}

Youth groups and trade unions gave Bose additional popular support and he spent a good deal of his time speaking to such groups and encouraging them in their work. Bose’s support for agitation by youth groups and trade unions was a crucial factor, Satya Ranjan Bakshi has argued, in the division that took place in the Big Five from the late 1920s. Dr. B. C. Roy was associated with the administration of Calcutta University and Nalini Ranjan Sarkar was a leader of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce; they came to oppose Bose for his encouragement of disruptive political activity by students and workers.\textsuperscript{137}

Although some leftist groups criticized Bose for his authoritarian control of the Bengal Provincial Congress at the end of the 1930s,\textsuperscript{138} other sources indicate that Bose never built a strong or united party organization in Bengal and that this was one of his serious failures. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has written on this point:

Subhas Bose as party leader failed to create a solid party behind himself. . . . Bose had nothing behind him beyond unorganized popular support. He never acquired any strong or lasting hold on the party bosses of Bengal. . . . The lower ranks of the career nationalists of Bengal gave their loyalty to him according to their estimate of his power to serve or harm their interests. . . . Thus he was never able to
knock his party enemies on the head and was paralysed all along by the factious squabbles in which he became enmeshed.\textsuperscript{130}

Several authorities have suggested that Bose was supported by the Jugantar revolutionaries and J. M. Sen Gupta, and by Anushilan revolutionaries during their 1929 struggle.\textsuperscript{140} Dilip Roy has written in his memoir that Bose was a lonely man constantly betrayed in politics by his supposed friends.\textsuperscript{141} Bose did have the support of his brother Sarat, who often acted as a kind of alter-ego for the more dynamic and charismatic Subhas, and the two worked in a kind of flexible tandem that made Subhas Bose's political career possible. Beyond this solid family support were close associates such as Satya Ranjan Bakshi and later Hemanta Kumar Basu, as well as a wide popular following. But he never developed a party structure or recruited a cadre of very talented lieutenants, as did C. R. Das for the Swaraj Party in the years 1922–1925. Those groups and leaders in whom he should have found firm allies simply because of a close ideological concurrence often proved to be his most hostile critics.

The Gandhians were weakened by the death of Sen Gupta in 1932. The rural Gandhians, who had been at work since the early 1920s, continued as one group within the Bengal Congress under P. C. Ghosh and Suresh Banerjee,\textsuperscript{142} but they did not seem to have forceful enough leadership or enough popular support to become the most powerful faction in the Bengal Congress. In the 1930s, Dr. B. C. Roy and Nalini Ranjan Sarker grew closer to Gandhi and became in time two of the most important links that the Congress High Command had with the Bengal political scene. Dr. Roy had first come in contact with Mahatma Gandhi in 1925, and the latter helped to have him made secretary of the Deshbandhu Memorial Trust.\textsuperscript{143} Dr. Roy remained friendly with Sarat and Subhas Bose for some years, even in the 1930s when he grew closer to the Gandhian High Command and became one of Gandhi's personal physicians. In the 1920s, he served under Sen Gupta as deputy leader of the opposition in the Bengal Legislative Council. He was elected mayor of Calcutta for the years 1931–1933. Dr. Roy had tried to mediate the 1929 Bengali election dispute and in the end appeared to side more with Bose than with Sen Gupta.\textsuperscript{144} The first time he ran for mayor, he was nominated by Subhas Bose, and there is a
friendly reference to him in a personal letter written by Bose in 1937. But the split with the Boses seems to have been widening by 1934, when with Gandhi's support Dr. Roy helped to revive the Swaraj Party. In 1935 Dr. Roy was elected president of the BPCC over Subhas Bose, who spent most of that year in Europe. The same year, Sarat Bose was released from detention and a controversy erupted with the other members of the Big Five, partly over who was to run the elections in Bengal. Eventually Sarat Bose did run the elections on behalf of the Congress for seats in the Bengal Legislative Council and Assembly, but Dr. Roy was selected as president of the BPCC and as a member of the Congress Working Committee for 1937. Just how strained relations were at this point between the Boses and Dr. Roy is not clear.

Another member of the Big Five who moved out in his own direction from the late 1920s was Nalini Ranjan Sarker. Sarker's career and actions must be seen in connection with those of other Indian businessmen who may be called the “nationalist business interest.” In Calcutta, some nationalist businessmen were non-Bengalis, the most prominent of whom was G. D. Birla. In describing his political affiliation in 1940, Birla said, “I am not a Congressman. But I am a Gandhi-man.” This may also have been true for other Indian businessmen in varying degrees. For the most part, many of them hedged their bets and gave money to the Congress while appearing loyal to the government. They wanted protection for the private sector and eventually assistance for Indian business interests over foreign business interests in India. They also wanted some assurance against nationalization of the private sector. Gandhi's theory of trusteeship, if carried out, would seem to offer some assurance that their property would not be suddenly expropriated. Some insight into their viewpoint may be gained from this passage in a letter from G. D. Birla to the secretary of state for India in 1932:

I need hardly say that I am a great admirer of Gandhiji . . . I have liberally financed his Khoddar-producing and untouchability activities. I have never taken any part in the Civil Disobedience movement. But I have been a very severe critic of the Government and so have never been popular with them. . . . I wish I could convert the authorities to the view that Gandhiji and men of his type are not only friends of India but also friends of Great Britain, and that Gandhiji is the greatest force on the side of peace and order. He alone is responsible for
keeping the left wing in India in check. To strengthen his hands is, in my opinion, therefore, to strengthen the bond of friendship between the two countries.148

Birla and a whole network of business connections who were principally fellow Marwaris came to play an increasing role in Indian politics.149 Birla evidently had Gandhi's ear from the late 1920s; one version of events in Bengal that came personally to Gandhi's attention came through G. D. Birla, and sometimes through Nalini Sarker.150

Nalini Ranjan Sarker began his political career as a lieutenant of C. R. Das; but as he rose in the business world, Sarker seemed to become less attached to the Congress and more a go-between connecting the government and the nationalists. Sarker moved from his base as successful manager of the Hindustan Cooperative Insurance Company to the inner councils of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Federation of Chambers of Commerce by the early 1930s. He resigned from the Bengal Legislative Council in 1930 with other congressmen, but at the same time he was serving as a member of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee. In 1933 Sarker was nonofficial adviser to the government of India on the Indo-Japanese trade negotiations and in 1934 he was elected mayor of Calcutta. He was president of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Federation of Chambers of Commerce in 1933 and was elected representative of the former to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937.151 His part in the Bengal Ministry question from 1937 to 1939 will be discussed later. From the late 1930s, Sarker served in increasingly important official positions and was a minister of the central government during World War II. Nalini Sarker and Dr. Roy, G. D. Birla, and the "pure-Khadi" Gandhians were Gandhi's allies against the leftists and revolutionaries. Although none of the Gandhians had the popular appeal of Subhas Bose or the widespread organization of the revolutionaries, they did represent a de facto coalition of considerable strength.

The revolutionaries moved gradually toward one of several leftist groups that were beginning to crystallize. A few formed a group within the Bengal Congress. Although revolutionaries have often been identified as either Jugantar or Anushilan, these organizations began to split up and become several among many revolutionary groups. Jugantar was disbanded, and men such as Surendra Mohan Ghose and Bhu-
pati Majumdar moved into positions of importance in the Congress. Others joined leftist groups operating within the Congress in the later 1930s. For example, Bhupesh Gupta and Ganesh Ghosh joined the Communist Party of India (CPI). A few other Jugantar men, such as Amarendra Nath Chattopadhyay and Jibal Lal Chatterjee, joined the Royists. Tridib Chaudhuri and Jogesh Chatterjee from the Anushilan Samiti went into the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). With the suppression of the Chittagong revolt and the wave of revolutionary actions in the early 1930s, the revolutionary phase ended, except for actions in connection with the 1942 movement. With their long political experience, their openness to new ideologies, and their devotion to politics as a career, the revolutionaries were prime recruits for leftist parties seeking to grow in the 1930s.

The leftist parties in Bengal were hampered by a factionalism that pervaded other parts of the political terrain as well. The parties described here all recruited from the same groups: students, factory workers, and educated high-caste Hindus, particularly the intellectuals. The parties—the CPI, the Royists, and the CSP—had small memberships, but the influence of a vague, socialist ideology was much wider than the party lists. This ideological line was also taken by Subhas Bose and his supporters, by the Bengal Labour Party, which was part of the CPI and the CSP for some time, and by the two Krishak Praja Parties.

After the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Western and Russian communists founded the Third Communist International or Comintern. The failure of communist revolts in Western and Eastern Europe drove Lenin and his colleagues to paying greater attention to nationalist struggles and revolutionary possibilities in Asia. From among the Indian émigrés scattered throughout the world, the Comintern chose M. N. Roy as their premier theoretician and organizer for India. In the discussion of the colonial question at the Second Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in 1920, Roy placed the movements in colonial countries in the forefront of his plan for world revolution, while Lenin remained more European-centered and more aware of organizing difficulties than did the confident young Roy. A critical issue, unresolved today, concerned the relationship between commu-
nists and bourgeois nationalists. Roy described differing views of Gandhi in his Memoirs:

we could not agree about the role of Gandhi, whose name was just coming to be known in Russia. Lenin regarded the new leader of Indian Nationalism as objectively revolutionary like the great heretics of mediaeval Europe. I held that such an estimation of the role of Gandhi was precluded by his religious and social ideas, which were positively reactionary. . . . As a disciple seeking light from the Master, I enquired whether an anti-imperialist movement inspired by reactionary social ideas and burdened with obscurantist religious beliefs, could be politically revolutionary.\(^{156}\)

To support his views Roy undertook the first thorough Marxist study of Indian nationalism, India in Transition, published in 1922. It included a class analysis of Indian society and an effort to show the relationship of this class structure to nationalism. Gandhi, who he thought embodied revolt and reaction, posed a problem. Roy admired Gandhi’s mobilization of the mass in 1921, but thought the masses were moved by objective economic forces, not the magnetism of a man he considered a religious fanatic. Gandhi, Roy decided, was the expression of petty bourgeois as well as bourgeois interests, for he had called off the Noncooperation movement when the seething proletariat was about to capture it.\(^{157}\)

Roy realized many years later that he had gravely overestimated the strength of the proletarian movement in India, but through the 1920s he called for the formation of a peasants’ and workers’ party within the Congress. Roy sent a stream of political pamphlets and propaganda, a number of agents, and some funds back to India to organize an Indian communist party.\(^{158}\) He wrote to men like C. R. Das who he thought might be sympathetic, but in organizational terms the CPI had hardly begun in the 1920s. The government of India nevertheless held two show trials, at Cawnpore in 1924 and at Meerut in 1929.\(^{159}\)

One contact in Calcutta was Muzaffar Ahmad, who began to correspond with Roy in Europe and served as chief contact and organizer in Bengal. Although he was arrested several times and was a central figure in the Cawnpore conspiracy case of 1924, Ahmad always returned immediately upon release to his political work. Together with Naresh
Sengupta, Atul Gupta, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Hemanta Sarkar, and Nalini Gupta, he formed the Bengal Workers and Peasants Party in Calcutta in 1924 or 1925. They published a weekly paper, *Langel* (Plow), and began the effort to spread Marxist ideas among workers and intellectuals in the industrial areas of western Bengal.

