

**EAST INDIANS IN THE POLITICAL AND  
ELECTORAL PROCESSES  
OF GUYANA**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This Dissertation entitled "**East Indians in the Political and Electoral Processes of Guyana**" submitted by **TUSHAR KANT**, Centre for American & West European Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of any other University.

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## **PREFACE**

For whatever reasons--be it the end of Cold War, rigours of economic globalisation process, etc.--multi-ethnic societies are faced with increasing political demands and mobilisation along the racial and ethnic lines, sometimes with violent consequences. Understandably, scholars and policy-makers alike are engaged in studying and analysing the phenomenon of the rise of ethnic and racial identities and devising ways and means of channeling them into democratic process.

The Caribbean country of Guyana is a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society with Blacks and East Indians constituting the two predominant groups. (For the sake of uniformity, the expressions Blacks and East Indians have been used throughout the study).

Electoral and political process and to an extent the economy of Guyana, unarguably has been shaped by the racial and ethnic divide ever since 1953 when for the first time elections for the legislature took place on the basis of universal adult suffrage. Significantly, the East Indians, who constitute the largest ethnic group and since 1960s a clear majority of 51 per cent of the population, have for most of the period been denied access to political power. It was not until 1992 when the Indian-based and supported People's Progressive Party (PPP) could succeed in winning an electoral majority with the help of some smaller parties

and civic groups. The electoral performance way repeated is the 1997 elections.

Guyana is an interesting case for the study of ethnicity and race-based politics. Since the 1960s, competition for political power essentially between the Blacks--who constitute 43 per cent--and the East Indians has continued unabated. Three important aspects are notable in this context :

- i) competition for political power and electoral supremacy has survived the context of colonialism and independence;
- ii) It has also survived the colonial economic policies and post-independence strategies of development premised on both 'socialism' and market-oriented economic policies; and
- iii) In terms of external dynamics, race-based competition for political power has also survived to a degree the context of Cold War and the post-Cold War.

It is imperative to note that until the 1950s, Guyana had had a powerful multi-ethnic and multi-racial trade union movement that comprised of mainly workers in the Bauxite mining and sugar estates. The rise of labour movement had also facilitated the formation of the class oriented, socialistic PPP under the multi-ethnic leadership. The introduction of universal suffrage in 1953 saw the victory of PPP and formation of government under the prime ministership of Cheddi Jagan.

Why did the experiment in a multi-cultural democratic and socialist politics come to an end? How did context of Cold War

affect the process? Jagan and his PPP won consecutive elections in 1957 and 1964, but were denied access to office. What were the fears of the Colonial Office and why did Great Britain decide to grant independence with the Black Forbes Burnham at the helm?

Post-Independence political process evolved along racial lines. Even economic development strategy and policies were influenced by ethnic and racial considerations. Ironically, both the main parties viz., the People's National Congress (PNC) and PPP were committed to 'Socialism'. Both the parties, however, relentlessly pursued their racial agendas often with disastrous consequences for the country's economy. Indians suffered the most since most often economic policies were designed to undermine their economic position besides politically marginalising them. Several aspects of the race-based politics are notable for the study of political process in Guyana.

- i) Racial divide between Blacks and Indians very nearly corresponds to the urban-rural divide as well as agriculture-industrial divide;
- ii) Reinforcing the division is the pattern of residential clusterings that has made acculturation and the sense of unity difficult to attain; and
- iii) As noted above, economic policies under Burnham made race relations a zero-sum game. Post-Burnham and post-'socialism' process of economic structural adjustment in its own complex ways is producing political consequences of far-

reaching implications for both democracy and ethnic-racial ties in Guyana.

How was such a system sustained and what factors eventually began undermining it? How did the opposition PPP participate in the electoral process after 1966? How did the East Indian-based political opposition evolve? Were there no efforts to form class-based, multi-ethnic political parties and platforms? How did the regime's economic policies affect the Indians? These are some questions that bear significance in the present study of the position and behaviour of East Indians in the electoral and political process of Guyana.

By 1980s, Guyana was in the grip of an authoritarian regime that had begun excluding from politics even the non-Indians such as the urban lower-class blacks. With the economy in total shambles, there was little to sustain the regime and consequently, the government was forced to implement very harsh structural adjustment policies.

Whatever may be the factors--the end of the Cold War, external pressures etc. -- Guyana had its first free election only in 1992. The PPP's return to power under very difficult economic conditions, with a leadership committed to a democratic multi-cultural Guyana raise few more questions. How is the process of structural adjustment affecting the race relations.? How has the

economy been shaped since 1992 and have efforts at racial reconciliation borne fruit? Besides, there are questions relating to political and constitutional reforms.

The present study makes a modest attempt to describe and analyse the political and electoral process in Guyana, focussing particularly on the role of East Indians. The introductory Chapter delineates the racial and ethnic profile of the Guyanese society, traces the types of political organisations and parties that were formed especially by the East Indians prior to independence; and highlights their electoral behaviour and voting pattern in the elections prior to 1966. The chapter also traces the genesis of race-based politics in Guyana prior to 1966.

The second Chapter focuses on the political economy of East Indians; the then PNC government headed by Forbes Burnham implemented several discriminatory policies and programmes which evolved a patronage system wherein the PNC government started allocating resources to keep Blacks satisfied and punish its political opponents--the East Indians--in the agricultural sector and government services. Separate sections in the Chapter deals with the sugar industry, the rice sector and the educational and professional mobility experienced by the East Indians especially since the 1970s.

The years between 1966 and 1992 was the most turbulent phase in the political history of Guyana when the PNC, headed by Forbes Burnham acquired power by unfair means and turned the



democracy into a farce. The third Chapter, in its first section presents an account of the electoral and party competition between 1966 and 1992; the Burnham regime by debarring East Indians in power sharing only deepens the racial and ethnic cleavages. Thus, the political response of East Indians during the period and their opposition to the regime has also been focused upon in the second section of the Chapter. After the 1992 election PPP was back to power which implemented certain measures to bridge the gap of racial cleavage. Hence, the policies and programmes of PPP in power has been discussed in the last section of the Chapter.

The fourth Chapter delineates and discusses the racial and ethnic reconciliation. In the first section the dynamics of racial reconciliatory politics since the 1980s has been has been discussed. This is the period when constitutional and electoral reforms were initiated and later continued when PPP government returned to power; and the second section deals with these constitutional measures. The last section of the Chapter covers the 1997 electoral victory of the PPP and highlights the racial animosity, which continues to exist.

The concluding Chapter presents the summary and conclusions based on the discussion and description of the preceding Chapters.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ASCRIA</b>	African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa
<b>BGEIA</b>	British Guiana East Indian Association
<b>BGLU</b>	British Guiana Labour Union
<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community and Common Market
<b>CIA</b>	Central Intelligence Agency
<b>GAWU</b>	Guyana Agricultural Workers Union
<b>GIWU</b>	Guyana Industrial Workers Union
<b>GSWU</b>	Guyana Sugar Workers Union
<b>GUYSUCO</b>	Guyana Sugar Corporation
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>MPCA</b>	Man-Power Citizens Association
<b>NDP</b>	National Democratic Party
<b>PAC</b>	Political Affairs Committee
<b>PNC</b>	People's National Congress
<b>PPP</b>	People's Progressive Party
<b>SPA</b>	Sugar Producers Association
<b>TUC</b>	Trade Union Council
<b>UF</b>	United Force
<b>WPA</b>	Working People's Alliance

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**TUSHAR KANT**

*July 21, 2000*

## **CHAPTER – I**

### **EAST INDIANS AND THE GENESIS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC POLITICS**

Social structures in Guyana are highly complex. Deep cleavages exist between different racial and ethnic groups. Divisions are sharpened not only by the racial factors but also by the political –institutional and economic productive structures. What is attempted here in the present monograph is to study of political and electoral process in the multi-ethnic Guyanese society; and how the majority East Indians have performed in the electoral political process of Guyana especially since its independence in 1966. The politics of race and ethnicity, it has been witnessed, becomes more prominent during the elections as the two predominant racial groups – the Blacks constituting nearly thirty per cent and East Indians with fifty one per cent of the total population–always compete to acquire and control the Political power by stirring racial sentiments. Racial politics has always guaranteed mass support for politicians. Hence, race has become an important factor in the organisation of popular political participation displacing other factors such as class. Race and ethnicity, are therefore even responsible for the growing conflict–political, economic and social, in the multi-cultural Guyanese society. Though policies and programmes of the two major political

parties – People’s Progressive Party (PPP), and People’s National Congress (PNC) – have ‘socialist’ influence both dependent heavily on ethnic mobilisation. PPP appeals chiefly to the East Indians and PNC to Africans. Besides these two major racial groups, other racial such as Amerindians, Chinese, other racial groups such as Amerindians, Chinese, Portuguese and mixed, also inhabit but their percentage is smaller. However, these groups, too, are not immune to racial appeals.

### **RACIAL AND ETHNIC PROFILE OF GUYANESE SOCIETY**

What is the demographic and occupational profile of various racial and ethnic groups? What were the early cultural and political organisations in Guyana prior to its independence? How seeds of ethnic and racial political mobilization over sown and the pattern of racial politics that emerged? How policies of colonial administration and the context of cold war intensified racial animosities and widened the gulf between the blacks and the East Indians?

Important as these questions are, the present chapter deals with several key issues. The first section deals with the demographic and social profile of Guyana. The section also deals occupational and residential pattern of various communities. The second section presents a brief overview of various cultural and political organisation and the orientations and representativeness of these organisations. The last section of the chapter covers the

aspects of political mobilisation along ethnic and racial lines, prior to Guyana's independence. The formation of race based political parties of the colonial administration and the context of Cold War, all worked to polarize the political spectrum.

The composition of main racial groups in Guyana is follows<sup>1</sup>.

<b>Race</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Population</b>
African	43.0%	32,8950
East Indian	51.0%	3,90,150
Native Amerindians	4.0%	30,600
Chinese/Europeans/others	2.0%	15,300
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7,65,000</b>

Each ethnic group has participated in the economy in its peculiar way and occupied different power position in the society.

