

MUZAFFAR AHMAD, THE KAKA BABU OF INDIAN COMMUNISTS

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MUZAFFAR AHMAD

Beginning of the First World War in 1914 and the subsequent development in Russia culminating in the Communist Revolution of 1917, the Communist activities became familiar in the world. The formation of the Third Communist International directly boosted the current and many colonized countries found communism as a viable alternative to fight away the imperialism and Capitalism in the midst of economic crisis and the war. Nationalism, whether it is secular or religious, was not sufficient to address the poverty and the grievances of the peasants and working classes. It was particular in India, where the nationalism often intertwined with religion and the leaders sided with their own communities , undermining the real objective. Communal riots in different part of the countries in the nineteenth twentieth centuries also couldn't solve the issues pertaining to the freedom of the country. On the other side, the national leaders without having any knowledge of the economic crisis only longed for political freedom, that also was facing a communal threat. It was in this context the intellectuals thought of uniting the peasant s and working class in communist lines and the communist party was formed at Kanpur on 26 December 1925, under Hasrat Mohani who was the Chairman of Reception Committee. The Conference was presided over by Singara Velu Chettiyar from Chennai. Chettiyar was also a social reformer and scientist and a Congress man who already had left the party. The Conference was attended by Muzaffar Ahmad from Kolkata, S.V Ghate ,who was elected as the first General Secretary, K.L Joglekar, Baba Santokh Singh, Mohammad Hasan, Kameshwar Rao, Krishna Swami Ayyankar and others representing various provinces and cities. Muzaffar Ahmad, who had been released from jail on health grounds before the completion of his tenure, directly came to attend the Conference. However, the Indian Communist party had

formed a bit earlier, out side India at Tashkent, on 17 October 1920, soon after the Second Congress of the Communist International. In this conference Hasrat Mohani had participated as a representative.

The Communist party was firstly an organization of urban intellectuals who fed up with the existing political movement dominated by the rich people, stood for the welfare of working class. These economically distressed and politically dissatisfied groups were disaffiliating themselves from the established political methods to combat colonialism. They supported the socialist principals which they found was bringing swift changes all over the world. Muzaffar was one among them. Though these people were from traditional back ground , now represented a break with the past and were absorbed into the current of international and local radical socialist tendencies created by the post war mass upsurge, material hardship and growing contact with the world of labour.

Muzaffar Ahmad, born on 5 August 1889 at Musapur, in the remote of island of Sandwip, in the Bay of Bengal . His father was Mansur Ali and mother Chuna Bibi.¹ Muzaffar was one of the many who travelled to the city in search of colonial education. In that time as the agrarian income was not sufficient to meet the both ends, the people used to migrate to the towns in search of colonial education and jobs in the industrial and business sectors. Muzaffar's father Mansoor Ali, because of his poor condition couldn't send him to a distant school. So he admitted him to a mosque where he studied the basic tenets of Islam under a maulavi. He also studied Bengali language from the Child School (Sishu Shikya) of Pandit Madan Mohan. Then he joined a madrasa to study Arabic and Persian. Muzaffar was fond of Bengali and Persian literature. He wanted to study further, but the demise of his father shattered all his hopes. He asked his brother Maulavi Maqbul Ahmad, a petty teacher, who also was not in a position to help him. He left his house seeking a job, thus saving enough to continue his education. A Hindu court peon took pity on him and paid him money for travelling in a steam ship. He landed at Noakhali main land and enrolled in a Madrasa. After few months he travelled to village in Bakherganj district where he stayed with a Muslim peasant family teaching Bengali to the children of different age groups. His brother Maqbul came there and took him to their home at Sandwip, with a promise that he would be allowed to study further.

In 1906 he joined at the age of sixteen or seventeen at Kargil high School in Sandwip town. Though he was senior in age, his proficiency in Bengali earned him the favour of the teachers and the students. He was fond of reading books, particularly Bengali literature. He also read Bankim Chandra Chatterji's novels including that of Anantha Mutt, which was anti Muslim in nature, but he admired the style and language of the novel. His grasp over Bengali, led Muzaffar to the world of literary productions and generated an ambition in him to become a writer. In 1910 he moved to Noakhali District School for appearing his Matriculation Examination and finished secondary education from this school.² From Noakhali he began to write articles and the first one appeared in *Prabasi*, a leading Calcutta based journal. The lucidity and elegance of Muzaffar's writing earned him reputation among the Bengali writers. Two years later he wrote

an article in the English journal *Modern Review*, with the title, “A Successful Mussalaman Student” which was the story of one Ubaidullah, from Sandwip, who was the first Graduate from a European University. The Bengali version of the article was soon published in *Prabasi* and Muzaffar was further appreciated by Bengali men of letters.

He migrated to Calcutta where he studied Persian literature but failed in the examination, though he maintained his passion in Persian, and a little bit in Arabic. He also tried to read Urdu books, but Bengali was the only language that he could write profusely. Muzaffar was basically a nationalist, taking interest in Swadeshi movement. When, in Naokhali, he tried to buy the more expensive Indian made cloth, despite his poor background, though foreign cloths were easily available in the town and many adopted foreign cloths as a fashion. He took interest in the economic programmes of the nationalists, while the Hindu revivalist ideology of Bengali Badraloks alienated him. He stayed away from both, the Bengal anti partition Movement, and the Muslim movement in favour of it. The anti partition movement was interpreted as the work Hindu land lords to maintain their hold over the Muslim peasants in the East Bengal area. Muslims, despite the Hindu character of the movement using Hindu symbols, supported the movement, though small in number. Muzaffar, as a devout Muslim during this period, didn't support it due to its communal colour. But he took interest in the boycott of foreign goods campaign. He also used to attend meetings guided by the vision of a political Islam, demanding special privileges.³

After the first world war Kolkata became the hot bed of national politics. After the annulment of the partition of Bengal, the Muslim politics became more active against the loyalists and the Congress movement. Using of Hindu symbols and Hindu religion as the rallying point in the anti partition movement, Muslims thought of uniting themselves and Muslim intelligentsia became more active in their own anti British sentiments. However, the unity achieved between Congress and Muslim League after the Lucknow Pact 1916, both the communities united in a single platform demanding self government and or complete freedom. Two personalities from Kolkata, Fazlul Haque and Moulana Azad represented the views of the Muslim League and Congress respectively. Later the Khilafat and Non Cooperation movements also provided a boost for the united action against the British.