During this same period, Roy tried to resume contact with his old revolutionary colleagues. The Intelligence Branch reported in 1922 that

Since Nalini Gupta’s return to Germany Roy has written several letters to prominent members of the old revolutionary party in Bengal, and in August he was reported to have secured the consent of Pulin Das to co-operate with him. In consequence of warnings received from Muzaffar Ahmad he appears since to have been making further inquiries regarding the reliability of these revolutionaries.

Through almost a decade of efforts to organize the Communist Party of India from Europe, and even with numerous agents and funds, Roy was constantly hampered by severe handicaps. He could not tell who was a spy and who could be trusted. His letters were constantly being intercepted by the Intelligence Branch even when he took precautions. He was trying to convince men at a distance that a foreign-derived ideology was relevant to the Indian struggle and Indian conditions, and he had to compete with the nationalist leadership headed by Gandhi. Roy appeared to dislike Gandhi intensely; it is difficult to tell how much he owed this hatred to his Bengali youth and how much to his subsequent secularization and conversion to communism.

The CPI shifted with the Third Communist International to an ultra-left line from about 1928. This meant concentration on the organization of the CPI itself rather than cooperation with the other nationalists through the peasants’ and workers’ parties. For this reason the CPI split from the All-India Trade Union Congress and formed the Red Trade Union Congress, which was in operation from 1931 to 1934. Although the CPI benefited from publicity they received through the Meerut conspiracy case, they lost the services of Muzaffar Ahmad until his release from prison in 1936.

With the Comintern’s official shift to the “united front” line in 1935, the CPI also shifted its work and moved into the CSP and the Congress. Among the Bengali communists who worked in the Congress
were Muzaffar Ahmad, Promode Dasgupta, Hare Krishna Konar, Somnath Lahiri, Hirendranath Mukherjee and Biswanath Mukherjee. During the period 1935 to 1940, several of these men served in the executives of the Bengal Provincial Congress, of district Congress committees, and of the CSP. One of their goals was to capture control of the CSP and eventually the Congress and after independence to make India into a communist country. They maintained a secret organization within the CSP until 1940, when after a grave crisis within that organization, they were expelled. The CPI, although illegal and underground at the time, broke with the Congress on the issue of participation in the World War II effort once the CPI switched to the “people’s war” line in 1941. But between 1935 and 1941, the CPI was a small and determined group within the Congress. It supported Subhas Bose at one crucial moment in his career (see below), but ridiculed him after that.

The Royists were a small political group which was committed to the leadership and ideology of M. N. Roy. Roy lost favor within the Comintern from 1927 and was expelled in 1929. He joined the Communist International Opposition, which included August Thalheimer in Paris and Jay Lovestone in New York. They thought that they had a more truly communist perspective and strategy. Against the advice of his friends, Roy returned to India secretly in 1930 after a fifteen-year absence. He was helped by Tayab Shaikh and Sunder Kabadi and slowly began to collect a number of political and trade-union workers around him who formed the nucleus of the Royist group, later called the League of Radical Congressmen (1937–1940) and the Radical Democratic Party (1940–1946).

While the Comintern and the CPI were veering to the left (1928–1934) and viewing the Congress as an enemy rather than a potential ally, Roy was moving from his former left, sectarian position toward a much more positive view of the Congress. He argued for leftist work within the Congress and the trade unions, but he was against forming an autonomous left-wing party until 1940, when he split with the Congress on the war issue. Although the Royists became known as a definite group, they were members of the Congress as individuals and did not maintain the same secrecy as the CPI during 1937 to 1940.

After doing underground political work for about seven months in
1930–1931, Roy was finally captured by the police, prosecuted under an old conviction in the Cawnpore conspiracy case, and sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment.\textsuperscript{171} The term was later reduced to 6 years, during which Roy secretly continued his political work. Instructions and articles were smuggled out of prison, usually to his associate V. B. Karnik in Bombay; they were then copied and sent out to the members of the Royist political and labor network in India and to the headquarters of the Communist International Opposition in Paris.\textsuperscript{172} During 1931 to 1936, while Roy was still in prison, Calcutta served as the publication center and Tayab Shaikh and others turned out a journal called \textit{Masses}, as well as the pamphlets \textit{Party Programme}, \textit{Appeal to the Students}, and \textit{Appeal to the Railway Workers}. Some later Royists in Calcutta included a few old associates from the Jugantar revolutionary organization, such as Amarendra Nath Chattopadhyay and Jibin Lal Chatterjee. Roy hoped that more of his Jugantar comrades would opt for the Royist group, but they preferred to follow their own line in the Congress or to join another leftist group.\textsuperscript{173} Roy was hampered by his professed low opinion of Gandhi, his atheism, his antipathy to many aspects of Indian culture, and perhaps by his arrogance and his lack of any strong local support.

The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed in 1934 as a group of leftist members within the Congress who were critical of its political strategy and ideology. Their program included: power to the masses; state planning and ownership; elimination of the princes and landlords; redistribution of and to the peasants; and the establishment of cooperatives and collectivization.\textsuperscript{174} M. N. Roy’s writings and those of other Marxists had considerable impact on the CSP. At first they decided to let Royists and communists join, but severe internal conflicts forced them to expel the Royists in 1937 and the communists in 1940. They recruited a number of ex-revolutionaries in Bengal, but none of their most important or most influential members was a Bengali. Thomas Rusch has explained the relationship of the Bengal Labour Party and the CSP:

the Bengal Labour Party had merged with the C.P. and thereby entered the C.S.P in that Province as part of the Communist merger with the Socialists. In the period between 1939–1940, it left the C.P. to become an independent party again, and aligned itself with the Forward
Bloc of Subhas Chandra Bose. Thus, this section, although small, was also lost to the C.S.P.175

The CSP was thus another small group in the Bengal Congress, partly merged with the CPI during 1934–1940, that competed with the Bose group, the Royists, and other Congress factions for support inside the Congress organization and outside among the students, workers, intellectuals, revolutionaries, and peasants.

While the CPI, the Royists, the CSP, and a number of other small leftist groups were working in Bengal and other parts of India during the 1930s, Subhas Bose was forced to spend almost the entire period from 1932 to 1938 in prison or in Europe. Sarat Bose was also imprisoned and was only released in 1935, after more than three years behind bars. Sarat, according to his brother Subhas, preferred to be a backbencher and to avoid public honors and offices.176 Nevertheless, when Subhas, the family's full-time politician, could not be active on the local scene because of imprisonment, ill-health or enforced exile, Sarat Bose came more into the open and acted for his brother. Meanwhile, Subhas Bose went to Europe to seek treatments for his health.

**SUBHAS BOSE IN EUROPE**

The major work Bose allotted to himself in Europe was that of a spokesman for Indian nationalism and culture. In the years from 1933 to 1938, he visited and established contacts in Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Switzerland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Belgium, Holland, and Ireland. He attended an International Conference for India in Geneva during 1933; he attended the opening of the Italian Oriental Institute in Rome during the same year, where he noted that Mussolini made a fine speech; and he maintained contact with the Federation of Indian students in Europe.177 At the same time, he made a number of new friendships with Indians and Europeans, especially in central Europe (mainly Vienna), where he spent the largest part of his time. Among those friends were Mr. and Mrs. Vetter, Mrs. Fulop-Muller, and Miss Emilie Schenkl, who served as his assistant in writing *The Indian Struggle*. In Berlin Bose became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Kurti, and had a number of discussions and exchanges of letters with Mrs. Kurti, particularly about psychoanalysis.178 He reestablished old ties and made some new friendships with Indians, including
S. K. Chatterjee, Nathalal Parikh, Amiya Chakravarty, and Vithalbhai Patel. Bose stayed with the latter during his last months and issued a joint statement with him criticizing Gandhi in 1933.\textsuperscript{179}

Through these years, Bose showed a lively interest in political and intellectual currents in Europe. He visited municipal institutions in Berlin, Dublin, and Vienna, seeking knowledge which would help affairs in Calcutta. Although Bose did speak kindly of the positive aspects of fascism from the 1920s until the end of his life, he was also aware of the dark and brutal side. He urged Mrs. Kurti and her husband to flee Berlin,\textsuperscript{180} and he wrote a letter about the Nazis to Dr. Theirfelder of the Deutsche Akademie after a visit to Berlin.