East Indians are predominantly rural, constituting most of the labour force on sugar plantations and small peasantry. They had replaced the Blacks on sugar plantations after the abolition of slavery in 1833. The East Indians later emerged as the largest group of peasants cultivating rice. Efforts were made to confine them to agricultural occupation. Moreover, they were exempted, by and large, from compulsory education laws that applied to all other racial groups. Only during the third decade of the twentieth century situation has somewhat remedied. Without a legally enforced access to education, East Indians became non-competitive

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<sup>1</sup> *Hand Book of the Nations* (Detroit, Michigan, 1987), edn. 7, pp. 240-44.

in most non-agricultural areas of the economy. also, ownership of land resulted in their upward mobility. During the twentieth century many of them invested in small businesses. The pattern of discrimination against East Indians in the public and private urban sectors impelled them into the professions, particularly medicine and law, those who managed to acquire a secondary education, and who had the money to afford higher education at overseas universities. Through business activities and professional status, the East Indians climbed into the middle and upper classes. They even replaced the Portuguese among the group of the largest entrepreneurs.

The cultural development of the East Indian population took on a character that was quite distinctive. East Indians have remained firm in their commitment to Hinduism and Islam. While there has been some conversions to Christianity among the group, the number of converts has been proportionally small<sup>2</sup>.

Blacks had been brought in as slaves from Africa. Although slavery was abolished in 1833, the bulk of the group is still located within the lowest socio-economic category. Black workers are concentrated mainly in urban areas and in mining industries and many maintain ties with black villages some of which continue to engage in subsistence farming; but the majority have been transformed into dormitory villages for urban and semi-urban

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<sup>2</sup> Percy C. Hintzen, *The Cost of Regime Survival Racial Mobilization, Elite Domination and Control of the State in Guyana and Trinidad* (Cambridge, 1989) pp. 25-26.

villages. A career in teaching, promotion within the teaching profession and access to civil service occupations became the mainstay of Black upward mobility in the twentieth century. Over the years, Blacks advanced from the most menial levels in the civil service to positions from which they now almost totally dominate and control it. Later, after the independence, top-level colonial officials were replaced by the local Blacks.

Most Black workers remain among the labour force. However, the Black middle class, consisting of government officials and professionals – which has merged and developed a sense of common identity with a smaller groups of coloureds (mulattos) – has evolved into a most strategic and powerful constituency in the politics of Guyana<sup>3</sup>.

The English were at the apex of power, privilege, prestige, status and wealth during the colonial rule. They were dominant in administration, business and plantation. The decline in the White population between 1960 and 1970 can be attributed to the repatriation of British functionaries after the independence<sup>4</sup>. The Portuguese occupied a position just below the British. They did not participate directly in running the country like The British. Their wealth and political influence declined considerably following the Guyanese regime's socialist programmes in 1971<sup>5</sup>. The other racial

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p – 23.



groups are Amerindians, who are socially, culturally and geographically isolated from mainstream society<sup>6</sup>. The Chinese have become part of the urban middle class with occupations as small businessman, civil servants and professionals. The Chinese have maintained some form of racial affinity by the formation of Chinese associations. The cultural activities of the group have been revived in the wake of the twentieth – century arrivals<sup>7</sup>.

In the colonial history of Guyana there was a group of mulattos located in the status order just below the Whites. During the twentieth century, many of them worked as middle-level functionaries in the government and in private sector; they were also to be found among the local professionals. Over the years, mulattos have become less distinctive as a group, having developed, by and large, a common identity with the upward mobile Black middle class. A few of the lighter skinned upper-class mulattos have become identified with the Creole whites<sup>8</sup>.

The preceding discussion describes generally the ethnic and racial profile of Guyana including relative proportion of leading racial and ethnic groups in the total population. Cleavages are, however, run much deeper within each group or community for instance diverse religious, sects, beliefs that characterised the East Indians similarly class and income difference are even more evident

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p – 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p – 27.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p – 26 .

among the Blacks. New ethnic groups among the mulattos and varied mixtures of race and colours make Guyana and truly complex multi-ethnic society.

Confining the discussion to political dynamics particularly to East Indians, the next section traces the evolution of political activities and organisations among the East Indians including initial attempts at building a trade Union movements along the lines of income and wage, social organisation that were somewhat conservative in their perception and finally the formation of organisations which were patently ethnic in nature.

### **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS AMONG EAST INDIANS**

Dating to the period before its independence in 1966, Guyana has had several social and political organisations of East Indians, which are more of exclusivist in their nature. The most important cultural and religious organisation for Hindus in Guyana remains Maha Sabha. The Gandhi Youth Organisation is the youth arm of the Maha Sabha. The United Sadre Islamic Anjuman is one of the most important Muslim organisation in the country<sup>9</sup>. These organisations have had a role of political and social awakening, both before and after the independence. In the year 1919 a distinctly political organisation the East Indian Association had

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p-71.

come into existence. It was founded to bring about the political education and improvement of the conditions of East Indians in the colony.

In 1936, Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA), a sugar estate workers union with a majority of East Indians came into existence. Its leadership had comprised a 'creolised' group of East Indians torn between the attraction and benefits of Western culture and their native East Indian culture. Its membership at the time was put at 10,000, recruited largely from the sugar plantations. In the foundations souvenir issue of the official organ, the hope was raised that it would become a Guyanese national movement<sup>10</sup>. On its inception in 1937, it had appealed to the British Labour Party for financial assistance. The presidential address of February 1939 had ended with a call for solidarity with "the struggle of the workers all over the world", and in a deft turn on Marxist theory had forwarded the view that because they were the closest to the means of production, the sugar workers were as qualified as any other to be in the vanguard of the nationalist struggle<sup>11</sup>.

In a memorandum to the Moyne commission – constituted in 1938 to examine the social and economic conditions in Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Jamaica, the Leeward Island, Trinidad and Tobago and the Windward Island and matter

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<sup>10</sup> John La Guerre, "The Moyne Commission and the West Indian intelligentsia" *Journal of Commonwealth political Studies*. (Leicester) vol. IX, no.2, 1971 p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150.

connected therewith, and to make recommendations<sup>12</sup>. MPCA urged that the greatest obstacle to the development of unionism among the sugar workers was the high rate of illiteracy and absence of any representative in the legislature. They will have to depend on the charity of the state, which was apathetic to their grievances. The MPCA recommended to the Moyne Commission to introduce adult suffrage, an elected majority in the legislature and the abolition of financial qualifications for representatives, who were to be paid by the state. The elected representatives of the Association found to be unrepresentative because they were elected on an extremely narrow franchise. The member of the Association even pleaded before the commission to nationalise the sugar industry so that the labour could get the share of the profit on sugar to which they were entitled.

Thus the MPCA as trade union strived hard not only for the betterment of the condition of sugar planters comprising mainly of East-Indians but also for political rights which the East Indians were debarred to exercise so far. The Association firmly believed that social, political and economic rights can never be enjoyed under a foreign rule; hence it acted as the vanguard of national movement.

In the late 1940s was formed the Political Affairs Committee (PAC). Its founder and leading light was an East Indian dentist, named Cheddi Jagan. Jagan founded a new Union, the Guyana

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 135ff.

Industrial Workers Union (GIWU) in 1946 to present a radical alternative to conservative trade union leaders representing East Indian plantation workers. Thus, to the middle-class leadership of lower class mobilisation efforts by Cheddi Jagan, undertaken through trade union activity, was added a progressive ideology. These conjoined to produce nationalist mobilisation. Cheddi Jagan's radicalism and his willingness to confront the pillars of authority in support of the rights of workers made the GIWU an immediate success. He was quickly able to use the union as a basis for political mobilisation in support of demands for radical change<sup>13</sup>.

Summerising the previous to sections it becomes clear that East Indians very much like other racial and ethnic groups have had the beginning of electoral political participation along democratic pluralist lines.

The prospects of both democracy and pluralism received a set back in the 1950s with the introduction of universal suffrage. Character of the leadership, personal ambitions, socialist rhetoric of the multi-ethnic PPP of the 1950s, colonial policies to shape the process of self rule leading to self rule and the international context of Cold War, all contributed to the exacerbation of ethnic & racial divide prior to 1965. The next section also details how the East Indians lost both the support of colonial government and how the

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<sup>13</sup> Hintzen, n.1, p. 33.

PPP from being a multi-ethnic party was reduced to being a predominantly East Indian political party.

### **DYNAMICS OF RACE BASED POLITICS PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE**

The period 1946 to 1966 is highly significant in Guyana for it witnessed the emergence of various political organisations having a close association between class and ethnicity. The period represented an important shift in both the level of popular political participation and the nature of political control on the part of the colonial administration.

In the year 1946, Cheddi Jagan, his US-born wife Janet Jagan, a white Marxist H.J.M. Hubbard and the Black trade unionist Aston Chase had organised the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), borrowing the name from the Political Affairs Committee of the then left-leaning Congress of Industrial organisations in the United States.

The appeal of the PAC crossed ethnic lines by basing itself upon a class analysis and aimed at unifying the largest body of working people in British Guiana, the working class of urban Blacks and rural East Indians. Self government and adult suffrage were the immediate political aims of the PAC, and once achieved, would provide the means through which economic and social justice could be obtained.

In early 1947, Sir Charles Woolley was appointed the governor of British Guiana. He had earlier served for many years in Ceylon, Jamaica and Nigeria. When he arrived in Georgetown, the PAC realised that elections were imminent. Here was the moment to bring their ideas to the entire community. It would be a time of testing and of opportunity. India had just been granted independence and this event had sent a surge of elation through the hearts especially of British Guiana's East Indian population.

The first election in British Guiana since 1935 was finally held in late 1947. Three members of the Political Affairs Committee, Cheddi Jagan, Janet Jagan and H.J.M. Hubbard contested the election but only Cheddi Jagan could get elected, taking central Demerara constituency which was just next to Georgetown and where there were many East Indians. He had also received considerable African support as a result of help from the capable black schoolteacher, Sydney King. It was a great moment for Cheddi Jagan when he entered the Legislative Council as the youngest member at the age of twenty-nine. The governor, Sir Charles Woolley also president of the Council, congratulated the citizenry on the 70 per cent turnout at the polls, but expressed regret "that during the elections a good deal of racial feeling was engendered in some quarters". This racism could only be a major hindrance to progress constitutionally and otherwise in the colony.

But the governor was convinced that racial animosity was not “deep-seated or widespread among the people themselves”<sup>14</sup>.