Anti Colonial political Islam now dominated the world of the urban Muslim intelligentsia and Muzaffar entered Calcutta and he developed closer and increasingly deeper links with the wider mainly Muslim, middle class intellectual circles. At the same time, the youths of urban intelligentsia displayed vigorous political interests that more youths from different communities joined the nationalist revolutionary networks and acts of individual terror against European administrators and their Indian collaborators. Muzaffar from his student life onwards was well acquitted with the group as one his class mates was imprisoned for his revolutionary activities. The Calcutta University, Presidency College and other important modern institutions and also the Madrasas became the hot bed of revolutionary activities.

At Kolkata , Muzaffar Ahmad enrolled as a student at Bangabashi College for a pre-graduation course. This time it was not easy for a poor or Middle class Muslim to get a seat in a college or boarding since all the colleges were owned either by the government or by the loyalists who considered Muslims as anti British. Besides, the poverty also prevented them to get room or a place to live. Here the Bengali Muslim Literary Society in which Muzaffar was an active member in later years, accommodated him. The society (Bangeeya Musalman Sahitya Samiti) was aimed at popularizing Bengali literature among Muslims. The office of the society was near to his college and he also adjusted his stay nearby the office with a family, where he stayed for four years. He was also familiar with the shared lodgings since many of his friends stayed in such accommodation.

Bangabashi College was one of the largest colleges encouraging the students to engage in socially oriented activities. It had a debating Club, a Drama Club, a society for the support of the poor students and a night school for disseminating education among the local working class people. Unlike some other institutions, the college admitted Muslims, but their number was very few. Muslims , because of their backwardness and poverty often failed in the pre-graduate examination and Muzaffar also couldn't turn the plates. He stopped his education when he failed in the examination. Though Muzaffar was only a student for two years, he never left the College Street because of his attachment with the Literary Society. He also became attached with a book store owned by a nationalist Bengali Badralok man. The book store was famous for the nationalist literature and the police put an eye on it because of the allegation that it keeps banned literature. This environment, integrally connected with anti colonial and national forms of political consciousness , increased Muzaffar's ambivalence towards national politics.

Muzaffar Ahmad himself gives the character of the Terrorist movements, active in Calcutta under Hindu Badralok : "Considering my mental condition in the second decade of this century, and the romance that lay in the terrorist movement, it was not possible for me to join the terrorist revolutionary camp, but there were certain obstacles in the way. The terrorist revolutionaries drew their inspiration from Bankim Chandra Chatopadhyaya's Anantha Math. This book was filled with communal ill will from the beginning to the end. The fundamental message of the book lay in Bankim Chandra's invocation *Vande Mataram*. The song contains the lines:

"Thou, as strength in arms of men
Though, as faith in hearts, dost reign
And from fane to fane
Thine, Oh, Goddess
For, though hast ten armed Durga's power...."⁴

Muzaffar asks: "How could a monotheist Muslim youth utter this invocation? No Hindu Congress leader was able to understand this. The terrorist revolutionary movement in Bengal was definitely anti- British, but it was also a Hindu revivalist movement; its aim was the restoration of Hindu rule."⁵ Later there was change in this outlook when the jailed revolutionaries got an

opportunity to read Marxist Leninist literature and many of the revolutionaries joined the Communist Party of India: says Muzaffar.⁶

Interest of Muzaffar was, however, in the literature. He became active in Bengal Muslim Literary Association. He made it a secular one, extending its membership to everyone who interested in literature, despite their religion, though the name of the society remained Muslim. The Association grew in the hands of Muzaffar and he could contact with a number of literary luminaries of Bengal. At the same time he also took interest in socialism and Communism and his friends, Abdu Rezzaq Khan and Abdul Halim joined with him in the socialist path. Without any income it was not easy for him to live comfortably. He had to work as a Madrasa teacher for long, and later as a clerk in a slaughter house, as translator in home department, helper in the Government press and finally a full time journalist.

Suchetana Chattopadhyaya writes: Muzaffar's work in the literary society transformed him into a prolific writer and facilitated his later return to political journalism. The subjects he chose and the debates he participated in, reflected the gradual shifts in his own intellectual and political positions. The larger political developments played a key role in changing the content of his writings. As a student in Noakhali, he was inclined to politics. After the Lucknow Pact of 1916, when Hindu Muslim unity was very much in the air, he attended 'all kinds of political meetings including a protest rally demanding freedom of political prisoners. Muzaffar was also part of the audience that had gathered to listen to the speeches made at the Congress and Muslim League conferences held in the city in 1917. He knew political figures linked with the Literary Society who were also prominent Muslim League and Congress activists. This connection may have encouraged and enabled Muzaffar's access to these forums.'⁷