To-day I regret that I have to return to India with the conviction that the new nationalism of Germany is not only narrow and selfish but arrogant. . . . The new racial philosophy which has a very weak scientific foundation, stands for the glorification of the white races in general and the German race in particular. Herr Hitler has talked of the destiny of the white races to rule over the rest of the world. But the historical fact is that up till now the Asiatics have dominated Europe more than have the Europeans dominated Asia . . . I am saying this not because I stand for the domination of one people by another, but simply because I want to point out that it is historically false to say that Europe and Asia should not be at peace with one another.\textsuperscript{181}

Bose was developing his views on world politics at first hand and he finally decided that the internal politics of other states should be of no concern to India.\textsuperscript{182} Jawaharlal Nehru and a number of other congressmen who were interested in the international scene did not agree with this detached viewpoint, which stressed nationalist interests above any overriding human and political values. Bose could see the dangers to the Kurtis and condemn Nazi racism, particularly as it applied to India, but he was willing to seek support for India in any camp, fascist, communist, or capitalist.

While in Europe, Bose did a good deal of writing, completing two books, The Indian Struggle and his autobiography, An Indian Pilgrim. In addition he wrote a number of essays that were collected in Through Congress Eyes. The Indian Struggle is Bose's effort to give his version of the recent political history of India and his assessment of the nationalist movement both to outsiders and to Indians. The book was originally published in Europe and was banned in India for some
years. It has a political focus and is concerned especially with the changing strategies of the Congress; it does not attempt to give a more penetrating sociological, psychological, or historical analysis of Indian nationalism. It is important not only as Bose’s view but also for its impact later on nationalist leaders who were finally able to read it. The book contained praise as well as sharp criticism of Gandhi. Bose saw Gandhi as the head of an older, reformist group of nationalists backed by wealthy capitalists. He saw a dichotomy partly between the have-nots among Indian nationalists. It was as if he were indirectly borrowing Marxist categories, identifying his political allies and himself with the masses of Indians, and seeing Gandhi, whom he admitted was accepted by the masses as their leader, as the leader of the oppressive forces. He viewed Gandhi, the High Command, and the government of India as restraints on the radical and militant nationalist forces with which he identified. This is yet another example of what Bose later called the “rebel mentality” which he had had since his youth. He not only rejected the authority of the government of India but also questioned the authority and wisdom of the controlling group within the nationalist organization with which he worked.

The one feature of the Congress to which Bose most objected was the lack of criticism of Gandhi. He wrote:

Besides the influence which the first three leaders [C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, and Lajpat Rai] had in their own provinces, their importance was also due to the fact that they were the three outstanding intellectual stalwarts of the Congress. Many of the blunders committed by the Mahatma as a political leader could have been avoided if they had been in a position to advise him. Since the death of these three giants, the leadership of the Congress had fallen to a low intellectual level. The Congress Working Committee today is undoubtedly composed of some of the finest men of India—men who have character and courage, patriotism and sacrifice. But most of them have been chosen primarily because of their ‘blind’ loyalty to the Mahatma—and there are few among them who have the capacity to think for themselves or the desire to speak out against the Mahatma when he is likely to take a wrong step.

Bose did not name any others who were willing to criticize the Mahatma, but he obviously thought he was one of the few following in the steps of Das, Motilal Nehru, and Lajpat Rai. Bose was also con-
cerned with the character of Gandhi’s relationship with the masses, and he wrote:

As we have already seen, a large and influential section of the intelligentsia was against him, but this opposition was gradually worn down through the enthusiastic support given by the masses. Consciously or unconsciously, the Mahatma fully exploited the mass psychology of the people, just as Lenin did the same thing in Russia, Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany. But in doing so, the Mahatma was using a weapon which was sure to recoil on his head. He was exploiting many of the weak traits in the character of his countrymen which had accounted for India’s downfall to a large extent. After all, what has brought about India’s downfall in the material and political sphere? It is her inordinate belief in fate and in the supernatural—her indifference to modern scientific development—her backwardness in the science of modern warfare, the peaceful contentment engendered by her latter-day philosophy and adherence to Ahimsa (Non-violence) carried to the most absurd length. In 1920, when the Congress began to preach the political doctrine of non-co-operation, a large number of Congressmen who had accepted the Mahatma not merely as a political leader but also as a religious preceptor—began to preach the cult of the new Messiah. 186

So Bose saw himself on the side of reason, science, and modern values against the most deplorable traits of enfeebled India, which Gandhi was exploiting. Later in his book, Bose condemned numerous blunders of the Mahatma, especially Gandhi’s lack of planning for the Second Round Table Conference. At the root of Gandhi’s errors was confusion between the Mahatma’s two roles of political leader and world preacher. 187 Perhaps Bose never thought to consider that Gandhi’s very success may have resulted in part from the Mahatma’s effective fusion of religion and politics, or that his own popularity in Bengal may have been in part related to a religious aura that surrounded him because of his sacrifices and his years of imprisonment. Bose felt that in her struggle against the British, India needed a strong, vigorous, military-type leader—perhaps even himself—and not a hesitating, confused reformist guru. 188 Showing admiration for strong leaders, among whom he listed Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and even Sir Stanley Jackson, the governor of Bengal, Bose claimed that India wanted and needed a strong party, strict discipline, and dictatorial rule. 189 At the end of *The Indian Struggle*, Bose offered an ideological blend of fas-
cism and communism and promised that all his energies would be used for the proper leadership of his country.\textsuperscript{100} The passages and ideas mentioned above also exhibit Bose's forthright style, his blunt manner of speech, and his outspoken criticism of colleagues, none of which were to do him any good in the Congress political struggles which lay before him.
In the late 1930s there were two major issues for Bengali politicians: a crisis of leadership in the Congress in 1939, and the controversy surrounding the Bengal Ministry which had taken power under the regional autonomy provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935. The first issue was primarily an internal one for the Congress; the second involved all those participating at the highest levels in Bengali politics.

The roots of the antagonisms and conflicting positions behind the Congress confrontation reach back to the late 1920s. The growth of the left gradually led to differences on significant issues between the Gandhian High Command and the younger leftists. The differences became sharpened from 1934 when the Congress Socialist Party was formally founded as an organization within the Congress. At this time, followers of M. N. Roy and the CPI were temporarily working within the CSP.¹ The issues over which there was disagreement with the Gandhian leadership included the Congress' agrarian program, its positions on labor and industrial disputes, its perspectives on economic planning, its work in the princely states and on the question of federation, and finally, its organization and leadership.² Through the 1930s there were internal divisions among leftists on these issues and also dividing lines between the left and the right within the Congress. The Gandhian old guard was wary of the socialist ideas beginning to make their impress in India and resistant to the challenge of the leftists to its continued control of the Congress.³

Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, the two prominent young leftist leaders, were more often rivals than allies. Nehru had formed close per-
sonal and political ties with Gandhi early in his career and Gandhi placed enough trust in him to have him chosen president of the Congress three times during this period. The last two terms were consecutive ones, 1936 and 1937. Nehru had persuaded several Congress Socialists to join the Working Committee during his presidency. But even these conciliatory gestures by Nehru and shrewd tactics by the Gandhians did not prevent the strain from growing.\(^4\)

Subhas Bose was in Europe for almost the entire period between 1933 and 1937, and so was not intimately involved in the controversies. Although he was usually identified as a leftist, Bose did not form close ties with Nehru or with the leaders of the CSP. Such ties would have been of great value to him in the coming crisis. For although the leftists were bracketed together by the old guard then, and are today by some historians, distrust runs through the relations between Nehru and Bose, M. N. Roy and the Congress Socialists, the Congress Socialists and Bose, M. N. Roy and Nehru. In the case of M. N. Roy and the CPI, suspicion turned to hatred.\(^5\)

Perhaps following the same strategy of blunting opposition by incorporating it that had worked so effectively with Nehru, Gandhi privately offered Subhas Bose the Congress presidency when Bose returned to India briefly in 1937. Bose was unanimously chosen president for 1938, and he flew back to India to deliver his presidential address to the Haripura Congress.\(^6\) Some Bengali nationalists had been harboring bad feelings against the national Congress leadership for several reasons: no Bengalis had been selected for the Congress Working Committee in 1935; Bengalis were experiencing growing employment discrimination in Bihar; and the terms of the Communal Award and the Poona Pact cut most directly into the number of caste Hindu members in the Bengal Legislative Assembly and the council.\(^7\) To assuage some of these regional grievances, Gandhi may have felt that it was intelligent politics to have a Bengali president of the Congress, who would be the first since C. R. Das had resigned in early 1923.

In his Haripura address, Bose put forth his position on a wide range of issues. Some of his stands are in line with the policy of the Congress Socialists; some may be said to represent a Bengali view; and still others were worked out independently by Bose. He spoke in general terms in favor of socialism and agreed with the Congress Socialists on the is-
sues of collective affiliation of unions and Kisan Sabhas, increased Congress pressure in the princely states, opposition to federation and to office acceptance under the provincial autonomy provisions of the 1935 Government of India Act. Bose opposed the Communal Award because he said it was antinational. Although his reasoning differed, he ended up on the same side of the issue as the Nationalist Party, which had gained a significant victory over the Congress candidates in the 1934 elections for Bengali members of the Central Legislative Assembly. Gandhi, Nehru, and other Congress leaders supported Bose’s view of this problem. Bose also said he adhered to the national Congress position on the rights of minorities and the use of the Satyagraha method.

Bose turned some of his attention to foreign affairs and to the shape India should assume after independence, and on these issues, he was stating his own view rather than that of any particular group. Bose maintained that in foreign relations Indian self-interest was to be the single criterion for relationships with other states; the internal politics of other states were of no concern to India. Bose said he expected the Congress to rule independent India; a national economic policy and industrial development under state ownership would be necessary; and a lingua franca for the nation was essential. He said that he looked at the Working Committee as a shadow cabinet for free India. Under his presidency, he formed a planning group headed by Nehru so that the Congress could prepare itself for the coming transfer of power. In several areas, Bose has been given less credit than is his due for specifying some of the crucial problems of free India in the decade before independence.

During Bose’s presidency Acharya J. B. Kripalani continued to serve as Congress secretary, and much Congress business continued to flow through the small secretariat under him. Bose was not particularly orderly in his correspondence, perhaps because he had been moving from country to country for a few years and was not prepared to handle the considerable chores associated with the Congress presidency. Keeping the secretary’s office in the hands of Kripalani allowed the Gandhians to insure that no issue arose without their being fully aware of it.