Cheddi Jagan along with the leading Black trade unionist Forbes Burnham formed the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) in 1950. Forbes Burnham was as popular among the Black working class as was Jagan among his East Indian supporters. It was a mass party representing different racial groups of the society. Burnham was the chairman; Janet Jagan, the U.S. born wife of Cheddi Jagan was general secretary, Sidney King, another Black, became assistant secretary; and Clinton Wong of Chinese background was senior vice-chairman. Cheddi Jagan was also designated second vice-chairman<sup>15</sup>. Thus it was an umbrella organisation covering all ethnic groups of Guyana.

The PPP boldly stressed on socialist reorganization of society. Meanwhile, by the fall of 1950, Sir E.J. Waddington, Professor V. T. Harlow and Dr. Rita Hinden had been appointed to a royal commission to investigate the political structure and economic capabilities of the colony. They were to make recommendations aimed at bringing British Guiana along the road to self-government.

The Waddington Commission traveled throughout the country. Its findings were published in late 1951. Among others,

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<sup>14</sup> T.J. Spinner, *A political and Social History of Guyana: 1945-83* (Boulder, Col., 1984), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



the Commission did concede that some racial discontent did exist in British Guiana. It concluded, however, that the source of the present tension would have beneficial results, for it originated in the ambitions of younger East Indians to become part of an integrated society. East Indian aloofness has now given place to realisation of their permanent place in Guyanese life and to a demand for equal participation in it<sup>16</sup>. In the end the Commission endorsed universal adult suffrage for all Guyanese citizens.

In 1953, the first elections based on universal suffrage were held. PPP garnered 51 per cent of votes and won eighteen of the twenty-four seats. In the elections, significant racial cooperation characterized the PPP campaign. In one predominantly East Indian constituency, the PPP ran the Black, Fred Bowman. To the delight of the leadership, Bowman defeated Dr. J.B. Singh who had been supported by the conservative East Indian Association. Though Bowman ran against three other East Indian opponents and their total votes exceeded his, his election still proved that a significant number of East Indians were willing to vote for a Black nominee.

The multi-racial character of the PPP and its avowed commitment to socialism, however, soon came under strain. Burnham had wanted to be the parliamentary leader of the party as well as the chairman of PPP. He challenged Jagan. For some, the personality conflict for some, acquired a racial tone. Jagan however retained the overwhelming support of the party including some

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

militant Black leaders such as Sydney King. At the PPP congress in March 1951, just before the election, one of Burnham's ally moved the motion that the leader not be elected at the annual congress but by the general council of PPP after the general election. Burnham prepared to challenge Jagan again after the electoral victory<sup>17</sup>. Although each minister was individually responsible for its post, the leader of the legislative assembly would resemble a prime minister with united power. Forgetting the joy of their multiracial triumph, a struggle for the spoils had began.

Meanwhile the policies and programmes of PPP were viewed by the colonial power with suspicion as pro-communist. By this time, domestic and international pressures were building on the PPP. Oliver Lyttelton (later Viscount Chandos) had been appointed colonial secretary by Winston Churchill in 1951. A great industrialist, who had entered political life during World War II, Lyttelton would had many problems: Mau Mau in Kenya, communists in Malaya, Nkrumah in the Gold Coast, and now, on top of the major crisis came British Guiana and the alarm expressed by the United States. The Lyttelton reports stated that the PPP was trying to use the machinery of democracy to destroy democracy and substitute rule by one party on the communist model<sup>18</sup>. The British intelligence services had reported that "riots and bloodshed would soon break out and that there was a plot to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

burn down the wooden capital. Hence in October 1953, the government was ousted, constitution was suspended, curfews and state of emergency was clamp down.

The suspension of the constitution resulted in the polarisation of ideological and personal cleavage within the PPP. Burnham was careful to dissociate himself from the more radical rhetoric of his Marxist co-leader in the party. He even supported the "non-aligned" policy in the international sphere and refrained from the anti-American posture<sup>19</sup>. At the same time, the issue of federation with the predominantly Black West Indies was also beginning to penetrate the politics of Guyana. The East Indian population in Guyana vehemently opposed to any such political union on the grounds that it was a plot to deprive them of their electoral majority. Cheddi Jagan reflected this concern and was the chief mouth piece of East Indian opposition to the idea of a federation. Contrary to that, Burnham vociferously supported federation, a position that reflected Black political opinion throughout the British West Indies as well as in Guyana.

In 1955 the intensification of these ideological, policy and personal conflicts led to a split in the PPP. Initially there were very few racial implications in the split as majority of the radical Blacks remained with Jagan while moderate East Indians departed with Burnham. Hence PPP (Jaganite) and PPP (Burnhamite) came into

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<sup>19</sup> Hintzen, n.l, p. 48.

existence in political sphere however this split was instrumental in initiating a serious racial hiatus between Blacks and East Indians<sup>20</sup>. Soon both the leaders gave up their mobilisation strategy from an appeal to lower-class sentiments to an appeal to race. In 1956, the use of racial rhetoric became so explicit in Jagan's faction of the party that all the leading Black radicals resigned in protest. With their departure the party became overwhelmingly East Indian and in turn PPP (Burnhamite) became Black dominated. To counter Jagan, Burnham also adopted racial rhetoric to mobilise his supporters.

In 1956, the governor, Sir Patrick Renison declared that elections will be held in 1957. With the election campaign, racial sentiments began dominating the scene. Politicians resorted to racial appeals. Black and East Indians were growing more agitated over just who would govern when the English left the country. In the election, PPP (Jaganite) stood triumphant, winning nine of the fourteen elected seats. This was mainly because East Indians voted *en masse* in favour of PPP (Jaganite). Realistic in defeat, Burnham promptly conceded the PPP name to Cheddi Jagan and renamed his own group the People's National Congress (PNC). The next election was planned for August 1961, and the constituency boundaries were redrawn by Sir Hugh Hallett, a retired British

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

High Court judge. Jagan denounced Sir Hugh's boundary lines as gerrymandering to give an edge to his opponents.

Meanwhile a new controversy had arisen in the PNC. Sydney King departed from the PPP in 1957 a disgusted with what he regarded as Jagan's East Indian 'racism'. He had joined the PNC to become general secretary of the party and editor of the party mouth-piece "New Nation". King now quarreled with Burnham when the latter announced that after the elections, he would immediately demand independence. The idea was intolerable to King who had nightmares of Blacks being exploited by East Indians.

King advocated a joint premiership for Jagan and Burnham after the elections. Convinced that the PPP would win the elections and that Jagan would refuse a joint premiership, King suggested partitioning the country into a Black zone, an East Indian area and a third region between the two for those who wished to live together. Stung by this completely unacceptable racist formula that none of the three parties would accept, Burnham expelled King from the PNC<sup>21</sup>.

In the 1961 elections, a new political party United Force (UF) emerged both to present the residual racial categories of Europeans, Portuguese, and Amerindians as well as economically well-off Blacks and Indians. , Led by a Portuguese businessman,

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<sup>21</sup> Spinner, n. 9, p. 79.

Peter D'Aguiar; the UF espoused a militant brand of laissez-faire capitalism, imputing collectivist motives particularly to the PPP. "Apanjat" politics-literally meaning, "vote for your kind"-dominated political mobilisation. Democratic politics had deteriorated into a conflict pitting one communal group against another. The stakes were high for the African sector. Jagan's victory in the upcoming elections of 1961 could irreversibly establish Indian domination especially since independence was likely to follow. To UF followers, Jagan's avowed Marxism threatened their property and advantageous social status<sup>22</sup>. In the elections, like in the past elections, racial differences and sectional consciousness between Indians and Africans were evoked by each parties. In the election PPP was declared victorious with 45.84 per cent of votes and 20 seats in the Assembly whereas PNC got 40.52 per cent age of votes and 11 seats; UF bagged 4 seats<sup>23</sup>.

During the election campaign, Jagan unabashedly proclaimed his socialist preferences. When he acceded to power, he not only praised Castro as one of the great liberators, but proceeded to open trade relations with Cuba. Given the context of Cold War, U.S. would have little tolerance for Jagan. The opportunity came with the constitutional conference in 1963, promised by the British Government to provide the bases for

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<sup>22</sup> Percy C. Hintzen and Ralph R. Premdas, "Guyana: Coercion and control in political change", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* (Miami) vol. 24, no.3 August 1982 p. 343.

<sup>23</sup> E.E. Mahant, "The strange fate of a liberal Democracy: political opposition and civil liberties in Guyana", *The Round Table* (London) no. 265, January 1997, p.80.

Guyana's impending independence. Pressures from the U.S., the British reneged on their promise. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a personal aide of U.S. president John F. Kennedy, provided some insights into the back room manipulation that were transpiring. He reported to the President that an independent British Guyana under Burnham would cause the U.S. many fewer problems than an independent British Guyana under Jagan. And the way was open to bring it about because Jagan's parliamentary strength was larger than his popular strength. He had won 57 per cent of the seats on the basis of 42.3 per cent age of votes. An obvious solution was to establish a system of proportional representation. After prolonged discussion, the British finally gave in in 1963<sup>24</sup>. In 1963 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reportedly fomented strikes and riots in Guyana with the purpose of overthrowing the popular government <sup>25</sup>. Ultimately the British troops had to be called to restore peace and order and the racial violence was controlled with a decision to alter the electoral system from a 'first past the post' arrangement to one of proportional representation. The decision came at the end of long and bitter struggles in Guyana, in which over 150 people had died and which almost completely polarised the population into Africans and Indians<sup>26</sup>. The independence talks were deadlocked over the question of proportional representation,

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<sup>24</sup> Ralph R. Premdas, "Guyana: communal Conflict, Socialism and Political reconciliation" *Inter-American Economic Affair* (Washington) vol. 30, no.2, Autumn 1976, pp. 67-68.

<sup>25</sup> E.E. Mahant, n. 18, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> Malcolm Crass, *The East Indian of Guyana and Trinidad* (London, 1972) p. .13.




which it was felt, would prevent the PPP from gaining a majority. The British government overtly acted to prevent further racial violence but in fact the opposition to Jagan was on ideological grounds. Thus semblance of order and new election before independence were the two condition which forced Jagan to accept constitutional change.