Muzaffar participated in the discussions on gender questions from an Islamic point of view and highlighted the freedom given by Islam to women and how the socialism is represented in the religion. He stood for the advancement of Muslim community through interpreting the religion in modern sense. In his article on Al Ghazzali, the Muslim thinker of twelfth century, published in *Bangeeya Muslamam Sahitya Patrika*, he stressed the saint's stimulation of free thinking. He also advocated female education and equal participation of women in social and political activities. Muzaffar started an educational project establishing a minor School in Sandweep with the aim of imparting education to his natives. Through his *Muslamam Patrika*, Muzaffar and his friends aimed at disseminating the history and civilization of Islam to the other communities, who were mostly unaware of it. The journal published in Bengali language attracted the attention of other communities who also became writers and subscribers in it. Many Bengali literati took interest in the revolutionary nationalism of the journal and enriched its library by their own contributions of literature. The journal published articles on communism and this attracted the readers particularly the young Muslims to communism. The whole office of the journal behaved like a party office where every member of the association was attached to it. Gradually Muzaffar turned to communist politics. Muzaffar's leaning towards communism was also strengthened by his association with the labourers in the Kolkata harbour. The working class segment of the area was mostly people from his native place and mostly Muslims who were hard pressed by brokers. In 1915 he served as a Madrasa teacher in Kidderpore (Khidrpur), situated in the port area, where he contacted with the workers. The condition of the area was very pathetic that the unhealthy environment and poverty caused epidemics and high death rate. After the World War the

situation became more horrible that the people turned to looting and attacking the granaries of the Hindu Zamindars creating riots. Exploitation and abuse by brokers and ship owners encouraged the workers to start trade unions in the area. Exposure to working –class conditions and hardships now made Muzaffar to realize the reality of situation. This prompted him to enter into active politics and oppose the rule of colonial capital, and involve sharp divergences from the politics of mainstream anti-colonial nationalism. Here are his own words: “In the tussle that had been going on in my mind between politics and literature, politics triumphed in the end. I have already decided to dedicate myself to some cause; and this was the reason why I became a whole time worker of Bangeeya Muslim Sahitya Samiti. At the beginning or 1920, I decided to make politics as the profession of my life. It was since 1916 that I had been attending meetings assemblies and demonstrations.”⁸

Muzaffar , the Communist

As observed by Suchetana Chatopadhyaya, “it was in the years immediately following the First World War (1914-19) that Muzaffar Ahmad’s politics was transformed. The change in direction was rooted in his encounter with left radicalism, a new political option emerging out of the complex interaction between class conflict, social location and political agency in a climate of mass post war upsurge.”⁹

As described earlier the Communist Party of India was founded on 17 October 1920 at Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. It was Manabendranath Roy (Narendranath Bhattacharya) who took the lead in founding the party. He has been a member of the revolutionary party, Anushilan Samiti of Bengal. He was sent to the foreign countries in search of arms. He visited Japan, China, California where he visited Sir Stanford University of Palo Alto. Here he married Miss. Evelyn Trend and they visited different places in America. Mr. Roy had contacted with German authorities who promised him to arrange arms for creating anti- British revolts in India. From Mexico, the German embassy paid him a large sum of money for the anti British activities. He was behind the founding of Mexican Communist Party, the first Communist organization outside Russia. By now he left the militant nationalism and joined Communism. Lenin invited him to Moscow and he participated in the Second Communist International (1920). Lenin admired him as the “Symbol of Revolution in the East.”¹⁰ When Roy represented Mexican Communist party in the Communist International Abaninath Mukherji (Dr. Shahir) represented India. Under the leadership of Mr.Roy, the Communist party of India was formed at the Indian House in Tashkent nominating Mr.Muhammad Shafiq as Secretary.¹¹ Besides Roy, the party had only six members- Mrs.Evelina Trent Roy, A.Mukherji,his wife Rosa Fitingof, Muhammad Ali (Ahmad Hasan), Muhammad Shafeeq Siddiqui and Acharya Prathivad Ayyankar.

The militant and revolutionary movements in and around Kolkata made Muzaffar Ahmad close to working class movements. His distaste towards the loyalist position, assumed by Congress leasers was clear during First World War, when large numbers mainly from Bengal had been interned on charges of trying to subvert the British war efforts. The refusal of the loyalist Congress leaders to officially congratulate Rabindra Nath Tagore after he had renounced his knighthood in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre was also noticed. The process was associated with the heightened interest in social ideas following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The success of the Russian revolution gave inspiration to the revolutionaries. From 1918,

Muzaffar worked as the assistant general secretary of the Muslim Literary Society, and resided in its office till 1920. Qazi Nasrul Islam, this time was a soldier in the 49 Bengali regiment, came to stay with Muzaffar, when the regiment was disbanded in 1920. Nasrul was a poet and revolutionary. They published a sheet paper called *Navyug*, under the proprietorship of AK. Fazlul Haque, an advocate. They wrote inflammatory articles on masses, working class and their grievances and need to unite and strike. Qutubuddin Ahmad, Pabitra Gangopadhyaya, Makhan Lal Gangopadhyaya, Kazi Abdul Wudud and Muhammad Shahidullah were his other friends. All joined in the office of the literary society. *Nav Yug (Nabajug)* became a political mouth piece supporting anti colonial activities. Though *Navyug* had to face the banning by the government, Muzaffar did his best to maintain the journal with a moderate voice. Unfortunately he had to leave the journal, when its owner Fazlul Haque transferred the ownership without consulting him and the workers. Then Muzaffar worked with Muslim Publishing House and edited its organ *Muslem Bharat*, but it was short lived. Muzaffar made an attempt to start a daily by establishing a Company. His students at Madrasa supported him in the endeavour, but the money required for the company was mainly met by his friend Kutubuddin, who also was a left activist.