On several of the important issues that he had to handle, Bose
worked closely with the Gandhian leaders on the Working Committee. For some years the various presidents of the Congress had been carrying on a fruitless correspondence with Jinnah, now more or less permanent president of the Muslim League. Jinnah insisted that the league spoke for all Muslims and demanded parity for the league with the Congress in many contexts. The Congress view, as propounded by Prasad, Nehru, Gandhi, and Bose, was that the league represented many Muslims, but that other Muslim organizations and the Congress represented other sections of the Indian Muslim community. Jinnah raised the same fourteen points that the league had put forward in 1929. Nehru agreed to some but held that others were out of date. The correspondence finally ended during Bose’s presidency when it became clear to Jinnah that he could not persuade any Congress leader to recognize the league as the organization speaking authoritatively for all Indian Muslims. On this issue, at least, Bose was completely in accord with his Gandhian colleagues.  

Bose was also called upon during 1938 to settle a controversy between members of the Congress ministerial group in the Central Provinces. Working with Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, and Sardar Patel, all members of the Congress Parliamentary Board, Bose finally ruled against N. B. Khare, who lost his position as chief minister. Khare violently denounced the Congress leadership.

Although some leftists walked out of a meeting of the AICC in September 1938 over several of their differences with the old guard, Bose himself does not seem to have had any serious break with the Gandhians until he made it clear that he would seek another term as Congress president. Bose’s term as president had served to put off a more serious break between left and right in the Congress, but the political and ideological differences had not been removed.

CONTEST FOR THE CONGRESS PRESIDENCY

In the usual informal fashion in which the Gandhians chose the candidates for the presidency, they met and decided on Maulana Azad. Azad declined to run. Sardar Patel said in a public statement at the time,

At informal consultations at one stage or other at which Moulana Azad, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, Babu Rajendra Prasad, Mr. Bhulabhai
Desai, Mr. Kripalani, Mahatma Gandhi and myself were present, not by design but by accident, it was agreed that if perchance the Moulana remained adamant in his resistance, according to the constitution Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya was the only choice left, since we were clearly of opinion that it was unnecessary to re-elect Subhas Babu. 17

Bose, who had been seeking a left coalition within the Congress during his first year back in active politics, said he would only stand aside in favor of another leftist candidate. On January 24, 1939, six members of the old guard in a public statement questioned the idea of a competition for the presidency and said that the Congress president had always been selected unanimously. 18 This was the same line of argument that the entrenched moderates used against the insurgent Extremists in 1906 and 1907. Bose, in reply to the Gandhians, said that democratic procedures allowed competition for office. In his opinion, it was a question of ideology and platform. Among the issues was that of federation under British rule, which Bose strongly opposed. Although officially the Congress was with Bose on this issue, there were rumors that the Gandhians were wavering on it. 19 Bose also stood by socialism as he had defined it in his Haripura address, including national planning and industrial development under state control. Bose also advocated that a national demand or ultimatum be issued to the British with a six-month time limit. Gandhi was against this. 20 Bose often described the ideal national worker and leader as selfless, absorbed in a strong and active social movement; but he was not personally reticent. One of his coworkers remembered Bose’s desire to “remain in history.” 21 Nehru had preceded Bose and served two terms; so Bose, for personal and political reasons, may have felt that he should have a second term. For his part, Nehru seemed to side with the Gandhians, although by ideological criteria, Bose was closer to Nehru’s own views than was Sitaramayya. With no other prominent leftist put forward, Bose ran and to the surprise of many, was elected by 1,580 votes, as against 1,375 for his opponent. 22 Sitaramayya had said before the election, “I am an ardent devotee of the cult of Gandhism.” 23 A number of factors combined to produce Bose’s triumph. The left had been growing throughout the 1930s and given a choice of Bose and Sitaramayya, almost all leftists, including the Congress Socialists, M. N. Roy’s League of Radical Congressmen, the communists, and the unattached leftists apparently voted
for Bose. Bose was also much more widely known than Sitaramayya. Bose's strength in the vote was in Bengal, the United Provinces, the Punjab, Kerala, and the Karnataka. Sitaramayya was stronger in Gujarat, Orissa, Andhra, and Bihar. Both had considerable support in Madras and Bombay.²⁴

After the election, Gandhi announced that “the defeat is more mine than his [Sitaramayya's].” However, was against rash moves because, he said, “After all Subhas Babu is not an enemy of his country.”²⁵ Bose issued a statement answering Gandhi, which said in part:

I do not know what sort of opinion Mahatmaji has of me. But whatever his view may be, it will always be my aim and object to try and win his confidence for the simple reason that it will be a tragic thing for me if I succeed in winning the confidence of other people but fail to win the confidence of India's greatest man.²⁶

This passage embodies the follow-up to Bose's usual desire to challenge authority. He wanted to beat the Gandhian candidate and did; but at the same time he wanted Gandhi's approbation. He wanted the satisfaction of victory over authority and approval from the vanquished as well. Gandhi and Bose met on February 15, 1939, and Bose came away satisfied that he would have the Mahatma's cooperation.²⁷

Before the election in January, Bose had said to the press, “It is widely believed that there is prospect of a compromise on the Federal Scheme between the Right Wing of the Congress and the British Government during the coming year.”²⁸ On February 22, twelve Gandhian members of the Working Committee resigned after Bose's retraction of the above “aspersion” was not forthcoming. Although Bose was not aware of it, the Gandhians were at work preparing to put him in his place. They wanted a homogeneous Working Committee and a policy based on the “will of the majority.” They saw the forthcoming Congress session as a test of leftist and rightist strength, and an opportunity to assess Congress confidence in Bose's or in Gandhi's leadership.²⁹

This period was also a crucial test of the internal cohesion and strength of the left. M. N. Roy, writing to Bose in February, 1939, said:
I have little more to add to the suggestion I made after your election last year. This year, there is absolutely no reason for you not to assert yourself. . . . The significance of the result of this year's presidential election has been correctly and clearly characterised by Gandhiji himself; he has been defeated. There can be little doubt regarding what is to be done in the given situation. The Congress must be given a new leadership, entirely free from the principles and pre-occupations of Gandhism which until now determined Congress politics. Gandhist principles cannot be reconciled with honest anti-imperialist politics. . . . it will be suicidal if any consideration is permitted to interfere with your selecting an Executive according to the verdict of the majority expressed in the presidential election. What is of still more importance, is that the new leadership of the Congress should have the courage and conviction of acting independently even of the wishes of Gandhiji, when these run counter to the objective revolutionary urge of the movement.30

Although the left had given Bose solid support for the presidency, the victory itself brought a jostling for places and second thoughts by some. M. N. Roy wanted a homogeneous leftist Working Committee and the position of general secretary of the Congress for himself.31 The CPI wanted a large block in the Congress Executive, while the Congress Socialists, who wavered between national unity and leftist unity, thought that the Working Committee should be divided among leftists and rightists, with the leftists having the edge.32 Bose himself was apparently undecided but seemed to feel that he needed the Gaudhians to run the Congress organization; and he did not want to split the Congress. Some, like Roy and several of Bose's closer followers, wanted him to complete the split and form a leftist Working Committee. One adviser to Bose, Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar, told Thomas A. Rusch in 1954 that Bose "did not have the courage" to split the Congress. He also felt that the British would not allow the Congress to function if Bose and the left had completely captured it.33

With this matter still undecided, the annual Congress session convened at Tripuri in Mahakoshal in the present state of Madhya Pradesh. Bose fell ill with fever, attending some sessions on a stretcher but for the greater part of the time confined to his tent. Under such circumstances, Sarat Bose served as his younger brother's spokesman. Gandhi was not present, since he had what he felt to be pressing work to do in the princely state of Rajkot.34
The confrontation between left and right at Tripuri came down to a controversy over the wording and passage of a resolution put forth by one of the old guard. This was the Pant Resolution, which was worded as follows:

In view of various misunderstandings that have arisen in the Congress and the country on account of the controversies in connection with the Presidential Election and after, it is desirable that the Congress should clarify the position and declare its general policy.

(1) This Congress declares its firm adherence to the fundamental policies which have governed its programme in the past years under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi and is definitely of opinion that there should be no break in these policies and they should continue to govern the Congress programme in future. This Congress expresses its confidence in the work of the Working Committee which functioned during the last year and regrets that any aspersions should have been cast against any of its members.

(2) In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such a crisis, the Congress regards it as imperative that the Congress executive should command his implicit confidence and requests that President to nominate the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.35

This resolution was first put forward in the closed meeting of the Subjects Committee, and Bose supporters, including M. N. Roy, made an attempt to dilute the resolution. In his amendment Roy changed the two points to one, deleted the instructions to the president to consult Gandhi about the formation of the Working Committee, and transformed Pant's Resolution into a meaningless tribute to Gandhi and Bose.36 But Roy's amendment was beaten, as were other attempts by the left. Mr. Niharendu Dutt Mazumdar, a labor leader, leftist, and member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, said that the resolution showed "a spirit of vindictiveness on the part of the members of the Working Committee." 37 He regarded it as a "backdoor method" of attacking the Congress president.

It was reported that, "When the discussion on the resolution was going on in the Subjects Committee a news [report] appeared that through telephonic communication the approval of Gandhiji had
been secured for it.” This event may have been stage-managed, since Gandhi later said that he had not participated in the formulation and passage of this resolution. Even the Congress Socialists seem to have moved amendments to weaken the Pant Resolution in the closed session. But the amendments failed by a margin of 218 to 135.

The most effective speech for the resolution was given by its mover, Pandit Pant. He said that if the delegates wanted Gandhiji back they had to prove it to him. The Indian Annual Register reported,

Digressing for a while, Pandit Pant said that wherever nations had progressed they had done so under the leadership of one man. Germany had relied on Herr Hitler. Whether they agreed with Herr Hitler’s methods or not, there was no gainsaying the fact that Germany had progressed under Herr Hitler. Similarly, Italy had risen because of Signor Mussolini and it was Lenin that raised Russia.