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In the 1964 elections, when the PPP and PNC both competed in all 35 electoral districts, and racial animosity reached its highest peak in Guyanese history, the results displayed more faithfully and even closer correlation between the size of an ethnic group and partisan voting preferences. In the 1964 elections, voting turnout was a phenomenal 96.98 per cent despite the fact that voting was not compulsory. Comparing these results with a census data in Guyana reveals the very close correlation between race and voting preference. The 45.84 per cent performance of the PPP instead of the 47 per cent, which was estimated as the size of the Indian population in 1964, is accounted for mainly by the fact the a substantial part of the Indian population was below 21 years of age in the 1960s. The 40.52 per cent of the PNC came closer than the 1961 figure in reflecting the size of the African voting bloc<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the PNC with 40 per cent of the vote joined the UF with its 12 per cent and decided to form a coalition government. Thus, of the

<sup>27</sup> Ralph R. Premdas, "Elections and Political Campaign in a Racially Bifurcated State: The Case of Guyana", *Journal of interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 3, August 1972, p. 283.

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United States, Britain, and foreign business located in the country, with the Guyanese upper and middle classes working in tandem whose political leaders had succeeded in appealing to racial sentiments, were able to secure the ousting of the socialist PPP.

In 1966 with Burnham as prime minister and with D'Aguiar, the leader of the United Force, holding the powerful portfolio of the ministry of finance, Britain granted the country its political independence. Thus a combination of racial appeal and an intense anti-communist campaign assured Burnham and D'Aguiar control of the state after the departure of the colonial power.

In sum, after the introduction of franchise in 1950s and subsequently the formation of political parties, the ethnic cooperation was replaced by hatred and political and racial confrontation. After the first election a clear cleavage emerged between the two predominant racial groups – the East Indians and the Blacks. The reason was not only the personality clash between the leaders of these two races but also the politics of colonial government. The East Indians were the greatest sufferer of this politics. Despite their majority they were debarred from power. The PNC government led by L.F.S. Burnham strove hard to ruin East Indians economically. Major policies and programmes were formulated in this direction. All the economic benefits goes to the Blacks.

In the light of these developments, the proceeding chapter focuses on the East Indian contribution in the economy of Guyana, despite all the hardships and discriminations. They, meanwhile, relentlessly opposed such policies and programmes through demonstrations and strikes led by East Indian supported trade unions. The East Indians' participation in the economy of Guyana has been discussed in three separate sections: the rice sector, the sugar industry and the East Indian educational and professional mobility.

## **CHAPTER – II**

### **EAST INDIANS IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GUYANA**

The preceding chapter has presented an overview of the demographic and social profile of the East Indians in Guyana,. It has also traced the formation of social and political organisations especially among the East Indians, highlighting that early efforts at organising the predominantly East Indian sugar estate workers into unions and organisations along secular and multi-ethnic lines. The social organisations as well, while active in the cultural and religious field did not promote and propagate an exclusivist approach. The beginning of electoral –political activities with the introduction of universal adult franchise in the 1950s saw the political spectrun get divided along ethnic lines after the ismissal of the cheddi Jagan government in 1953.

Carrying the discussion further, the present Chapter examines the structures of Guyanese economy that have sustained the racial and ethnic politics for so long. The chapter fucussing on the status and position of the East Indians in the economy of Guyana examines their economic and occupational aspects since the independence. It evaluates the agricultural policies and programmes of the L.F.S. Buruham government, and the way racial considerations. While depressing the economic position of the East Indians also caused damages to the entire economy. Separate sections – length description of sugar and rice

sectors have been made with a view to describe and identify the economic structures and policies towards the agricultural rural sector since the 1960s. State domination of all key economic sectors in the name of 'cooperative socialism' left little scope for the private sector. The last section of the chapter details how under very adverse circumstances, Indians began making headway in the educational and professional areas. Educational and professional mobility among East Indians is important to study and understand the electoral political process after 1966, and particularly the circumstances that enabled the East Indian based People's Progressive Party (PPP) gain an electoral majority in the 1992 elections.

The economic activities of the East Indians still remain largely the functions of their original immigrations and have only gradually changed in nature among the descendant communities. East Indians occupy an ethnicity-based economic niche; over the decades, indentured immigrants became rural labourer and independent farmers especially in sugarcane farming and sugar industries. Thus the areas where the immigrant Indians settled followed their occupational specialisation. Soon after the arrival of East Indians as indentured labour in 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were dispatched to the respective estates where they were to be put to work immediately. Thus with the abolition of slavery and unsuccessful attempts to employ other immigrants as labour on the sugar plantation, it was left to the East Indians immigrants to

fill the vacuum of labour shortage and check the collapse of the sugar industry. As a member of the court of policy of British Guiana stated, "Humanly speaking, Indians have been the salvation of the colony, for the continuous stream of labour that they had afforded, she has risen sphinx-like, from the prostration and ruin into which she had sunk"<sup>1</sup>. A historian Rodway said, "without immigration no sugar plantation can continue as far as can be judged no sugar plantation could remain if all our East Indians left the colony. Even were wages excessive, we need not hope for a plantation without these people, for even through some jobs might be done by others the all round work would be practically impossible"<sup>2</sup>.

What is the contribution of East Indians in the political economy of Guyana? What are the different professions pursued by the East Indians? What are the different trade unions and organisation that emerged to protect the economic interests of East Indians? How have the policies and programmes of different regimes intensified the ethnic antagonism? These were some question which are discussed in the present chapter. The first section deals with the importance of rice sector for the East Indians. The second section will focus on the sugar industry the last section profiles the educational and professional mobility among East Indians.

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<sup>1</sup> Yesu Prasad, "Indians in Guyana" in Jagat K. Motwani and other's ed. *Global Indians Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and tomorrow*. (New York, 1993), p.179

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

## SUGAR INDUSTRY

To a large extent, sugar has remained a key in the dependent economy of Guyana and continues to direct and influence the economic life of Guyana and continues to direct and influence the economic life of Guyana. Favourable performance by the industry and world sugar prices are closely linked with the governments economic programme. Since the inception of East Indian indentureship and to date, East Indian have dominated occupations in sugar industry. The sugar industry was one of the most important and familiar areas for racial and political discrimination against the East Indians.

The need for representation of Indian labour interest was partly met by the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU) and the British Guyana East Indians Association. In 1922, BGLU was registered as the first trade union in the colony. The Union's principal concern were the dockworkers of Georgetown and it also took some interest in conditions of workers on the sugar estates, and criticised the work system as too exploitative. BGLU further campaigned that the Indians be paid on the same basis as other races in the colony. BGLU, no doubt, served as an inspiration for later unions in the sugar industry<sup>3</sup>. The most important union later was the Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA) founded by Ayube M Edun in 1937. The union represented the workers in general and

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<sup>3</sup> Tyran Ramnarine, "Over a Hundred years of East Indian Disturbances on the sugar Estates of Guyana, 1969-1978: An Historical overview" in David Davideen and Brinsky Samaro, ed, *India in the Caribbean*. (Hansib/University of Warwick, 1987), p. 127.

East Indian in particular who worked in critical conditions in the sugar industry. MPCA for a short period provided an acceptable and effective medium of channeling the grievances of the Indians sugar workers. MPCA was recognized after two years of its formation by the Sugar Producers' Association (SPA).

Labour relations in the sugar estates had always been characterized by strikes and work stoppages due to the primitive conditions in which the cutters lived and toiled. When the MPCA received recognition as their bargaining agent in 1939, hopes were high for a better day. Responding to the sorry state of sugar estate affairs in 1946, Dr. J.P. Lachhmansingh and A.A. Rangela organised the Guyana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU), aimed at replacing the MPCA as the representative of the sugar workers. The arrival of Cheddi Jagan in Guyana in 1943 from the U.S. added a new dimension to labour movement on the sugar estates. Jagan first attempted to infuse some degree of militancy in the MPCA. In 1945, he became treasure of the MPCA. Jagan was brought further into the limelight when five cane cutters were killed at the Enamour sugar estate in 1948 and Cheddi Jagan and Janet Jagan led a great funeral march from Enamour to George town.

The governor, Sri Charles Woolley had set up a commission to investigate the incident, which Jagan refused to testify arguing that the investigation would be a whitewash. A royal commission was then established under the chairmanship of J.A. Venn to investigate conditions in the sugar industry. The report appeared

in 1949. Paying special attention to the fact that 30 per cent of the employees on the estate were women, the report insisted on some immediate improvements. Women driver should replace men where gangs of women were working in the fields. At specified times, they must be allowed to return home to care for their children. The Venn Commission further recommended that medical department inspect and report on housing, water supply and sanitation. Proper plots of land should be given to all regular workers for farming and growing rice. It was imperative that there " be a chance of all 'ranges' and re-housing of sugar workers by the end of 1953". The commission had been appalled by the housing problem<sup>4</sup>.

The commission urged the recognition of small specialized unions but ignored the claim of GIWU. The commission argued that workers' dissatisfaction with the leadership and policy of the MPCA should be met by a change of leadership, not a change of unions. This is how the GIWU failed to gain recognition. The massive victory of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in the 1953 general elections gave the GIWU another opportunity to press its claim for recognition. But with the suspension of the Guyana constitution the attempt by GIWU for recognition was thwarted. MPCA gained impetus from the suspension of the constitution. It became affiliated to the American directed and controlled Inter - American Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT)<sup>5</sup>. ORIT provided

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<sup>4</sup> T.J. Spinner, *A political and social History of Guyana: 1945-1983*, (Boulder, col., 1984) p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ramnaraine. n.3, p. 135.



MPCA with financial aid and elaborate propaganda equipment. MPCA was further strengthened when the multi-ethnic nationalist movement split in 1956. Dr. Lachmansingh, the most important leader of GIWU, joined the Burnham factions of the PPP. Thereafter the GIWU became largely discredited and its membership dwindled. In 1957, a rival union, the British Guiana Sugar Workers Union was formed, but lasted for only a short while. It suffered from poor leadership and in July 1959 its registration was cancelled. After the victory of PPP in the elections held in 1961, the party hinted at the need for legislation to guarantee workers the right to select their own unions<sup>6</sup>. The PPP after winning the 1961 elections set about immediately and vigorously to challenge the supremacy of MPCA on the sugar estate. In September 1961, the month following the electoral victory, the Guyana Sugar Workers Union (GSWU) was formed. It was renamed the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) the following year and was led by a prominent PPP activist Harry Lall.