Muzaffar found more time to read books on communism and the developments going on in the world. The works of Lenin like, *Can the Bolsheviks retain State power?*, *Left Wing Communism –An infantile disorder* and *People's Marx* were among them. Muzaffar also by seeing the repressions by the British, and banning the vernacular press turned towards socially aware radical journalism. Some book sellers smuggled the banned books on Marxism for Muzaffar and his friends. Though Muzaffar kept away from Khilafat and Non Cooperation Movements, he often participated in the meeting and wrote articles supporting it. His friend Nasrul actively supported it by composing poems and participating in the processions. Articles appeared in *Navayuga* against the atrocities committed by the British on the activists of the movements. However, he showed a slight interest in the Khilafat when it took up the case of the working class and their grievances. It was the more radical Muslim trade union leaders and activists who enabled Muzaffar participate directly in politics through workers' organizations. In 1921 he became acquainted with one Kutubuddin, who was a leader of Pan Islamist and leader of Khilafat, Non Co-operation and workers' movements. Kutubuddin was also close with Abul Kalam Azad and his publications *Al Hilal*, and *Al Balagh*. Kutubuddin gradually became interested in Communism and began to read books on Marx and Communism. Kutubuddin also was a disciple of Jamaluddin Afghani, who visited Kolkata during 1880s and he had promulgated the idea of the unity of Pan Islamism and Indian Nationalism, both stood against imperialism. After the success of Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 Kutubuddin was fully inclining to Communism.

While writing in *Navyug* Muzaffar used to attend workers' meetings. His association with intellectual and labour circles, showing interest in Bolshevism, generated in him to learn more. He studies labour ideologies and their problems and how Communism had united the labour class. By the end of 1921 he was convinced that, class should be the basis of his activity. With Nasrul's support, he gave serious thought to the idea of setting up Communist organization. As Muzaffar moved closer to working class politics, he increasingly saw the possibilities of social transformation by way of proletarian uprising represented by Bolshevik Revolution. His ideas were initially propagated among the familiar and easily accessible circles and political networks,

trade unions of working class and intellectuals located in and around Kolkata. He continued to regard the peasants as crucial agents of social reformation.

Now Muzaffar was giving greater attention to the Bengal peasantry and making a detailed attempt to theorize their conditions in Marxist terms.¹² His interest in Communism and activities connected with working class and peasants convinced him of the need to start a Communist organization. He began to reject national and Islamic ideological approaches to politics. Nasrul Islam and Kutubuddin Ahmad shared his concern. Besides, Nasrul and Khutubuddin, Muzaffar was joined by his friends Abdu Razzaq Khan and Abdul Halim and Abani Chaudhari and Muhyaddin Chaudhari. Muslim Literary Society became the meeting point of these Communists. Meanwhile one Nalini Gupta, a revolutionary came back to Calcutta after his stay in England and Russia for six years. He came as a representative of M.N Roy. At Calcutta in December 1921 Nalini met Muzaffar and Nasrul Islam to start a communist organization in affiliation with the Communist International. Being an unworthy person Muzaffar left him. He also got news that Nalini was not sent by M.N.Roy to start communist party, but to contact the old revolutionaries. Nalini had to return by contact only with some khilafatists and Non Cooperators. What Nalini did for Muzaffar was that he gave the name of Muzaffar as a representative of India to Communist International. Muzaffar was made the member of the Tashkent CPI.

Muzaffar and Nasrul Islam contacted their friends in Muslim Literary Association and many khilafatists and congressites and distributed to them the communist booklets. Many youths came supporting communism. Muzaffar frequently contacted with MN Roy and introduced his new friends to him. Bhupendar Nath Dutta, who was a revolutionary connected with some secret society, and Jibanlal were among them.

As a youth of 31 years old, Muzaffar had now acquired political experience and he is no more an experienced man. He had contacted with eminent leaders of Communism and has become its central figure of the socialist nucleus in the city. Bengal Muslim Literary Society now became the centre of Communist activity with Muzaffar and Nasrul as leaders. They were familiar with revolutionaries and workers alike and there were many government officials who also helped them informing the developments in government circles against socialists. It was a postman who informed Muzaffar that the police were opening his mail regularly. Muzaffar was contacting regularly with M.N Roy and Bhupendranath Dutta and imported communist literature in large scale and distributed it among the youths. Vanguard, journal published by M.N Roy from Berlin was brought in large quantities to Bengal. Since Muzaffar was a part of Anti-colonial literary circle and had access to periodicals and journalists, he also managed to influence some radical anti imperialist Muslim Vernacular organs. As advised by Roy, the Muslim organ *Moslem Jagaat* was transformed into a communist organ. There were a number of socialist journals published by Badralok revolutionaries also. Muzaffar kept in touch with them uniting all the literary activities in a planned manner. Nasrul's *Dhuma Kethu* was perceived as the most Bolshevik among the journals. The Labour Union came with an Urdu mouth piece called *Mazdoor* in 1925 which was the first labour journal in Bengal professing socialist sympathies.