The Pandit reminded the delegates that “we have Gandhi. . . . Then why should we not reap the full advantage of that factor?” Pandit Pant denied the suggestion that the resolution savored of vendetta and he disarmed some of the opposition by saying, in effect, that the resolution was for Gandhi, not against Bose. The resolution was adopted by the Subjects Committee and brought before the open session. The Congress Socialists decided to remain neutral on the resolution, and the margin of passage was even greater than it had been in the Subjects Committee. Conflicting accounts have been given of the position taken by the communists on the resolution. They were caught in the dilemma of having to choose between left unity and nationalist unity. For the moment, both groups chose Gandhi and left Bose to his fate. The Congress Socialists had disagreed with Bose about setting a time limit on the national demand to the British. The Gandhians agreed to pass the national demand resolution in the form desired by the Congress Socialists, and this may have obtained the neutrality of the Congress Socialists on the vote.

Subhas Bose had made yet another challenge to authority, this time within the Congress, but in the end showed his familiar ambivalence. He wanted to defeat the Gandhians and control them, and yet to retain their support for his program. The passage of the Pant Resolution put Bose in a very difficult position. The “wishes of Gandhiji” were interposed in the usual Congress procedure of having the president
nominate the Working Committee. A long, sometimes embittered, correspondence between Subhas and Sarat Bose, Nehru, and Gandhi followed the Tripuri Congress and lasted until the end of April. In conciliatory tones, Bose pleaded with Gandhi to compromise on the selection of the Working Committee. Bose said he would nominate half the members, while Sardar Patel for the Gandhians could choose the other half. Bose argued that a heterogeneous Working Committee was what circumstances required, and he was willing to go more than half way. Nehru was in favor of some sort of compromise, but Bose was furious at Nehru, for he felt that Nehru had betrayed the left and the future of socialism in India by not taking his side. Nehru later admitted that he had let Bose down, but he claimed that there would be no movement in India without Gandhi. Gandhi, for his part, was adamant and seemed determined to oust Bose. He argued that it would be impossible for a heterogeneous Working Committee to operate effectively and he refused to nominate anyone, since he said that his nominees would be men with whom Bose could not work. Gandhi urged Bose to select his own committee. Bose answered that this would go against the Pant Resolution. Although Bose maintained that the Pant Resolution was unconstitutional, he felt bound by it.

Gandhi was, in effect, challenging Bose to select a Working Committee of leftists. Bose, feeling his lack of strong support from the left and unable to confront the danger of splitting the Congress, did not select a Working Committee. Although Bose believed in the socialist ideology that he expounded, he also felt that the mass support for the Congress among millions of Indians was due to Gandhi’s charisma and the organization which had been built in large part by Gandhians. There were a number of other issues which entered into the correspondence with Gandhi, and they may be summarized as follows:

1. Gandhi said he “smelled violence in the air”; Bose said Gandhi had a bogey about violence and there was no such smell.
2. Gandhi, Nehru, and the Gandhians felt the moment was inopportune to put an ultimatum before the British.
3. Bose had established a National Planning Committee; he favored land reform, including the abolition of landlordism, and state control of the economy. The Gandhians disagreed with many parts of Bose’s economic program.
4. Bose's "aspersion" on some former members of the Working Committee, for which he had never apologized, and remarks in *The Indian Struggle*. A writer in the *Indian Annual Register* noted that this book had been banned in India until 1938. "The correspondence published in the *Press* on May 14, 1939, after his [Bose's] resignation, bears unmistakable evidence of his spirit of accommodation, of his eagerness to propitiate and reconcile. This eagerness failed to win confidence, because the book stood in the way." 54

Bose failed because the left which united to elect him president continued to disintegrate. M. N. Roy, although he had thought the Pant Resolution undemocratic and had opposed it, called for Bose to resign. 55 Nehru and the Congress Socialists may not have been happy about the evidence of the weakness of the left or about the treatment given Bose, but they flowed with the Gandhian tide. Bose's victory in the presidential election proved to be hollow and he and his brother were outwitted and outmanned by the Gandhians in the ensuing contests.

Bose and Gandhi could not come to an agreement about the composition of the Working Committee, and the stalemate continued until a meeting of the AICC in Calcutta during late April and early May. Nehru, trying to prevent a damaging split, moved that Bose continue as Congress president. But after some discussion Nehru withdrew his resolution. Another attempt to keep Bose in office was also abortive, and finally, seeing no other course open to him, Bose resigned as Congress president. 56 Rajendra Prasad wrote this description of the events just before and after the meeting:

As Subhas Bose's position was now untenable, we began to think of his successor. The brutal frankness of Sardar Patel was not liked by Bose and other people. Jawaharlal, who was disgusted with the state of affairs, did not want to take up the Presidency. Maulana Azad, who would have been the best choice had an accident. . . . My name was suggested. I did not want to take it up. . . . But all my arguments had to be waived when Gandhiji directed me to take up the responsibility. 57

Outside one of the sessions of the AICC, Pandit Pant and Bhulabhai Desai were roughly handled and Acharya Kripalani was threatened
with violence. Observers believed that Bengali supporters of Bose were responsible for these incidents.\textsuperscript{58} There was undoubtedly much hostile feeling in Bengal against the national leadership of the Congress at this time. The choice of Rajendra Prasad, a Bihari, to succeed Bose just at a moment of some ill-feeling between Bengalis and neighboring Biharis may have added to the charged atmosphere. With Bose's exit, a new Gandhian Working Committee was formed, and it included Dr. B. C. Roy and Prafulla C. Ghosh, two of Bengal's foremost Gandhians.\textsuperscript{59}

After Bose's capitulation, he was subjected to much criticism from other members of the amorphous left. Among the most severe critics were those who had wanted him to choose a solid left-wing Working Committee. The following example of this criticism is from \textit{Forward}, which by 1939 was edited by a faction of former Jugantar revolutionaries.

Then entered Subhas Babu into the arena with the passport of thorough obedience to Gandhiji. Throughout the year he was perfectly submissive even on the Federation and the political prisoners' release issues. He never attempted, he never thought of increasing the organization strength of the Congress. \ldots{} when the revolt was a \textit{fait accompli} and the split was brought about that should have been postponed until some organisational strength had been built up, an attempt was made to make the best of a bad job by the real revolutionary elements in the country. \ldots{} The advice was to replace the representatives of the conservative sections on the Working Committee by those who might in a way and for the time being represent the interests of the masses. \ldots{} But Subhas Babu, having revolted for nothing other than the Presidency, carried a blank mind as far as a plan or a programme was concerned. \ldots{} He had not the courage to accept the plan of action placed before him. \ldots{} When asked why he was not acting in this situation, he replied that his supporters were "shaking in their shoes." \ldots{} The fact of the matter \ldots{} is that Subhas Babu is no radical. \ldots{} When it became obvious that he had no lead to give and no plan of action to put forward, he could no longer keep his supporters together. In the last resort, his mainstay was Bengal's Provincial feeling. As a result, Bengal tended to be isolated as it once before had been during the Assembly elections of 1934. \ldots{} Luckily for the Province, at long last he calls off the revolt. He ought not to find a chance to repeat a like experiment by which \ldots{} he has landed the country in confusion and demoralisation.\textsuperscript{60}

With the debacle of the left at Tripuri and Calcutta, Bose decided later in 1939 to form a leftist group and called it the Forward Bloc.\textsuperscript{61}
But finding that several groups like the Royists and the communists would not submerge their identities in a new organization, Bose called for a more amorphous left-wing grouping called the Left Consolidation Committee. Even this looser alliance, however, was not able to bring together the warring factions of the left.\textsuperscript{62}

In the same period in 1939 and 1940 when the left and the national Congress were passing through a crisis, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee was also affected. Subhas Bose was the reigning president of the BPCC and the annual general meeting of the committee was held in late April 1939 in Calcutta. Some 420 members out of a total of 544 attended. But more important than the general meeting was a small gathering of 15 representatives of the different groups in the BPCC. These included Sarat and Subhas Bose, Kiran Sankar Roy, Prafulla Ghosh, Monoranjan Gupta, Arun Chandra Guha, Bhuban Kumar Datta, Surendra Mohan Ghose, Satish Chakravarty, Amar Ghosh, Bi-joyendra Palit, Rajkumar Chakravarty, Sushil Banerjee and Pandit Jee-awanlal. It was decided that the executive council of the BPCC was to be formed in consultation with all groups, that Subhas Bose was to continue as president, and that the BPCC would have 5 vice-presidents and 5 assistant secretaries.\textsuperscript{63} Starting with the hypothesis that there were five main factions to be represented, some suggestions may be offered about the ones gathered in the smaller meeting. Sarat and Subhas Bose headed the Bose faction, and Amar Ghosh was with their group. Kiran Sankar Roy, J. C. Gupta, and Rajkumar Chakravarty were known as official congressmen, usually following the national Congress line. Prafulla Ghosh was a pure Gandhian and had been since about 1921. Surendra Mohan Ghose, Bupen K. Datta, Arun Guha, and Monoranjan Gupta were all ex-Jugantar revolutionaries; but there may well have been divisions between them, since Jugantar members had moved into different groups.\textsuperscript{64}

When Subhas Bose announced his executive council for the BPCC early in June, some factions felt that they had been underrepresented or left out. \textit{Forward}, edited by Bhuben K. Datta, maintained that Bose had gone back on the April agreement about the composition of the executive body. It was argued that Bose had blocked participation of the opposition in the regional Congress in the same way that Gandhi had neglected Bose and other leftists in forming the Working Committee of the national Congress.\textsuperscript{65}
Shortly, however, an even more serious crisis arose for the regional Congress when Gandhi selected Dr. B. C. Roy to reorganize the BPCC. Dr. Roy was thwarted, but the Working Committee shortly found a way to get at the Bose-dominated BPCC. In July 1939 Bose called for a demonstration opposing a move by the Congress to gain greater control over provincial committees. As punishment for this action, Bose was suspended from Congress executive positions for three years. The Working Committee called for new elections to the BPCC and when Bose refused to hold them, a new, ad hoc BPCC was appointed. Bose resisted the Working Committee efforts. He wrote in a letter to M. N. Roy in January 1940:

I have already used my moderating influence to the extreme limit. As a result, the B.P.C.C. toned down the resolution of the Executive Council. This could be done with great difficulty, and members were on the point of revolting against my moderation. But if the W.C. does not reconsider the ad hoc committee affair, then I am afraid that the B.P.C.C. will defy the W.C. Bengal has certain traditions (which cannot be ignored) in its relation with the W.C. of the Congress. Consequently it will not take lying down what other provinces possibly may.