Between 1964 and 1968, the sugar industry was plagued with a number of strikes as GAWU sought better living and working conditions for the workers. In an effort to arrest the situation, the government appointed a commission headed by justice Guya Persaud to examine the economics of the sugar industry and make recommendation. His report, which was accepted, recommended the discarding of the one-for-all bonus

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 136

scheme and its replacement with the profit-sharing scheme for the workers.

In the aftermath of independence, the government of Forbes Burnham had in 1971 declared Guyana as "cooperative socialist" republic which qualitatively expanded the functions of state and control of the state bureaucracy over the Sugar Industry. In 1979, the government passed the sugar levy law which siphoned off a substantial portion of the profits, leaving little or nothing for the sugar estate workers. The levy, the highest in the Caribbean, was one of the principal source of government revenues during the 1980s.

In 1975 GAWU called for two strikes. In a memorandum to the minister of finance in 1976, GAWU pointed out that the Guyana sugar workers were, the lowest paid in the Caribbean. He received only about half of what his counterparts received in Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad. The strike registered heavy financial losses - approximately G \$ 100 million in foreign exchange and G \$ 50 million in government revenue<sup>7</sup>.

In May 1976, the government nationalised the entire sugar complex, which included sugar estates and business enterprises and baptized them as state-owned Guyana Sugar Company (GUYSUCO) and Guyana Stores, respectively. The sugar levy remained a thorny issue and in August 1977, GAWU called for yet another general strike over the question of profit-sharing for the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

years 1974-76. On the day following the commencement of general strike, the parliament passed the National Security Act, which empowered the security forces to institute preventive detention of persons without trial and impose the curfew<sup>8</sup>.

The 1977-78-sugar strike seems to represent the ultimate in racial division in the sugar industry. Towards the end of indentureship, and even afterwards, the planters had considered a certain number of African labourers on the estates necessary to prevent the Indians from uniting and unionsing. During the several strikes called by the GIWU and the GAWU, the sugar authorities had gone to the African villages to recruit labourers. In the 1977-78 strike, this kind of recruitment reached new dimensions. The predominately African composed 'disciplined forces,' i.e., the army, the peoples' militia and the National Service provided scab labour in the government's attempt to break the strike. This served further to exacerbate relations between the two racial groups<sup>9</sup>.

When this strike is compared with the bauxite strike of 1979, leadership of the sugar worker pointed that race rather than politics or economic reasons was the primary factor in resolving industrial disputes in the two sectors. The government went out of the way to placate the bauxite worker, the two dismissed employees were re-employed, a commission of inquiry was immediately set up and within three weeks, all the contentious issues were resolved and the strike ended. But the same treatment

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

was not meted out to the sugar workers. The strike further crippled the economic condition of East Indian dependent on the sugar economy. Imposition of levy went on to meet the revenue needs of a government that was least concerned with investment and modernization of the sugar industry. The eventual nationalisation of the sugar industry on the name of 'cooperative socialism' meant full state domination and control over all aspects of the East Indians engaged in the sugar sector.

### **RICE INDUSTRY**

Rice was introduced by the Dutch from the Carolinas in the early eighteenth century and subsequently by the French from Louisiana in 1782. Initial attempts at rice growing failed disastrously. In 1865, sixteen acres of rice were planted by the first batch of Indian immigrants. By 1900, The production for rice was approximately 13,500 tonnes while imports of the commodity stood as about 22,230 tonnes. During the Second World War production not only rose but rice was exported also. Thus, during the Two World Wars, self-sufficiency was achieved<sup>10</sup>. The export prices were fixed by the British government during the War years. It was claimed that these prices were 50 per cent below the world price so that in effect the Indian rice farmers were subsidising the West Indian colonies during the war years at the bequest of the British government<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Prasad, n.1, p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

In the later period, especially during the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when the country was governed by PPP, East Indian participation in the agricultural sector became firmly established. The rice industry in particular was developed and was to become the third leading sector after sugar and bauxite. In the words of Dwarka Nath, "East Indians not only saved the sugar estates from extinction but also established the rice industry, making it the most important industry in the colony"<sup>12</sup>. Mr. R. Duff immigration Agent of British Guyana gave an apt description of how the Indian Immigrants had built the rice industry from scratch. "The immigrants and their descendants have spread all over the country, reclaiming places formerly lying waste and opening up new tracts of land on the creeks and river from the Corentyne to the Essequibo. With their thrifty, industrious habit and unfaltering perseverance in the face of loss by the drought and flood, they form the very beau ideal of settlers for a tropical country like this"<sup>13</sup>.

One important area related to rice cultivation was land settlement scheme implemented in 1955 when PPP was at the helm of the affairs. Governments' policies to promote agriculture particularly the diversification into the rice sector earned the PPP government the nickname of 'rice government'. Burnham later on

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<sup>12</sup> Sahadeo, Debiprashad and D.R. Budhram, "Participation of East Indians in the Transformation of Guyanese society: 1966-1979", in David Davideen and Brinsley Samaro ed. *Indian in Caribbean*. (Hansib /University of Warwick, 1987)., p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> Prasad, n.1., p. 181.

cited it as an instance of Jagan's pro-Indian social policies. It was argued that it was mainly East Indians who were given lands when the scheme were established. It was even alleged that entire agricultural programme of the PPP was partisan and discriminated against Blacks in particular. The statistics reveal that the racial composition of the settlers: 3,864 East-Indians as against 550 Afro-Guyanese<sup>14</sup>.

However, as the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) report showed, inspection of the methods of selection of applicants for lands in these schemes did not in any way give preference to East-Indians. As the ICJ remarked, *inter alia*, land settlement schemes are made for the purpose of making land available to persons prepared to cultivate them, mainly for growing rice or sugar, the Indians usually happened to be the only persons with the necessary experience in cultivation, and consequently the land passed almost exclusively to them. For this reason, there is no cause to recommend any change in the procedures for selection of settlers. These procedures do not appear to lead to or encourage racial discrimination<sup>15</sup>.

During the PPP's term of office in the 1950s, the rice industry made remarkable advances. And since agriculture was to be the base for the country's future development, the government's alternative was to direct attention towards the domestic agricultural sector. The institutional framework for the agricultural

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<sup>14</sup> Debiprasad, n.12, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-51.

sector became enlarged to facilitate efficient functioning of the sector. The government implemented an increase in the guaranteed price for both agricultural commodities. Rice Marketing Board enlarged its physical facilities for storage of rice. The rice Producers' Association (RPA), a producers' organisation, was represented on the board. Other important incentives such as duty free gasoline, or free and subsidised insecticides were given to farmers. At the same time, the Guyana Marketing Corporation was established and offered guaranteed price and marketing facilities for a number of agricultural products. Since East Indians tended to predominate in agricultural sector, these were the important factor, which contributed to their prosperity, and to the advances made by the sector.

With the change of government in 1964, the previous agricultural programmes of the PPP were abandoned, and that this caused stagnation and in some instance retardation of agricultural sector,. It is argued that the agricultural programmes after 1964 discriminated against East Indians in particular and were mainly responsible for low rate of development in the agricultural sector.

The guaranteed price for rice bought by the Rice Marketing Board was reduced. The Rice Producer Association, which happened to be a pro-PPP organization was no longer recognized as a producers' organisation, and their representatives on the Board were removed. All the incentives given (easy credit, subsidies, inputs, etc.) were removed. There was discrimination in the

granting of loans and credit facilities. There are cases where machinery used for rice cultivation and harvesting were only loaned to those farmers considered to be sympathizers of the ruling PNC party. East Indians felt that deliberate policies were implemented to discriminate against them and that though they were the ones perishing in this transformation process to feed the nation.

The Indians had built the rice industry unaided into one that became the third largest earner of foreign exchange in the country<sup>16</sup>. With the decline of rice cultivation and discriminatory policies of the PNC regime since 1964, many farmers migrated overseas; while some converted their lands into pastures for cattle.

Besides agricultural activities East Indians have a strong presence in other activities too, such as timber industry, where Indians entered as wholesaler and retailers of sawn timber. In the last fifty years, they have been able to integrate backward into the extraction of timber from the forest and into saw-milling. Extraction and saw-milling require large capital outlays and Indian family units pooled their resources together and invested heavily in the industry. Many Indian companies have remained profitable whereas the state companies involved in the same line of business had incurred huge losses. Cattle industry is another occupation pursued by the Indians since the days of indentureship. Even in the field of cattle farming, the policy till the 1960s tended to

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<sup>16</sup> Prasad, n.1. p. 181.



discriminate against East-Indians. Pig farmers who were predominantly Blacks were financed by Agricultural Bank and the Guyana marketing corporation<sup>17</sup>. There was no such policy for poultry farming and farmers of other livestock who were predominantly Indians.

When Burnham and his PNC party took power in 1964, Indians seemed to be singled out for discriminatory action. Awards of tenders for public work seemed to have been done on a basis which discriminated against Indians. Not much more than verbal encouragement was given to the development of a new industrial base since Indians were the main actors in the theatre of industrial development<sup>18</sup>.

Due to these discriminatory policies, Indians found that the basis of their livelihood was being eroded. These anti-Indian majors which were often termed as anti-PPP supporter bit into the whole economic life of the country. This was inevitable, as the economy of the country was far more integrated than the policy makers realised. Though initially Indians suffered the most, every other community and the whole country found that the hostile actions against the economic life of Indians eventually affected them as well. The economic conditions of Guyana, thus, directly related to the economic policies pursued for decades by the PNC government.

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<sup>17</sup> Debiprasad, n.12, p.153.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Prabhu Dial, "History of Indians in Guyana since 1945", in Jagat K.Motwani and other's ed. *Global Indians Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. (New York, 1993), p.189.