After the success of Bolshevik revolution the anti imperialist organizations like Irish Sinn Feiners, Ghadar revolutionaries comprising Indians living in North America, Mohajirs (Muslim religious exiles who left India in protest against British rule and Pan Islamists united forgetting

their differences. At the same time the British authorities fearing the menace of Bolshevism, strengthened their intelligence. The formation of Indian Communist Party at Tashkent also had bewildered them. By now the Bolshevik message has reached at different parts of India and major centres witnessed agitation against the British Government . One such anti British Conspiracy to overthrow the British was hatched in Kan pur, which later became birth place of Indian Communist party. The British court declared eight including Muzaffar as accused. In the absence of others, case was pushed against Shoukat Usmani, Muzaffar, S.A Dange, and Nalini Gupta. The crime against Muzaffar was that he handed over letters from M.N.Roy to the conspirators. In May 1923 Muzaffar was arrested and was given a punishment of four years of rigorous imprisonment and sent to Gonda jail.¹³ The government couldn't stop Muzaffar from his communist thoughts. His first colleagues, though in disarray after his arrest, gradually came together again while Muzafar was still in jail. During the time of arrest, the life condition of Muzaffar was not secure. Shortage of money, attempts to encounter the influence of nationalists and the surveillances by the police made the conditions precarious. Even after his release the police kept him under vigilance by searching his political contacts and post boxes. When he was invited for AITUC conference at Lahore the police strictly watched his movements. He had to leave his lodge due to failure of remitting the rent and had to live with his friends.

Following Nalini Gupta's visit a direct link was established between M.N.Roy, based in Berlin, and Muzaffar Ahmad. Letters exchanged between the two reveals their urge for a more concrete effort and strategy to strengthen the communist move in India. By this time Muzaffar sent letters to Roy as secretary of Bharat Samyatantra Samiti (Indian Socialist Association). Roy had invited Muzaffar to Europe for a direct discussion. The latter's illness and police surveillance on his movements followed by swift arrest prevented such a meeting. Roy mainly concentrated on advising Muzaffar to send able recruits for training in Europe, receive and distribute literature sent to India, and send report on political reports. Muzaffar did his duties promptly with his own opinions. Along with Muzaffar Abdul Halim, Abdu Razzaq Khan, and Shamsul huda were also co-opted as CPI representatives. They were helped by Philip Spratt, a leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), who, along with Benjamin Francis Bradley, was sent by their own party to help the Indian communists in their attempts at party-building and trade union activities.

Muzaffar's effort to build a network which could be distinguished from the type of anti colonialism associated with Congress and Khilafat couldn't take off. Instead, reformist agenda of Swarajists made greater progress and influenced Middle Class Bengali Muslims and Bhadrakal alike. Though not unsympathetic to left ideas, most of the nationalists displayed a syndicalist and reformist tendency emphasizing class conscious unionization; they discouraged workers to go beyond these formation to launch a revolutionary collective. (Suchethana Chattopadhyaya, 133). When Muzaffar was arrested Mr. Roy expressed his concern and contacted Jiban Lal Chatterjee and Kutubuddin to continue the activities, but because of the strict intelligence of the police his attempts were not successful. In the absence of Muzaffar many of his friends left the communist activities either joining nationalist politics or even stopping the political activities.

By this time a Communist Conference was organized at Kanpur under Satya Bhakta and Hasrat Mohani. Muzaffar was not in favour of this conference by saying that it has no recognition from the Indian Communist party of Tashkent. Besides, Muzaffar was not favouring Singara Velu

Chettiyar, who was elected as the President of the Kanpur Communist party for his alleged apologizing in the British court to save himself from the imprisonment. M.N Roy also criticized the way the conference was arranged. To Muzaffar the Communist Conference was “a disgraceful affair.”¹⁴ The immediate political gains from the conference were limited that the party could claim only 200-300 members. A central committee of the Communist Party of India was formed at the conference. Despite his uneasiness regarding the ill defined politics of the conference and its leading organizers, agreed to being entrusted with the Bengal section with Calcutta as its centre.

Another Communist party was organized by Gopala Krishna Chakrabarty, Dharanikanta Goswamy and friends at Kolkatta. It had no connection with the Kanpur Communist Party. Muzaffar notes that these party was intended to get money from the Communist International. Those who attended its conference criticized M.N Roy for not sending them money.¹⁵ Muhammad Ali, the member of the Foreign Bureau of the Communist party wrote to Dharanikanta Goswamy that it is not proper to have different communist parties and asked to cooperate with Muzaffar in organizing the party.

BIRTH OF THE PARTY

By 1925 friends of Muzaffar again joined to form a political organization of their own with the name the Labour Swaraj Party (Bharatiya Jatiya Mahasamiti Shramika Praja Swaraj Dal/1, November 1925). Kutubuddin Ahmad, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, Kazi Nasrul Islam, and Shamsuddin Husain were the pioneers of the party. This made easy for Muzaffar when he came out of jail in September 1926 to restructure his old activities. Now Muzaffar again became the leader of the new socialist groups that signaled the appearance of a new political interest with communist ideals. The organization gradually was overwhelmed by communist ideals, introducing Marxist theoretic formulations and the organization was named as Workers and Peasants' Party (WPP). A new executive committee elected at Krishna Nagar affirmed the unity between the Communist Party of India (Tashkent) and the independent socialists. Naresh Chandrasen Gupta was elected as the President, Atul Chandra Gupta became Vice President and Muzaffar, Nasrul and Soumendra Natha Tagore, were executive members. Kutubuddin was joint secretary along with Hemanta Kumar Sarkar.

The new party maintained its connection with CPI(Tashkent)and the international communist movement through contacts in London, Paris, Berlin and Moscow. Officially affiliated to the Comintern in 1930, its representatives attended the activities of India. George Allison, Philips Spratt and Ben Bradley, the British communists visited India in this connection. CPI Foreign Bureau at Paris sent George Allison to Kolkatta in November 1926 under the false name Donald Campbell, who through Muzaffar contacted with trade union workers. Within no time Allison was arrested convicted and deported. Ben Bradley also visited Muzaffar and remained at Kolkatta for one year. Spratt stayed with Muzaffar to assess the activities of the communists in the area. J.W Johnstone, the representative of US Communist party also visited Kolkatta and attended the

strikes and meetings of the workers. Then came Jack Ryan, a member of Australian Communist party to coordinate the works of AITUC. Both of them were arrested and deported.