In July 1940, Bose was arrested by the Bengal government for leading a demonstration demanding the removal of a memorial to Black Hole of Calcutta victims. He was also held for sedition. After some time in prison, he undertook a fast and, fearing for his health and possibly his life, the government released him, placing him under house arrest in his home on Elgin Road. Early on January 17, 1941, Bose slipped secretly from his house; and he soon left India never to return.

During his final year of freedom in India, from the summer of 1939 to the summer of 1940, Bose toured the country trying to rouse support for the Forward Bloc. Although he was greeted by large crowds in some parts of the country, he did not build a viable organization. But he did get a large percentage of the Congress Socialists in Bengal, the Central Provinces, Berar, and some Congress Socialists in the Punjab, the United Provinces, and Orissa, to switch to the Forward Bloc. Bose’s legacy to this small party was his own charisma and his eclectic program.
Through this account of the Congress, the left, and Subhas Bose from 1926 to 1940, Bengali Muslims and Bengal legislative bodies have been neglected. In general, communal relations in Bengal and in India regressed during these years. Bengali Muslim leaders such as H. S. Suhrawardy and the Muslim Swarajists, who had cooperated with the Swaraj Party and defended many Congress moves, now took more of a Muslim separatist line. Virtually all Muslim leaders in Bengal now advocated separate electorates and wanted seats reserved for Muslims commensurate with their percentage of Bengal’s population. Communications between Bengali nationalists and important Muslim leaders seem to have been minimal, and even the term “nationalist” began to take on a Hindu communalist connotation. A group calling themselves the Bengal Nationalist Party challenged the Congress for Bengal seats in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1934 and won a surprising victory. They played upon caste fears over the small share of seats given caste Hindus by the Communal Award of 1932. This event assisted those Muslim leaders who believed in manipulating Muslim communal feelings to gain preeminence.

But it would be misleading to dwell only upon communal difficulties and neglect communal cooperation. There were a number of small Muslim groups, including the Bengal Nationalist Muslim Conference and some Muslim leaders, who were still willing to work with the Congress and Hindu leaders and would remain so until independence and partition. These efforts deserve attention in order to counteract an ahistorical view that by this period communalism and eventual partition were inevitable.

Among Bengali Muslim leaders there were some of the same problems that Congress leaders faced. Difficulties arising from endemic factionalism, personal ambition, and strains between national and regional organizations are apparent among the Muslims. From the late 1920s up to about 1937, and perhaps later, the Muslim League was weak as a national organization and particularly feeble in the Muslim majority areas. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Bengal Muslim Party and annual Bengal Muslims’ Conference had considerable strength. The Bengal Nationalist Muslim Conference and the Bengal Presidency Muslim League leaned towards the Congress and had less support.
this period, the Krishak Praja Party was formed under the leadership of A. K. Fazlul Huq. Humayun Kabir, who was associated with the party and worked with Huq for some time until the party split, wrote this sympathetic description of its aims in 1944.

The Krishak Praja party has already been mentioned as a party with a future. Though non-communal in aim and objective, the party is dominantly Muslim in composition and leadership and is continually trying to organise the masses on the basis of an economic programme. The conviction that political democracy cannot be made real and effective without a fundamental reconstruction in the economic framework of society serves as the cornerstone of the Praja movement and organisation. Aiming at agrarian revolution through parliamentary and constitutional methods, it has grown out of the peasantry’s fight for rights and is bound to increase in strength with the growth of political consciousness among the masses.\(^{76}\)

The wide support given the Krishak Party in the 1937 elections, the presence of a few Muslims—most notably Muzaffar Ahmad—in the inner circles of the communists, and the growing fame of the leftist poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, indicate that socialist and communist ideas were spreading among Bengali Muslims as well as Hindus.\(^{77}\) A socialist program offered the opportunity to appeal to Hindu intellectuals and Hindu and Muslim peasants, though it might alienate business and landholding interests which were cagily working between the government, the nationalists, and the communal groups. The Congress, which had been incorporating a number of socialist items into its program, did not make a major effort to gain Muslim support until the 1937 elections showed how little Muslim backing it had.\(^ {78}\)

In the period 1927–1936, Muslim members and ministers played an important role in the working of the Bengal Legislative Council.\(^ {79}\) By 1929 the Swaraj Party had been severely weakened in the legislative councils and that year, in an effort to put pressure on the government of India for significant constitutional advances, Congress members resigned from these bodies. This left the Bengal Legislative Council completely in the hands of Hindu loyalists or liberals and the Muslim members. The Muslims, with the support of the officials and the Europeans, were able to run the transferred departments.\(^ {80}\) Although there was some shuffling of ministers, the Muslim leaders were able to pass some measures of importance to them, especially concerning elemen-
tary education, local self-government, and peasant indebtedness.\textsuperscript{81} One Hindu leader has suggested that this long experience of power and the opportunity to pass measures of value to the Bengal Muslims made some difference in the support the idea of partition eventually gained among them.\textsuperscript{82} They developed a sense of their growing importance in Bengal and a determination to benefit from their numerical majority in the province.

The importance of the work of the Bengal Legislative Council itself, however, was undercut by the continuing discussions of the next step of constitutional advance.\textsuperscript{83} These talks within the government of India and the British Parliament, at round table conferences, and between Indian leaders, formally began with the formation of the Indian Statutory (or Simon) Commission, and culminated with the Government of India Act of 1935. Though almost all political organizations, including the Congress and the Muslim League, disliked most or many of the provisions of the act, all groups eventually decided to participate in the elections for provincial legislative bodies to be held early in 1937.\textsuperscript{84}

Many leftist leaders of the Congress, including Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, opposed the formation of ministries by the Congress under the provisions for provincial autonomy in the 1935 Act. The Congress as a whole decided to wait until after the actual elections and then evaluate its position.\textsuperscript{85} The league, although it rejected the federal provisions of the act, seemed willing to implement the provincial provisions in those areas where they were strong enough to form a government or to be an important element in a coalition government. In the elections, the Congress gained an absolute majority in 6 states, while it was the largest single party in 2 others, Bengal and Assam.\textsuperscript{86} The Congress demanded the assurance from the government of India that governors would not interfere with the work of Congress ministries. Negotiations with the government dragged out over several months. The bargain finally struck did not actually give the Congress what it wanted, but it was accepted anyhow. The Congress formed governments in 6 provinces but did not participate in coalitions in those provinces in which it did not have an absolute majority.\textsuperscript{87}

In Bengal there had been considerable wrangling over an allotment of seats which greatly changed the strengths of the different castes and communities from those of 1919 Act. Under the new Act, Ben-
gali Muslims had 117 of the total 250 seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly reserved for them. Of the remaining seats, 78 were in the general non-Muslim category, but of these, 30 were reserved for scheduled caste members. The Communal Decision had raised the number of scheduled caste seats from 10 to 30, and this action is what had given the Bengal Nationalist Party strong support among caste Hindus in the 1934 election for the Central Legislative Assembly. There were 55 other seats, divided in the following way: Europeans, 11; Anglo-Indians, 4; commerce and industry, 19; landholders, 5; labor, 8; universities, 2; Indian Christians, 2; women, 4. Much controversy had accompanied this allotment.

In 1934, the Swaraj Party had been reconstituted, and after some controversy between Dr. B. C. Roy and Sarat Bose, the latter became head of the Congress Parliamentary Board in Bengal responsible for running the Congress election campaigns. The results of the 1937 poll for Legislative Assembly seats showed that the Congress had 60 seats, the Muslim League 40, independent Muslims 41, the Krishak Praja Party 35, Europeans 25, the independent scheduled caste group 23, and independent caste Hindus 14. The Congress formed de facto alliances with scheduled caste candidates and this enabled it to win many scheduled caste seats under joint electorate voting. A government report on the elections noted that the Congress was the most “clearly defined party” and exercised a “remarkable influence” on Hindu voters. The electorate numbered 6,695,483 or 13.4 percent of the population. Only 40.5 percent of the electorate voted, but there was great variation from constituency to constituency, with the extremely low percentages voting for women’s and scheduled castes’ seats pulling down the average. The Muslim League won only about one-third of the seats reserved for Muslims and did badly in several contests with the Krishak Praja Party. The generally poor showing of the league spurred Jinnah to work energetically to build support for the league in the following years. Since the Congress was not willing to enter coalitions or form governments in the early months of 1937, other party leaders were approached in Bengal. Ram Gopal has described the fruits of this effort:

Fazlul Huq, who was the leader of the Praja Party, and who was looking for the co-operation of another party to raise his strength to...
clear majority, preferred to approach the Congress and not the League. The Congress had declined to accept Ministerial responsibility. Huq, therefore, made common cause with the League and, instead of coalescing with that party, joined it with most of his followers. It was an event of outstanding importance. A Congress-Praja Party coalition would have put itself on a road to Hindu-Muslim understanding; the Praja Party’s merger with the League made the Ministry almost wholly communal, and gave communalism a foothold to expand.93