## **EDUCATIONAL-PROFESSIONAL MOBILITY AMONG EAST-INDIANS**

The question of educational facilities has always been a contentious issue with the Indians. In 1904 the then governor, Sir James Swettenham, had issued a circular which removed any legal sanction compelling Indians to send their daughters to school. It was argued by some that this was designed to preserve the East Indian culture from the missionary function of denominational schools. As 95 per cent schools were run by Christian denominations, the fear of conversion of the Indians from Islam and Hinduism to Christianity were entertained. This, however was not the real reason. Swettenham was acting in the interests of the planters who needed the child labour for the 'coolie' gangs for weeding and manuring on the estates and who were generally averse to education for their estate labour. Although the swettenham circular mentioned only girls, it was generally the case that very little encouragement was given to the Indians to educate their children.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s great advances had been made and Indians were well represented in both primary and secondary schools especially with respect to the latter. Problems still exist, however, in that rural secondary school facilities are less developed than in urban areas, a fact which automatically militates most heavily against the Indians. The 1965 report of International Commission of Jurists had condemned the Indian response to the

troubles of the previous few years, which had been to establish their own schools. The commissioners viewed with grave concern the trend towards racial schools, although, despite this, it has continued and there are now some schools that are explicitly for Indian children. An added incentive to this demand came with the revived interest in Indian culture and tradition<sup>19</sup>.

When one considers the representation of Indians in the occupational fields other than agricultural, it is apparent that until recently they have been severely under represented.

Dwarka Nath, the civil servant in British Guiana and himself an East Indian, provides some important statistics. He stated that upto 1921 Indians could not achieve anything: till 1931 things improved only marginally. In that year the Indians comprised 42 per cent of the population of British Guiana but only 8 per cent of the civil servants. Even in the police force, only 7 percent were Indians<sup>20</sup>. By 1943, the Indians comprised just over 10 per cent of the civil servants<sup>21</sup>.

After widespread rioting and social violence between Africans and Indians in the years 1962-1964, the new prime minister, L. F. S. Burnham, invited the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) to investigate the problem of racial imbalance in the public services. The commission chaired by Seamus Hendy of the Irish Republic also included Felix Ermacora of Austria and Peter

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<sup>19</sup> Malcolm Cross, *The East Indians of Guyana and Trinidad*, (London, 1972), p.9.

<sup>20</sup> Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana*, (London, 1970), p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Cross, n.19, p.8.

Papadatos of Greece. The ICJ observed that the police force statistics shows that there was a marked preponderance of Africans. The commission recommended that 75 per cent of new recruitment for the next five years should be composed of East Indians. While not advocating establishment of permanent racial quotas, some action was required to win back the confidence of the East Indian community. Of 1600 policemen 1200 were Africans and about 300 were East Indians<sup>22</sup>. The number of East Indians in police force has increased since 1961, when the Jagan government had decreed that recruitment for the security services must be 50 per cent African and 50 per cent all other races. The Commission noted that the para-military special service unit established in 1964 be equally divided between East Indians and Africans.

In the volunteer forces, it was obvious that four of the five companies were overwhelmingly African. The practice whereby, until 1964, every single company of the volunteer force was established in an area of predominantly African population did amount to racial discrimination. The commission recommended that more units be established in the East Indian regions<sup>23</sup>.

The civil services also indicated that Africans were doing much better than East Indians. The report noted that in 1931 only 8.8 per cent of the civil servant had been East Indians; however, the number in 1965 was 33 per cent<sup>24</sup>. The Commission observed

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<sup>22</sup> Spinner, n.4, p. 117.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

that the poor representation of Indians was the result of historical and social forces and not the operations of discriminatory practices. Conditions were improving. Some East Indians were moving to higher grades, but the African monopolised the lesser positions. This imbalance was caused by the African majority in Georgetown and by the fact that, until recently, East Indians had not been attracted to civil service jobs; on the other hand, the land development schemes involved few Africans; they were dominated by the East Indians.

The question of teachers till 1960s was one of the concerns for many East Indian educationist. Overall the Indians comprise about 42 per cent of all teachers, which was a great improvement. However when one considers the denominational schools (largely Anglican and Roman Catholic), the proportion falls to little more than one-fifth--thus reflecting a dual tension that has a long history. The denominational schools preferred Christian teachers and the Indians viewed the school with suspicion because of their self avowed missionary and proselytising function. This was of particular significance to the Hindus for even during the period when there were few with any real understanding of their religion. Ironically, fear of proselytisation and opposition to modern education served a vital integrating function for the East Indians in an alien and often hostile environment<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Cross, n. 19, p.9.

In certain occupations, the East Indians more than hold their own. Almost 70 per cent of government employed doctors have remained to be East Indians, while only 13 per cent were Africans. Likewise, East Indians comprise roughly 42 per cent of government employed lawyers, while only 23 per cent were remain Blacks. Seemingly, East Indians have marched nicely up to ladder of success when a university education was required<sup>26</sup>.

Sahadeo Debiprasad and D. R. Budhram have opined that till 1979, East Indians had not been able to occupy the important management occupations of estate enterprises. In financial institutions, greater ethnic imbalance was seen. No East Indian had been able to occupy the position of General Manager or Deputy General Managers. In various boards, committees and commissions there was a overwhelming majority of Black membership. The opportunities for East Indians, to be employed and promoted within the public sector were not abundant. Two important departments which recruited personnel, the labour exchange and the redeployment secretariat had been dominated by both Blacks. The central recruitment agency to discharge the functions of these two departments is also heavily manned by the Blacks<sup>27</sup>.

Burnham observed that the reason for East Indian under-employment in civil services was due to the fact that, with the abolition of slavery African drifted away from the plantation and

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<sup>26</sup> Spinner, n. 4, p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> Debiprasad, n.12. pp. 164-69.

they moved to the cities or set up villages. Robbed of all but the rudimentary aspects of their native culture they accepted European (English) social standards and norms and about being assimilated into a society dominated by the Europeans. They seemed to have placed great store on the acquiring of education and skill. The Indians, when Africans had forsaken the plantation, have from that time formed the predominant section of the plantations, and therefore rural population. The very fact of their having accepted wages and conditions which the African for social and financial reason rejected was a source of early friction. The Indians found themselves in the midst of a foreign society with different values from their own. They realised that they had to be Westernised to be accepted but naturally their late arrival into the environment made the necessary assimilation seem slow and all the more so since they survey they retained much more than fragmentary traces of their native culture. In seeking entry into the society they at first placed emphasis on the accumulation of wealth rather than educational skills and the outward trappings of the Western world. The result has been that those Indians now seeking and obtaining entry into jobs and professions in which they were hardly represented before, tend to feel that this process is slow, that they have been discriminated against in the past and the swing of the pendulum should now be in the direction of the Black being discriminated against<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> C.A.Nascimento and R.A. Burrowes, ed., *A Destiny to Mould*, (Trinidad and Jamaica, 1970), pp. 40-41.

The situation prevailing in Guyana after its independence where the transformation of society along 'socialistic' lines was seriously questioned by East Indians led to more racial antagonism. The battle for social and economic mobility increased the potential and possibility of conflict along racial lines especially between the two predominant groups.

In sum, the contribution of East Indians in the political economy of Guyana can not be denied. They have remained the backbone of the economy. The discriminatory policies of Forbes Burnham which tried to wreck the economic strength of East Indians only ruined the economy. Indians have not only contributed to the sugar--the mainstay of Guyanese economy—but also succeeded in diversifying the economy into rice, timber etc. Agricultural economic structures and policies especially pursued after 1966 have shaped the economic well-being and the political responses of the East Indians. Indians did well to the extent that possible and permissible under state cooperative socialism 'to move up in the field of education and profession, though discrimination was visible in defence forces and police where their presence remained negligible.

Building the argument further the next chapter explores the dynamics of East Indians political and electoral behaviour after 1966. It first examines the position of East Indians particularly the role of PPP as an opposition party until 1992. The pattern of East Indian political opposition to the rule by the Block dominated



People's National Congress (PNC) is a particular political instance in understanding the pattern and structure of ethnic and social political opposition . How the ethnicised political opposition in the shape of PPP succeeded in registering on electoral victory is also important and has been discussed in the last section of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER – III**

### **ELECTORAL POLITICS FROM 1966 – 1992**

The preceding two Chapters dealt with the pre-independence Political process and aspects of the political economy of Guyana. The first Chapter focussed on the racial and ethnic profile of Guyanese society and the cleavage that exist between different racial and ethnic groups. In the Chapter different social and political organisations among East Indians during the 1950s and 1960s. have been discussed. These organisations had a significant role in the political awakening of East Indians to fight for their political and economic rights. The Chapter also deals with the formation of different political parties, their support base and mobilisation method before Guyana's independence in 1966.

The second Chapter discusses the East Indian's economic activities as they occupy an ethnicity-based economic niche. East Indians were the backbone of the Guyanese economy but were discriminated in the government jobs. Different trade unions and organisations emerged to protect the economic interest of East Indians. The policies and programmes of different organisation-- political and economic -- somewhat intensified the ethnic antagonism. Thus the economy affecting ethnic relations and vice versa has been discussed in the second chapter.

In the Present Chapter, the politics between years 1966 to 1997 has been discussed which is marked by one of the most

turbulent phase in the political history of Guyana. Known as the "Burnhamite era" the period 1966 to 1985 saw Forbes Burnham resort to unfair means to win elections, replace the constitution and institute a somewhat authoritarian rule. This continued till 1985 when his successor Desmond Hoyte implemented a modicum of reforms in political and economic field. The present Chapter deals with the electoral competition and the rule of PNC led by Forbes Burnham. Meanwhile, East Indians and particularly the PPP vehemently opposed the authoritarian and discriminatory rule of the PNC. There was a pattern to East Indian political opposition - mobilisation and organisation. This has been described in the second section of the Chapter. In the third section, the return of the PPP government in a largely free and fair elections held in 1992 and the political and economic reforms undertaken by the government since that have been discussed.

### **ELECTORAL AND PARTY COMPETITION FROM 1966 - 1992**

The International Commission of Jurists that had submitted its report in 1965 prior to independence was discussed by Burnham with the nation on 20 October 1965. The Commission, while noting the existence of discrimination against East Indians in jobs, had hoped that independence would improve race relations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T.J.Spinner, *A Political and Social History of Guyana : 1945-1983*, (Boulder, Col. 1984), P. 118.

Meanwhile, the PPP, having been denied power, was in disarray throughout 1965. Having refused to testify before the International Commission of Jurists, it now proposed to boycott the forthcoming independence talks. Only with reluctance, Jagan had finally decided to participate in the elections. There had been a strong support for the idea of election boycott by PPP leaders as well as by its rank and file.