The CPI, in May 1927, stressed for complete independence and criticized the bourgeoisie for demanding for Dominion Status. It stood for working with the other classes within the national movement to secure full freedom. Muzaffar, an architect of this strategy argued that, unity with other forces couldn't be based on the abandonment of principles. In the Bhatpara conference of WPP held in 1928, Muzaffar submitted a report in this regard. For this a resolution, 'Call to Action' was adopted. Though, at that time this strategy was against the principles of the Comintern, its sixth Congress adopted it to strengthen the anti colonial agitation.

Meanwhile, two Indian communists Gopen Chakrobarty and Shamsul Huda from Kolkata visited Moscow and after their studies there, they were sent back to India to assist the communist party activities. When the foreigners and others became active in Kolkata, the strength of the WPP increased with clear representation of the communists. Now Soumyendra nath Tagore, a relative of Rabindranath Tagore, after his differences with Congress came in touch with WPP through Muzaffar, Halim, Shamsul Huda and Nalini Gupta. He became the secretary of the WPP in 1927. He went to Berlin to pursue his studies there and attended the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928. The circulation of *Langal*, later renamed Ganavani, the mouthpiece of the WPP, attracted the revolutionaries and nationalists alike. The articles of Muzaffar were read with curiosity and more people from all classes became attracted to communism.

WPP worked against the communal issues, that frequently occurred in Calcutta and other places. Through writings and speeches the communist leaders stood for Hindu Muslim unity and interpreted the riots as a class struggle maintaining that the riots are often the creation of the land lord tenant issues or capitalist and workers problems. They fought to lessen the exploitation through strikes and other means. The CPI formed at the Kanpur Conference worked side by side with WPP and strict orders were issued by both parties that the communist in no way would be attached to any communal organization. Even Hadrat Mohani, one of the founders of the Communist party was expelled from it for keeping membership in All India Muslim League. The Kanpur CPI was looked with suspicion by M.N.Roy and Muzaffar. Later as advised by M.N Roy the Kanpur CPI dissolved in WPP.

The communists also extended their hands to the problems of peasants and fishermen community. Muzaffar and Halim, both hailed from country side wrote letters to their old friends to organize the peasants. One Faizuddin took the programme of the WPP into the rural masses while another member of the party, Mr. Hemant Kumar tried to organize a fisher folk's conference and to expand the works of WPP into the rural areas. Muzaffar, along with Goswami and Spratt toured Dacca and surrounding regions in order to support the peasant struggles going on there. He spoke for the peasants who were threatened by eviction from their lands. They thought of organizing a peasant league in Nadia district, but the police aborted this attempt. Mymen Singh now became the hotbed of peasant agitation and in 1930 a strike of peasant

became a violent there. The peasant conference held there demanded that no eviction of the peasants from land would be effected without compensation, no usury and, no indirect taxation. However the Bengal Peasant League was formed in Kushtea. It spread its branches to different parganas.

The party met different trade union leaders also. Muzaffar spoke at the conference of the Railway workers' strike and the conference of AITUC at Kanpur. When a strike started at Keshoram Cotton Mill. Muzffar and members of WPP, Gopan Chakrobarty, Halim, Philip Spratt and Mani Singh rushed to the place and supported the strike. There the WPP formed a union with Mani Singh as secretary. When the capitalist including G.D Birla tried to crush the strikes dividing the workers on communal lines and infusing communalism, Muzaffar and his friends warned the strikers that they should stick to the class struggle and not to indulge in any kind of communalism that will make divisions among the workers. Nasrul started a school in the industrial area with the help of Hemanta Kumar, with the aim of contacting with the workers. Halim was entrusted the duty of uniting sea men and different trade unions. They planned a general strike in the port area and, despite the police disruption, the strike was successful. The workers of different trades such as textile, jute, port, seamen and scavengers are now united under the banner of WPP. Suchethana Chathopadhyaya writes: " Communists mounted a campaign to build labour solidarity against imperialism and capitalism. In 1928 Spratt and Muzaffar while addressing sailors stressed the need to boycott the Royal Commission on Labour. The WPP inspired by the CPI, held processions and meetings to introduce a culture of proletarian internationalism in Calcutta. On May Day of 1928 , one thousand workers led by Spratt, muzaffar, Kishorlal and others marched from Mirzapur Street to the Calcutta Maidan, where workers from other unions joined them. A large trade Union meeting was held. A workers' meeting to mark Lenin Fifth Death Anniversary was also held on 20 January 1929.Red banners at the venue displaying the Communist slogan "Workers of the world, Unite!" alarmed the colonial authorities. "¹⁶

Thousands of workers under WPP leadership marched to pandal of annual session of the Congress in December 1928 at Park Circus in Kolkata, occupied for two hours and demanded the adoption of Purna Swaraj (Complete Independence) as the Congress policy. Many pro left Congress people also joined with them. Muzaffar, Halim, Goswamy, Huda and other WPP leaders led the march. Mazdur hukumat ki Jai (Long live the Workers' State) were their slogan. Nwxt WPP mobilized thousand of workers to march against the Simon Commission on 19 February 1929. It was in this procession the slogan Inquilab Zindabad (Long Live Revolution) was prominently displayed for the first time in India. Thus by concentrating on the workers, the WPP created the condition for the emergence of a left political culture in the city and its suburbs. The youths from different communities also found their place in WPP expanding its influence and by forming a separate youth front the Young Comrades League (YCL) they strengthened the workers strikes and activities. This youth domination reflected the first organized attempt to curb the nationalist influence over younger members of the intelligentsia and to introduce them to the

communist alternative. The works done by Muzaffar, Halim and others through the WPP thus generated the possibilities of creating a communist base in Bengal. The Comintern's encouragement in this direction also acted as a major stimulus.