Fazlul Huq had been a fringe member of the Muslim League until 1937 and had concentrated his energies on building up his own party. He did take a more active part in league activities from 1937 but often had a strained relationship with Jinnah and the national organization.94 In these circumstances, private negotiations continued among a number of Bengali politicians, including Huq, about the possibilities of alternative coalition arrangements. By October 1937, the Bose group had decided that they would like to join with Fazlul Huq’s party and oust the Muslim League from the coalition in office. Nalini Ranjan Sarker, ex-Swarajist, peripheral congressman, and friend of Gandhi, had agreed to serve as finance minister in the Bengali cabinet dominated by the Krishak Party and the Muslim League. The Boses, who had control of the BPCC, continued to apply pressure on Gandhi to have the latter ask Sarker to resign, allowing the Bengal Congress to form a coalition with the Krishak Party.95 At the same time other talks were going on between Surendra Mohan Ghose and Khwaja Nazimuddin about the possibility of a Congress-league coalition, to which the league at first was not averse.96 In the period 1937 to 1941, none of these negotiations bore fruit. The story of these negotiations and exchanges has not been written, and much of the evidence that may eventually be gathered must come from oral sources. There are a few documents bearing on this issue, and they include unpublished letters exchanged between Subhas Bose and Gandhi in 1938. Gandhi wrote to Bose in December 1938,

My Dear Subhas Babu,

I must dictate this letter as I am wilfully blind. Whilst I am dictating this, Maulana Saheb, Nalini Babu and Ghamshamdas are listening [that is, Maulana Azad, Nalini Ranjan Sarker, and G. D. Birla]. We had an exhaustive discussion over the Bengal Ministry. I am more than ever convinced that we should not aim at ousting the Ministry. We
shall gain nothing by a reshuffle; and, probably, we shall lose much by including Congressmen in the Ministry. I feel, therefore, that the best way of securing comparative purity of administration and a continuity of a settled programme and policy would be to aim at having all the reforms that we desire, carried out by the present Ministry. Nalini Babu should come out, as he says he would, on a real issue being raised and the decision being taken by the Ministry against the interests of the country. His retirement from the Ministry would then be dignified and wholly justified. . . .

Yours sincerely,
M. K. Gandhi

Bose replied to Gandhi from Bombay on December 21, 1938:

My dear Mahatma Ji,

The letter which Sjt. G. D. Birla brought from Wardha came as a profound shock to me. I remember to have discussed the Bengal situation with you time and again. The other day at Wardha it was discussed between us once again. My brother Sarat also discussed the matter with you. Both of us have the clear impression that you have always agreed with the idea of a Coalition Ministry for Bengal. I do not know what has happened since I left Wardha to make you alter your view so completely that you now write—"I am more than ever convinced that we should not aim at ousting the ministry etc." The papers say that after I left Wardha Sjt. N. R. Sarkar, Sjt. G. D. Birla and Moulana Azad Sahib have seen you. Evidently you have altered your [view?] after talking to them. The position, therefore, is that you attach more value and importance to the views of those three gentlemen than to the views of those who are responsible for running the Congress organisation in Bengal.

You are not in the habit of writing anything lightheartedly—hence I shall be justified in attaching the fullest weight to what is your considered opinion. Your letter has given rise to a crisis in which it is necessary for me to speak very frankly and I crave your pardon at the outset for doing so.

To come straight to the point—there is a fundamental difference between Moulana Sahib and myself on the point at issue. This became manifest when we were confronted with the ministerial crisis in Assam. I can perhaps now claim that I was right and Moulana Sahib was wrong. But if Sardar Patel had not providentially come to my rescue, Moulana Sahib would never have given in at Shillong and perhaps you would not have supported my view point against that of Moulana Sahib when the Working Committee met at Delhi. In that case there would not have been a Coalition ministry in Assam. . . .
The Crisis of Bengal and Congress Politics

Over Sindh, there has been a difference between Moulana Sahib on the one side and several members of the Working Committee including myself on the other. And now come[s?] the Bengal situation on which our views are diametrically opposed.

Moulana Sahib's view seems to be that in the Muslim-majority provinces like Bengal, communal Muslim Ministries should be allowed to continue in office. Moulana Sahib is evidently unhappy over our lending support to the Allah Bux Ministry in Sindh.

I hold, on the contrary, that it is imperative in the national interest that we should pull down the Huq Ministry as early as possible. The longer this reactionary Ministry remains in office, the more communal will the atmosphere of Bengal become and the weaker will the Congress grow, vis-a-vis the Muslim League.

At long last early in November Sjt. Nalini Sarkar had been convinced that he should resign from the Huq Ministry. He assured me for the last time on the 9th December, before I left Calcutta for Wardha, that he would resign his office before the next Budget Session. What made him renege from the position within one week, I do not know. Your influence is going to be used not to get Nalini Babu to resign but to get him to stick to office at a time when even his closest friends want him to get out of the Huq Ministry. It has astonished me that you did not feel it necessary to even consult me before you arrived at a decision on such a serious matter.

Bose went on to explain at length why he advocated a coalition ministry. He thought that Nalini Sarker’s resignation would bring down the Huq ministry and then the Congress would be in a strong bargaining position for forming a coalition ministry in which it would hold decisive power. As long as Sarker would not resign, Bose and the Bengal Congress were effectively prevented from overturning the predominantly Muslim ministry which Bose thought was encouraging communalism by both Muslims and Hindus. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who was Sarat Bose’s private secretary at the time and who handled much of Subhas Bose’s correspondence, has suggested that Bose felt that not only was there a difference of view with Maulana Azad, but that G. D. Birla was interfering because he feared Hindu-Muslim unity, that is, a coalition ministry, in Bengal because this would adversely affect Marwari economic domination of Calcutta. In Mr. Chaudhuri’s opinion, Gandhi acted knowingly in the Marwari interest because he was against Bose and against Bengali interests, other than those of his own men in Bengal.
The strains between Gandhi and the Booses in early 1939 may have had a stronger regional aspect to them than was obvious from the superficial facts of the Congress presidency campaign.

With the continuing failure of Congress-Krishak Party discussions, Fazlul Huq, who was known for frequent changes of direction and a determination to stay in power, talked and wrote publicly in ever harsher communal terms. Under his name a pamphlet was published in December 1939 on *Muslim Sufferings under Congress Rule*. Listing hundreds of violent acts by Hindus against Muslims in those provinces under Congress rule, Huq concluded, "The Muslim case remains that during the Congress regime they were condemned to live in terror and to suffer these atrocities, while the Law moved tardily or did not move at all." 99 Within two years after writing this, Huq found himself expelled from the Muslim League and began to form the Progressive Coalition, an alliance between the Bose faction of the Congress, the Krishak Party, and the Hindu Nationalists.

With the coming of World War II in September 1939, the government of India, without consulting Indian politicians or ministers, brought India into the conflict. The Congress, feeling that this step should not have been taken in such a manner, had its ministries resign in the six provinces which they controlled. Nalini Sarker finally resigned in 1939, but in 1941 he became a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. The Bengal Ministry continued, since the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party supported the Indian government's war effort.100

Subhas Bose was under house arrest in December 1940 when he made an effort to have the viceroy step into the deteriorating communal situation in Bengal. He wrote to Lord Linlithgow, criticizing the Bengal Ministry, and continued:

in criticising the Bengal Ministry in the above manner, I have nothing in common with the mental attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha [an organization of more communally oriented Hindus—L. G.]. People like myself are prepared to concede to the Muslims, gladly and voluntarily, their legitimate share in everything which interests them. We have already proved our *bona fides* in this matter by our action in the past —action which at times has made us unpopular with that section of the Hindus which is communally-minded. Today we represent perhaps the only party in India that can still hope to bridge the gulf be-
tween the two major communities and can still claim to possess the
goodwill of a large section of Indian Muslims.

Nobody will deny that Bengal has been the cradle of Indian Nationalism since the dawn of British rule in this country. Hindu Bengal, in particular, has throughout these decades thought and striven in terms of nationalism, with the result that the Hindu Mahasabha movement has never had a strong foothold here. But today a wave of communalism is spreading over Hindu Bengal, as an inevitable reaction to Muslim Communalism. In the face of this communal vortex with its unending eddies, those who believe in Nationalism are looking on helplessly.\footnote{101}

Bose asked the viceroy to make an effort to have the support of officials and European businessmen withdrawn from the Bengal Ministry. He even suggested the suspension of the Constitution in Bengal, if necessary. About three weeks after this final act, he left India.

Bose’s efforts at forming a Hindu-Muslim coalition ministry and his challenge to the Gandhian leadership in the Congress both ended in failure while he remained in India. Whatever his personal sentiments for communal harmony and leftist hegemony in the Congress, he was not able to bring about either of them. Although he probably had a larger popular following than any Bengali Hindu leader in his own province and had considerable support from Indians in other regions, he was not able to use this enthusiasm to help him make concrete political accomplishments. He was limited in what he could do by his lack of rapport with the Gandhians and by the general suspicion which characterized the Indian left.

It must have been with mixed emotions that Subhas Bose listened to Rabindranath Tagore in 1939 give a second famous address entitled “Desanayak.” Tagore, addressing Bose, said in part,

As Bengal’s poet, I today acknowledge you as the honored leader of the people of Bengal. The Gitā tells us that from time to time the eternal principle of the good arises to challenge the reign of the evil. . . . Suffering from the deadening effect of the prolonged punishment inflicted upon her young generation and disintegrated by internal faction, Bengal is passing through a period of dark despair. . . . At such a juncture of nation-wide crisis, we require the service of a forceful personality, the invincible faith of a natural leader, who can defy the adverse fate that threatens our progress. . . . I have watched the dawn that witnessed the beginning of your political sadhana. In that uncer-
tain twilight there had been misgivings in my heart and I had hesitated to accept you for what you are now. . . . Today you are revealed in the pure light of the midday sun which does not admit of apprehensions. . . . Your strength has been sorely taxed by imprisonment, banishment and disease, but rather than impairing these have helped to broaden your sympathies. . . . You did not regard apparent defeat as final: therefore, you have turned your trials into your allies. More than anything else Bengal needs today to emulate the powerful force of your determination and your self-reliant courage. . . . Let Bengal affirm in one united voice that her deliverer’s seat is ready, spread for you. . . . Long ago . . . I sent out a call for the leader of Bengal who had yet to come. After a lapse of many years I am addressing at this meeting one who has come into the full light of recognition. My days have come to their end. I may not join him in the fight that is to come. I can only bless him and take my leave, knowing that he had made his country’s burden of sorrow his own, that his final reward is fast coming as his country’s freedom.\textsuperscript{102}

Even the poet’s vision and homage could not dispel the sense of failure and frustration which may have filled Bose as he felt the disparity between the call for unity which Tagore sent out and the divisions within Bengal and India which Bose could not eliminate. Tagore, as usual, saw the dangers, and suggested a solution, unity behind Bose. But neither could bring it about. Although both had pride in Bengal’s past and hope for her future, they saw grim sights around them. Tagore was to die within two years, while Bose was to seek new avenues to action and India’s freedom outside his native land.