A. Brindley Benn, Chairman of the PPP and one of the few important Blacks still with Jagan, had never wavered in his opposition to participation in the electoral process; he favoured increased labour agitation. Moses Bhagwan, East Indian leader of the Progressive Youth Organisation, was convinced that the elections could not be won. He thought the PPP should cease acting as a regular political party and immediately transform itself into a disciplined, vanguard, communist party with a militant hardcore, functioning both openly and clandestinely.<sup>2</sup>

In the intense ideological and political struggle within the party, Jagan did succeed in maintaining his control over the party, but at an enormous cost. At the annual congress of PPP in 1965, Jagan suspended both Bhagwan and Benn from the party.

Colonial secretary Anthony Greenwood's peace mission to British Guiana in February 1965 had been aimed at obtaining PPP participation in the independence talks. Jagan demanded an end to the state of emergency; release of all detainees before PPP could

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.119.

participate; that police and security forces be immediately reconstructed so as to reflect the ethnic distribution of the population, and finally, there must be a new constitution with a different electoral system. Once the constitutional and independence talks were set for early November 1965, Jagan did meet with Burnham. He reiterated his final terms : the state of emergency must be terminated and all political detainees released. When Burnham refused, Jagan responded that PPP would boycott the independence talks. The PNC leader was probably delighted with Jagan's decision. Without the presence of the PPP, the independence talks were sure to proceed to a smooth and rapid conclusion. With Jagan's absence, the independence conference actually completed its deliberations between 2 November and 19 November 1965. S.S. Ramphal, a distinguished East Indian lawyer and a non-party member of the coalition government in which he served as attorney general, drafted the constitution for an independent Guyana.<sup>3</sup>

Ramphal's constitutional draft proposed that the legislature remain a single house elected nation-wide through proportional representation. It was suggested, however, that members be linked to particular regions. Impartial commissions were to be maintained to supervise the judiciary, police and public services. An ombudsman would be appointed to assist citizens who felt they had received unfair treatment. Certain clauses designed to protect

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 118-9.

citizen rights would be entrenched in the constitution, and a two-third vote of the legislature or a nationwide referendum would be required to alter them. The leaders of the opposition was formally recognised in the draft constitution, and he had to be consulted on certain matters. The constitution further provided for an election commission to supervise and conduct all future elections. It would be presided over by a judge or an ex-judge and consist of one representative from each party having more than five members in the national legislative assembly. Private property was guaranteed in the constitutional draft; if the government demonstrated a need to requisition private property, then prompt and adequate compensation was ensured.<sup>4</sup>

Independence was set for 26 May 1966 and finally British Guiana became independent state of Guyana under Burnham D'Aguiar coalition. At the time of independence, a state of emergency was in effect, and many of Jagan's supporters were languishing in the Mazaruni prison without trial. The PNC-UF coalition ruled by a slim parliamentary majority. In the 53-seat unicameral legislature, the PPP had 24 seats, but Burnham's People's National Congress (PNC) had 22 seats, and D'Aguiar's United Force (UF) had 7 seats making it total of 29 seats for the coalition. Although its margin seemed tenuous, the government was stable because party discipline was strong and political alignments ran on ethnic and racial lines. However, at the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p 120.

grassroots level, the coalition was weak as political parties were built around the country's ethnic cleavages. Race was the determinant of party affiliation. Jagan's PPP had the support of East Indians, while Burnham's PNC was supported by Blacks and some 'mixed' race persons; D'Aguiar's UF had its base among the Portuguese, Europeans, Amerindians, Chinese and an assortment of middle-class 'mixed' race Africans and East Indians.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the manner in which Jagan was ousted from power and the racially based politics, the coalition government lacked cross-sectional majority support. The fact that over half of Guyana's population consisted of persons of Indian descent who steadfastly supported Jagan weakened the legitimacy of the government. During the bloody 1964 PPP-sponsored sugar strike, Jagan had demonstrated that he could bring the country's economy to a virtual halt. In order to enable the government a minimum of security to implement its programmes, the PPP machinery had to be crushed. This was done by coercion, but at the cost of perpetuating the already impaired legitimacy of the coalition, at least in the eyes of the East Indians.<sup>6</sup>

The partnership between Burnham and D'Aguiar was never a comfortable arrangement, especially for Burnham who saw D'Aguiar's party as the representation of the old colonial

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<sup>5</sup> Ralph R. Premdas, "Guyana : Socialist Reconstruction or Political Opportunism?", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. vol. 20 no.2, May 1978. P 136.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p 137.

privileges and racism. Guyana decided to remain within the Commonwealth of Nations. D'Aguiar had been particularly insistent that the monarchy be retained and that Guyana not become a republic. An agreement was reached that in the next general elections to be held by December 1968, a decision would be made on whether to establish a republic. D'Aguiar was becoming increasingly disturbed by the lack of his own power and the popular base of UF; as well as by the governmental corruption which seemed to be increasing at an extraordinary rate. As finance minister, his optimistic first budget presented on 14 April 1965 demonstrated his belief in free enterprise capitalism; however it appalled Burnham and his socialist followers. The finance minister, confident of aid from the United States, increased capital expenditure by 266 per cent over the previous year. Foreign exchange controls were relaxed. Inheritance and corporation taxes were also reduced. And it is true that the United States poured in more than 5 million dollars worth of equipments plus assistance for the development of infrastructure.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of 1966, however, D'Aguiar sensed that all was not well; he had underestimated Burnham. The PNC leader had not abandoned his socialistic ideas. Burnham had, with the departure of the British, mobilised all the influence and patronage of the state in order to make sure that the votes were counted before the election took place. Burnham, further, had the guns and he was

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<sup>7</sup> Spinner, n.1, pp 120-21.



prepared to use them to ensure his retention of power. Despite his pledges to implement the recommendations of the International Commission of Jurists, Burnham maintained the overwhelmingly Black composition of both the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and the police. He intended to take no chances with the East Indians whose loyalties might be open to doubt. Shortly after the independence, the coalition regime passed a severe National Security Act. It gave the government the right to suspend *habeas corpus* and to detain any Guyanese when necessary for national security. A few months prior to the 1968 general elections, Burnham, with the aid of certain PPP defectors in Parliament wrested control of the government and ousted D'Aguiar. This was the end of PNC-UF coalition. The PNC then proceeded to reconstitute the electoral commission with party sympathisers and to tamper with the electoral machinery. Consequently, the PNC won sole control of the government in the 1968 elections. Like the Indians before, now D'Aguiar's ethnic supporters were also alienated from the government.<sup>8</sup>

Thus after independence the machinery of colonial control passed into the hands of the new government. In practice, this meant that the colonial centralised state apparatus inherited by Burnham was now preponderantly Black-dominated. Urban Black residence not only imparted ideal strategic location to exercise and maintain power, but concurrently, urban trade unions were

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<sup>8</sup> Premdas, n.5, p. 137.

similarly ethnically-based and controlled. Black preeminence in these areas was supplemented by UF support representing much of the local and all of the foreign-owned business sector, as well as the Christian churches and many Western governments. By contrast, the East Indian-supported PPP sector, already dependent was deprived of whatever autonomy it still possessed. As agricultural labourers, they were dependent upon foreign-owned sugar plantations at a time of growing labour surplus in the industry and as peasants, they relied on the Black dominated civil administration for the technical and financial inputs for rice cultivation and marketing. Indian vulnerability was accentuated by internal divisions which were exploited by the ruling regime. This was a critical dimension of the PNC control apparatus. Internal property distinction led many middle and upper class Indians to identify with the UF; while many Muslims and Christian who constituted over 15 per cent of the Indian population gave partial support to the PNC-UF coalition. To many, small and large propertied Indians, Jagan's socialistic rhetoric was an anathema. Hindu Maha Sabha, representing wealthy Hindus openly sided with the PNC government.

The issue of communal control became more intense. Blacks already had and overwhelming representation in the urban centres, industrial labour unions, and the civil services including state-owned corporations as well as political the army and the police. What was lacking for virtual Black monopoly of political control

included a majority in parliament, exclusive control of cabinet positions including the pivotal finance ministry occupied by the UF leader himself, and control of the commercial sector of the economy. Burnham's next move was to dominate precisely these areas.

At the PNC annual congress in April 1968, Burnham vehemently criticised the coalition politics. He accused the UF for thwarting the policies and programmes of PNC. He urged that after the next election, the PNC must have a clear majority so that its programme could be properly implemented. In 1967, the PNC began to register all Guyanese -- both those living in Guyana and overseas. Help was obtained from Shoup Registration Systems Inc. of the United States. By mid-1968, the registration process was intensified. The PPP accused the PNC of fraud and irregularities as the registration proceeded.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, legislation was also brought forward to permit voting by overseas Guyanese and to allow a greater use of proxies. Any "good cause" would be sufficient to permit a proxy vote. The election commission was being ignored. Contrary to the Constitution, the government was seizing control of the electoral machinery. By-elections would disappear, the party leader could simply designate a replacement from the list of candidates nominated at the time of election. Such legislation required a constitutional majority of only twenty-seven votes. D'Aguiar attacked the bill, for it would lead inevitably to a

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<sup>9</sup> Spinner, n.1, p 123.

one-party dictatorship. Finally, D'Aguiar withdrew the UF from the coalition government. The deputy speaker Rupert Tilo who belonged to the UF joined the PNC; thus Burnham mustered the required majority of twenty-seven members in the legislature and carried out the legislation.<sup>10</sup>

The minister of home affairs in Burnham's Cabinet, Llewellyn John conducted the elections, making sure of the PNC victory. PPP and UF could not stop the elections. The day before the voting was marred by angry street scenes, rowdy mass meetings, and racial hate propaganda. There was a deep anti-government feeling in the sugar belt though Burnham had some support of East Indians in Georgetown. His feeble attempt to woo East Indians had failed; hence he turned his back to the traditional Black support and electoral manipulation.<sup>11</sup>

An opinion research centre conducted a survey of the names listed by the government as overseas Guyanese qualified to vote. The investigations led to the conclusion that only about 15 per cent of the names on the overseas electoral roll registered in the United Kingdom, were valid; the rest were fake.<sup>12</sup>

The election was held in December 1968 with predictable large scale electoral irregularities. Despite all the malpractices,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp 123-4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p 125.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p 125.