In November 1928 the WPP decided to convene an all India conference of the workers and peasants at Albert Hall Kolkata. The conference was a turning point in the history of Indian Communism. Representatives of communist dominated socialist groups from Bombay, Bengal, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh joined together and chalked out programmes on all Indian basis. The preparations to launch a communist mass campaign encouraged Muzaffar to draft a new CPI constitution in early 1929. In 1931 Muzaffar stated that the new draft was an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the constitution adopted earlier in 1927 when CPI was very weak in terms of membership and organization.

Because of hard work and financial stringency Muzaffar's health became weak and doctors confirmed that he was suffering from Tuberculosis. At the same time the party was suffering from want of finance. Most of the senior workers were also met with different diseases because of their restless organizational works. Muzaffar himself couldn't afford the injections needed to treat his illness. His bankrupt condition made travel for organizational purposes difficult. However, he with difficulty attended conferences in and around Kolkata. He had already wrote to M.N.Roy regarding the financial difficulties that he was forced 'to beg at door of friends'. Even for his own daily food Muzaffar had to depend others. Muzaffar also wrote to Soumendranath who was in Berlin to send money, but, despite his promises no money reached. Repression by the authorities posed a continuous impediment to the activities of the communists and WPP. Muzaffar and his colleagues were under constant surveillance that made contacts outside Bengal extremely difficult. Connections with the Comintern and the CPI members of other parts of India repeatedly obstructed by mail interceptions. Searches, arrest, deportations and suppression of activities through legislative and judicial measures became order of the day. To prevent the inflow of communist literature and communications from abroad counter measures were strictly enforced. All this was to culminate in the Meerut Conspiracy case and the consequent weakening of the WPP.

The Meerut Conspiracy case was the fabricated conspiracy of the British government to curb the menace of the growing communism in the country. It was alleged that the communists tried to expel the British Government from India, conspired an India wide strike by the workers as ordained by the communist international. In 1933 the sessions Court at Meerut sentenced Muzaffar Ahmad, S.A Dange and Shoukat Usmani and twenty four others for stringent measures including transportation for various periods. Muzaffar was sentenced for transportation for life. On appeal, the Allahabad High Court reduced the transportation for three years. Muzaffar, due to his illness, was however, released in 1934. The arrest of Muzaffar and other comrades brought the activities of WPP extremely difficult. Financial worries, increased state repression and the parting of the ways between the communists and many of the independent socialists on ideological and organizational grounds, made the party unsustainable. Still the organizational

basis was maintained, coordinating the defense of the Meerut accused, correspondence with the Comintern and other such duties under the leadership of Halim. Unfortunately Halim was also arrested for unpaid rent of the WPP office for one year in 1930. After his release the party was strengthened again with the help of many supporters and meetings were held at different places for collecting money for defending the Meerut case. Signs of communist revival were apparent, when Halim, Ranen Sen and Somnath Lahiri renewed organizational efforts through the Kolkata committee of the CPI. In addition to organizing the WPP, the communists were also making independent efforts to organize the CPI as the vanguard working-class party. On 22 December, 1928, the second day of the All-India Conference of the WPP, Muzaffar Ahmad, Abdul Halim and other members of the CPI held a separate meeting of the CPI in the committee room of the Albert Hall in order to organize the CPI on a sound basis. The members of the CPI met in Calcutta from 27 to 29 December, 1928. The conference which was held in semi-illegal conditions, resolved to organize and strengthen the CPI along with the WPP and issued a manifesto entitled *Manifesto of CPI to All Workers* in order to emphasize this necessity. This Manifesto called upon the workers to 'join the Communist Party', consider it as their own and 'help forward the great cause of the exploited and oppressed throughout the world. The CPI re-established connections with Comintern and paved the way for expanding further, the communism in Bengal.

The prospects of the WPP had become in peril in the policy change of sixth Communist international held in 1928. It put forth the union of all communists detaching connections with other organizations. WPP was criticized for having alliance with other socialist organizations. On 2 December 1928 the Communist international drafted a letter to WPP, which singled out the party consisting of largely petit- bourgeois intellectuals connected with the system of landlordism, usury or straight away capitalist interests. The letter took long time to reach the WPP office. The tenth plenum of the Executive Committee of Communist International, 3 to 19 July 1929 directed the Indian Communists to break with the WPP. Now the party dissolved itself automatically. The Communists of WPP joined with CPI. Now the communists became more active through CPI. More people from different circles joined the party.

In 1930 the new leaders of the CPI broke with the past and brought about a change in the position of the party in order to adapt it to the Colonial Thesis of the Comintern, when they became aware of its foil implications. The over-zealous communists of India, interpreted the Colonial Thesis in a completely mechanistic way and thus pushed the Comintern line, which already had a 'left-sectarian' slant, to further left'. In 1930 the CPI adopted a thesis entitled *Draft Platform of Action of the Communist Party of India*. The *Draft Platform* considered 'the complete independence of India by the violent overthrow of British rule' to be the first and foremost object of the CPI, but at the same time it launched a full-scale and blistering attack upon the Gandhian leadership of the Congress and especially upon the left elements of the Congress like Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and others.