\textbf{POSTSCRIPT}

The beginning of World War II changed the political situation in India and Bengal significantly. Positions on the war effort determined, to a great extent, the kinds of activity the government of India was willing to allow each political group. Strange matings occurred. Once the Soviet Union was in the war on the Allied side, the CPI surfaced and quickly changed its line from “imperialist war” to “people’s war.” M. N. Roy also supported the war effort and was suspended from the Congress for his stand. He transformed his small group, the League of Radical Congressmen, into the Radical Democratic Party. The Congress Socialists and the Forward Bloc, on the other hand, were adamantly against supporting the war unless the British were ready to
hand over power to Indian nationalists. The Congress was torn between the two positions, with Nehru eager to join the fight against fascism but unwilling to do so without major concessions from the government. Prodded by the Congress Socialists and embittered by the shortcomings of a British offer made during the Cripps Mission in 1942, the Congress finally began the Quit India movement. This involved individual civil disobedience, mass action in some areas such as Midnapur district in Bengal, and acts of violence and sabotage often planned by underground Congress Socialists.103

The Muslim League and the Bengal Ministry supported the war effort. Fazlul Huq, perhaps seeking to have a position more independent of the Muslim League and eager for improved communal relations in Bengal, brought the downfall of the league–Krishak Party ministry and formed a new ministerial alliance, the Progressive Coalition, in 1941. Huq wrote to Jinnah in December 1940:

It is far from my intention to bring about a disruption in the Muslim League. . . . My only desire has been for peace, because I feel that unless there is unity among all communities on the principle of give and take, there will be no constitutional advance and no prospect of a better India than we know at the present moment.104

It is difficult to understand what motivated Huq’s changing positions and alliances. The Progressive Coalition included the Krishak Party, the Forward Bloc section of the Congress formally led by Sarat Bose, a scheduled caste group, and the Hindu Nationalists led by Shyama Prasad Mookherjee. There were 5 Muslims and 4 Hindus in the new cabinet, 8 of the 9 lawyers by training.105 The coalition might have been a step toward improved communal relations in Bengal if its members had worked together more effectively and if tremendous outside pressures had not been applied. Jinnah took the formation of this ministry as an attempt to ruin the Muslim League. He visited Bengal and made considerable efforts to insure its prompt dissolution.106 Khwaja Nazimuddin, who had been a member of the inner circle of Huq’s earlier ministry, became the leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party spearheading the opposition. Natural disasters, the 1942 rebellion, the growing strength of the Muslim League, and the disfavor of the government of Bengal contributed to the fall of the Progressive Coalition in
1943. It was replaced by a Muslim League ministry headed by Nazimuddin and H. S. Suhrawardy.\textsuperscript{107} It should be noted, however, that even before the collapse of his ministry in 1943, Huq had been privately dickering with Jinnah about dissolving the Progressive Coalition and returning to the Muslim League fold.\textsuperscript{108}

Early in the tenure of the Muslim League ministry, Bengal suffered one of the worst famines in its history. It has been blamed on profiteering food distributors and speculators, the governments of India and Bengal, a poor administrative and distribution system, and the Huq and Nazimuddin ministries. The ministry struggled on through this crisis, but became so weak in 1945 that it was defeated in a vote in the assembly and Lord Casey, the Australian governor of Bengal, temporarily suspended parliamentary government.\textsuperscript{109}

Subhas Bose decided, probably in 1940, to take advantage of the war situation to promote India's struggle for freedom. On January 17, 1941, Bose slipped out of his house and by car, train, plane, and foot secretly made his way to Afghanistan and then to Berlin. During World War II, he worked with the Axis powers against those who he said were enslaving India, the British. From Europe he traveled to Southeast Asia in 1943. With the assistance of the Japanese, he formed a provisional Indian government-in-exile and an army, the Indian National Army (INA), composed of captured Indian prisoners-of-war and fought with the Japanese against the British in Burma.\textsuperscript{110}

Bose died in a plane crash in 1945 as he was trying to flee from the victorious Allied forces.\textsuperscript{111} After the war, the government of India tried some leading members of the INA, but the trial became a cause célèbre and several prominent lawyers joined the defense committee, including Jawaharlal Nehru.\textsuperscript{112} Gandhi wrote in glowing terms at that time about Subhas Bose. "Netaji's name," he said, "is one to conjure with. His patriotism is second to none. His bravery shines through all his action."\textsuperscript{113} Bose became a greater hero in death than he had been in life. Demonstrations for the INA prisoners were a factor in making the British anxious about controlling the country, and they strengthened their determination to quit India.\textsuperscript{114}

In the brief period between the end of World War II and the granting of independence to India and Pakistan, there was a growing polarization between the Muslim League and the Congress. The Muslim
League made rapid progress in gathering support during the war years, and the 1946 elections demonstrated that the league had so broadened its base that it could now claim to speak for most of the Muslims in India. The Krishak Praja Party had fallen apart and Fazlul Huq had gone into temporary eclipse.

The Muslim League in Bengal led by H. S. Suhrawardy, who was ably assisted by Abul Hasem, won virtually all the Muslim reserved seats in the 1946 provincial elections and Suhrawardy became chief minister, forming a Muslim League cabinet with only very minor Hindu support. Serious communal disturbances broke out in Bengal following the league's "Direct Action Day" in August 1946, the most famous of which was the Great Calcutta Killing.¹¹⁵ This latter incident and riots in Noakhali District in Eastern Bengal persuaded many Hindus that they could never endure a permanent Muslim-majority government after British rule ended.

At the center, there were negotiations over possible constitutional changes which proved fruitless until the new Labour Government in London announced that British rule would terminate in 1948, and that Lord Mountbatten would be the new viceroy empowered to carry through this transfer of governmental authority. Once Mountbatten had decided that no federal system would work, he pressed for the partition of British India and persuaded Congress leaders Nehru and Patel that this was the only way out of the impasse. In Bengal some Hindu and Muslim leaders, including Sarat Bose, Kiran Sankar Roy, H. S. Suhrawardy, and Abul Hasem advocated an independent and united Bengal. This made sense to many Muslims, since they would be the majority in such an independent entity, and Jinnah is said to have given his blessing to such a move. Mahatma Gandhi, who opposed the partition of India as the destruction of his life’s work, also gave some verbal support to the movement for a united Bengal.

But after the riots of 1946, many Hindus in Bengal were unwilling to accept a Muslim-majority, united Bengal. A section of the Congress in Bengal and the Hindu Mahasabha organized a majority of Bengali Hindus to demand the partition of Bengal into two separate provinces, even if there was to be no partition of India. Communal antagonism was at flood level and could not be resisted. Sardar Patel supported the demand for the partition of Bengal and wrote to Sarat Bose that the
latter had become isolated from his Hindu brethren. The efforts for a united Bengal failed, and British India was officially partitioned into the independent nations of India and Pakistan on August 15, 1947. Bengal was split into the Hindu-majority area of West Bengal in India, which included Calcutta, and East Bengal, later called East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{116}

The Congress and the Muslim League took office in the two new nations. In West Bengal, those Bengali political leaders most closely allied with the Gandhian leadership controlled the BPCC and the government of the state for two decades following independence. These men included Prafulla Ghosh, Dr. B. C. Roy, Surendra Mohan Ghose, P. C. Sen, and Atulya Ghosh.\textsuperscript{117} They were aided for this long period by the inability of leftist forces, including Socialists, communists, and members of the Forward Bloc, to ally. Sarat Bose made an attempt to rally the leftists under one banner at the end of the 1940s, but he failed.\textsuperscript{118} There continued to be considerable resentment against the Congress and the government of India which the leftists were finally able to take advantage of in the 1967 and 1969 elections,\textsuperscript{119} and the Congress hold over the state was finally broken.

In East Pakistan, the Muslim League came to power under Khwaja Nazimuddin, who with Jinnah's assistance gained preeminence over H. S. Suhrwardy in the Bengal branch of the league shortly before independence.\textsuperscript{120} But in East Pakistan as well, there continued to be resentment against the national party and the government. A temporary alliance between the two political groups headed by H. S. Suhrwardy and Fazlul Huq capitalized on this feeling and crushed the Muslim League in the 1954 general elections held in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{121} These were the first elections conducted in that country, and they demonstrated that Bengali Pakistanis would have to be given more autonomy, economic assistance, and a greater share in the rule of Pakistan if the nation were to hold together.

Some Bengali Hindus have created a regional version of the nationalist past. They would claim that Bengalis made decisive innovations in the movement—for example, the beginning of Noncooperation during the Swadeshi period. Later, however, the Gandhians gained control of the movement and the Bengalis were exploited in the interests of North Indians. A few insist that Subhas Bose, not Gandhi or other Congress leaders, won independence for India and that the demonstra-
tions during the INA trials were the critical factor that made the Brit-
ish determine to leave India.\textsuperscript{122}

In the regional version of the past shared by some Bengalis, Mahatma
Gandhi is the chief antihero. He is blamed for the Bengalis’ decline
within the movement, for the partition of India, and for the vanishing
of Bengal’s favorite son, Subhas Bose. Many politicians, especially
those who aspire to national eminence, say kind words about Gan-
dhi.\textsuperscript{123} But there is an underground or street culture in Calcutta which
utilizes numerous references to Gandhi and the Gandhians made in vile
terms.\textsuperscript{124} Some of Bengal’s outstanding men of letters, including Nirad
C. Chaudhuri and Dr. R. C. Majumdar, are more critical of Gandhi
and his legacy to India in their version of the past than are most writ-
ers from other parts of India.\textsuperscript{125}