Since the formation of the 'Calcutta Committee' of the CPI early in 1931, its leading members like Abdul Halim, Ranen Sen, Somnath Lahiri, Saroj Mukhopadhyay, Abdul Momin, Shamsul Huda, Dhramvir Singh, Manoranjan Roy, Nityananda Chowdhury, Muhammad Ismail, and Bankim Mukheji, were repeatedly arrested on various grounds and they had to serve different terms of imprisonment. In 1934, the British government on 23 July, declaring the CPI, illegal gave a fatal blow to the party. Now the party was accustomed to secret and underground work and functioned in a semi-underground condition in order to avoid police hunt and repression. But these obstacles could not deter the CPI from continuing its anti-imperialist political activities and its work of organizing the workers in movements and strike-struggles. Through this network of activities the party continued to flourish and grow in strength.

While the CPI was carrying its strict anti Congress line, the Comintern came with a shift in its policy towards colonialism. The Comintern brought with the policy of united front against imperialism and asked CPI to join with the Congress. Though the party was strictly against such a move it had no option except to accept the verdict of the International. Thus in 1936 the CPI joined with Congress. In 1938 Muzaffar and five others became the delegates of Bengal Congress session. They also became the ex officio members of the Congress Provincial Committee. At the same time Muzaffar and others were keen to develop the party by strengthening it among the workers and peasants. They organized continued strikes among the workers who now largely joined with CPI. The revolutionaries who were deported to Andamans were now released and a grand reception was accorded to them by the Communist dominated parties under Soumyendra Nath Tagore. The reception named 'Andaman Day' took place on 14 August 1937.

By this time M.N Roy visited India and met the Congress leaders who showed affection to him as told by himself. But the British government arrested him as a part of Kanpur Conspiracy case in which he was one of the accused. He was sent to jail where the rigorous punishment made him sick and he suffered from many a disease. However, he wrote articles on the communist ideals and they were smuggled out of the jail and published in different names. In 1936 he was released and he continued his alliance with Congress. Though some had written that, this alliance was at his own will and against the decision of the Communist International is not correct. Actually the Comintern was asking the Indian Communists to join with the Congress and Roy and Muzaffar were following this dictate. Though Roy wanted to continue supporting the Congress, for Muzaffar this relation had become a souring one. When Roy created Radical Democratic Party within Congress, Muzaffar's support was lukewarm. Formerly he had criticized Roy for his attempts of imposing the decisions of the Comintern without prior consultation and without informing him the problems in building the organization. Roy had already been expelled from the Comintern in 1929, so there was no question of corresponding with him on that basis. Subsequently he was expelled from CPI Tashkent also. Muzaffar's friendly contact, however, remained and he always affirmed that it was Roy and the early Muhajirs, who were the first to

identify with Communism, rather than those like himself. The alliance of CPI with Congress no more remained cordial.

Between 1938-40, the Communist Party had spread to all 28 districts of undivided Bengal and party members became thousands. Trade Unions and Kisan Sabhas developed in large numbers. The task of re-organizing the party continued throughout the fifties. The party began to emerge as a national party both inside and outside the legislature. Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad was at the centre of all these activities. He was the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Committee of the party from 1940 to 1943. Throughout his life Muzaffar Ahmad remained in the leadership of the party.

As observed above, the party became politically strong with the admission of the revolutionaries who flocked to the party. The leadership gradually went to the new generation and Muzaffar's role as the central figure of the party became minimized. The new leadership followed the footsteps of the early leaders including that of Muzaffar. Unfortunately the advance of the Communists was seriously affected by the partition of Bengal in 1947. The Congress government banned CPI without any concrete reasons and Muzaffar was arrested and imprisoned. Communists were persecuted and their position in the independent India was as not better from that of the British India. After his release he advocated the formation of a new communist organization independent of Moscow and Peiking, when the party was in the verge of a division on account of their leaning either with Russia or with China. He again faced imprisonment for the last time in the same decade. In the later years he supported the Marxist faction of the Communists (CPI(M)).

Muzaffar Ahmad breathed his last on 18 December 1973. Anil Biswas writes: Just one day before his death ,on 17 at 9.PM I visited him at Kimber Nursing Home. When I was about to depart Kaka Babu (Muzaffar) told me: "You Should come tomorrow at 7 AM. I have something to talk with you." Before I fell asleep I prepared mentally to visit the Nursing Home ,morning at 7 AM sharp, because Kaka Babu will be offended if I reach there even at 7.15 AM. But Kaka Babu never saw the next morning. He passed away early morning at 4 AM¹⁷

Thus, left the world, the founder of Communism in India. Affectionately called 'Kakababu' (uncle) by party comrades and sympathizers, he was a true communist in every sense of the term. His way of life and functioning was a role model for other communist followers. Kakababu was an extremely thoughtful person. He had deep knowledge in various subjects, particularly he had an intense attraction towards classical literature. He used to study for about 7 to 8 hours every day. He had huge collection of books. Even he used to get books from abroad. The major share of his collection of books and old documents are preserved in Muzaffar Ahmad Pathagar(library) at Ganashakthi Bhavan, 74A, A. J. C. Bose Road, Kolkata. His major work is *Amar Jiban o Bharater Communist Party* and *Qazi Nasrul Islam Smrithi Katha* both written in Bengali. The first one has been translated into English with the name

Myself and the Communist Party of India by Prabhas Kumar Sinha. Besides, he had to his credit a number of articles written in various journals.

Muzaffar was married off as a teenager to stop him from running away, though marriage couldn't keep him tied to a family life. We have no further information regarding his family, since he gives only a scanty reference of that in his memoirs. It seems that his wife and only daughter remained in his home town at Sandweep and he sent meager amounts to the family and even this was not regular because Muzaffar himself was out of money at times. After partition Sandweep became a part of East Pakistan and contact with family became difficult. After the creation of Bangladesh, he visited his home town in 1972, and returned after a few days, despite the invitation of his daughter to stay on. His interest was to live with his comrades.
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