PNC received only 50.4 per cent of the total votes cast within Guyana.<sup>13</sup>

Burnham was annoyed by the accusations of a rigged election. But he did not react to any accusation made by the opposition. He was in power, controlled the army and the police, and knew that as long as Jagan chanted the Soviet line there was nothing to fear from united States. The outright victory permitted the PNC to retain control of the legislature and the executive. What remained to complete PNC hegemony was the private commercial sector under both local and foreign control. Without control of this vital base, absolute domination remained uncertain and elusive. Hence, the PNC proceeded to use its enormous political power to change the economic *status quo*.

By 1970, a two-pronged policy began to unfold aimed at giving Blacks an independent economic base. First, a programme of "cooperative socialism" was formulated in an attempt at locating Blacks in the predominantly Indian peasant agricultural sector. Second, a programme of state expansion, which started in 1970 with the nationalisation of the foreign owned bauxite companies was initiated.<sup>14</sup> Between 1970 and 1976 the subsidiaries of all the major foreign corporations in the country were nationalised. The state had intervened in the private economy and in doing so, had

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p 126.

<sup>14</sup> Percy C. Hintzen and Ralph R. Premdas. "Guyana : Coercion and Control in Political Change". *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. vol. 24. no.3, August 1982, p.346.

wrested control of it away from competing racial groups by placing it in the hands of Black-dominated public sector.

Communal domination initially rested upon the promise of the regime to transfer enough resources to its constituents to maintain superior socio-economic status vis-à-vis the other groups. Creation of new and more employment opportunities in public sector and government bureaucracy, high salaries and perks and populist, welfare programmes for Black urban poor were some of the initiatives of the government. When the policy failed, the ruling elite began to lose communal support causing it to shift to reliance upon an increasingly centralised machinery of control under a tighter circle of trusted elites. "Cooperative Socialism" failed to alter the relative well-being of particularly the Black lower classes. Meanwhile, Western boycotts and the oil price rise by Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) wreaked havoc on the Guyanese economy, especially harmful at a time when state penetration of the private sector was getting underway. Foreign reserve plummeted and national debt increased.

A predominantly Black but multi-racial political party, the Working People's Alliance (WPA) along with several others opposition groups including Jagan's PPP revived organised strikes and rallies against the troubled PNC regime. The WPA was particularly successful in mobilising large and growing demonstrations in major PNC strongholds, signalling the weakening of monolithic communal support for the PNC regime.

To check the faltering economic and PNC popularity, Burnham turned to an activist foreign policy. The PNC regime began to turn increasingly to Eastern Europe, Cuba and China for assistance and for some kind of cushion against the Western retaliation. By signalling its ideological commitment to the Eastern bloc and by supporting these countries in international fora, the regime anticipated that economic, political and strategic support necessary to offset the effects of western action would be forthcoming. But it soon became clear that the regime's effort to substitute the Eastern bloc for the Western world would meet with very limited success.

By 1973, Cheddi Jagan had decided to participate in the forthcoming elections which were around the corner, despite PPP's experience of rigged elections in 1968. The PPP was now more radical, openly declaring itself as a Marxist-Leninist party. Prime minister Forbes Burnham announced that election would take place in July 1973. He indicated that an entirely new register of voters would be prepared including the overseas register for voters. He refused to abolish proxy voting as demanded by the opposition parties though he agreed to limit it to certain occupations. One individual would now be able to cast only two rather than three proxy votes. Postal voting could be used if necessary. He also proposed lowering the voting age to eighteen. Jagan met Burnham to discuss the PPP demand for a fair election. Jagan demanded an impartial election commission and the drawing up of a new and

correct voters' list. Overseas voting and proxy voting, he demanded, should be abolished. Also, all ballots must be tabulated at the respective polling stations and voting right should be granted to eighteen-year olds. The prime minister's announcement of elections however made no concessions to the PPP with the exception of lowering the voting age to eighteen years. Jagan now denounced what he had previously supported, for he feared that allowing the eighteen to twenty-one-year olds to vote would only mean more padding of the electoral lists by the PNC. As this change was a constitutional matter requiring a two-thirds vote of the legislative assembly. The PPP prevented passage when the bill was introduced in the parliament.<sup>15</sup>

A government decree that all votes would be counted at three centres, rather than at the polling places, further angered the opposition parties. Attempts to have the courts rule against the government's electoral tactics were unsuccessful; the judges had no intention of irritating Burnham and the PNC.<sup>16</sup>

Election officials carefully guarded the electoral registers, making it difficult for the opposition parties to see them. The register for Guyana had increased by a total of 75,000 voters since 1968 even though the total Guyanese population had only gone up by about that number.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Spinner, n.1, p 144.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p 145.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p 145.



Meetings of the three opposition parties were disrupted by the so-called Georgetown hooligans. The police provided inadequate assistance. Concern grew over violence in the countryside as Black youths from Georgetown broke up PPP meetings in the sugar regions. In the atmosphere of fear, the 1973 elections were held. Guyana Defence Force (GDF) became directly involved in the electoral process of the country. The GDF was given the task by the prime minister of ensuring the orderly conduct of the elections and of transporting the ballot boxes to the capital city for counting; where there was evidence that locks were broken and ballots destroyed or changed during the transit. Poll watchers for the opposition parties were prevented from travelling with the ballot boxes to the three places designated for the counting.<sup>18</sup>

The PNC obtained more than 90 per cent of the postal, proxy and overseas votes. For example, the party won 29,031 of the 29,643 overseas votes cast. The PNC attained a total 244,403 votes, or 70.15 per cent of the 350,181 votes cast. The PPP was awarded only 92,368 votes or 25.51 percent. The PNC had achieved its goal of winning two-thirds of the seats in the legislative assembly. It acquired thirty-seven seats, whereas the PPP won fourteen and the Liberator Party won another two.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Percy C. Hintzen. *The Cost of Regime Survival: Racial Mobilization, Elite Domination and Control of the State in Guyana and Trinidad*, (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 1989), p 92.

<sup>19</sup> Spinner, n.1, p. 146.

In a joint statement the opposition parties denounced the election results and argued that the army and the police had intervened to enable the PNC to win using power by fraud.

With a two-third majority in the legislative assembly, Burnham could do just as he wished, with the exception of tampering with those entrenched clauses of the constitution requiring not only a two-thirds vote of parliament, but a referendum as well. Within a month, he removed the British Privy Council from the constitution. No longer could there be an appeal from the Guyana courts to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. There had been some discussions about the need for a regional Caribbean Court of Appeal, but none had been established; therefore, charges of electoral fraud could not be pursued beyond Guyana's own courts.

To PPP's dismay the PNC even began to refer itself as a Marxist-Leninist party, although it did not formally affiliate with the international communist movement. Distinguished Third World socialist leaders like Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Sri Lanka's Sirimao Bhandarnayke paid friendly visits to Guyana; it was difficult for Jagan to argue that he was the only anti-imperialist and only true socialist in Guyana. Burnham running skillfully had adopted a number of Jagan's programmes and slogans. But Burnham still needed the willing support of Guyana's sugar workers, which never forth came.

Meanwhile, PPP was still caught in the web of its own socialistic rhetoric. Addressing the annual conference of the PPP in August 1975, Jagan argued that imperialism must be destroyed before socialism could be attained. He remarked: "the PPP had no monopoly on socialism and was prepared regardless of ideological and tactical differences to work with others if they are interested in building socialism in Guyana. And this includes the PNC. Our political lines should be changed from non-cooperation and civil resistance to critical support."<sup>20</sup> Jagan took a conciliatory line believing the socialist credentials of Burnham. Expectedly, PPP was once more caught in internal party wranglings and political confusion.

In August, 1977, Jagan demanded the establishment of a National Patriotic Front government including all parties and groups which are progressive, anti-imperialist and who wish to see Guyana take a socialist path of development. According to Jagan, free elections were a first priority. After elections, there could be a sharing of power between the two major parties and other progressive groups. He advocated one new political position, that of an executive president. The prime minister would still be the leader of the largest party, and the second largest party would designate the executive president. The cabinet, presided over by the prime minister, would be drawn from each party that accepted the socialist bases of the National Patriotic Front, in proportion to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-9

its representation in the national assembly. The executive president could send proposal to the National Assembly, address that body when he wished, and its measures, but a two-third vote of the national assembly could over side the veto. He went on to further propose a programme for the government of National Patriotic Front. Nationalisation of banks and insurance companies should be carried out; participation of all the people was required in every aspect of development; wage inequalities at different levels and sectors of the economy must be rectified; and all forms of discrimination and corruption cease. The fundamental human rights listed in the constitution must be respected.<sup>21</sup>

Behind all these proposals was Jagan's knowledge that free elections would bring a victory for the PPP. Cheddi Jagan would become prime minister while Forbes Burnham would be relegated to the less prestigious post of executive president. Though these proposals, if implemented could alleviate racial tension and ethnic hostilities. But it would also have meant a loss of jobs for some of the PNC top brass and other faithfuls. The PNC alone could resolve Guyana's myriad problem.<sup>22</sup> Burnham had no interest in such constitutional and political solutions.

The next parliamentary elections were scheduled for 1978. But instead of elections, the PNC conjured up a referendum. The referendum would ask the Guyanese people to decisively alter the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 161-2.

constitution. Article 73 of the constitution had provided that certain entrenched clauses could only be altered after the changes were first approved by the national assembly and then submitted to the population in a referendum. The entrenched clauses included such fundamental matters as the electoral system itself and the composition and dissolution of the parliament. Such a procedure was designed to protect the basic rights of the Guyanese people. Other parts of the Constitution could simply be changed by a two-third vote of the national assembly; no referendum was required. The PNC proposed that the 10 July, 1978 referendum be final. If it won, a two-thirds parliamentary majority could do as it wished, even write a new constitution. Since the existing parliament legally terminated on 25 July with elections due not later than 25 October, Burnham's game-plan was obvious. After winning the referendum, he would postpone elections for the national assembly, write a new constitution giving even greater powers to himself and the PNC, and then have it approved by the PNC-controlled national assembly without bothering to consult the people once again in a referendum.<sup>23</sup>

The opposition, as was to be expected, organised protest marches and meetings against the proposed referendum. The government was adamant to hold the referendum despite stiff opposition from the opposition parties and others. The government did not release the location of polling places until two days before

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

the vote, since the opposition had indicated it would monitor the voting. Before the election day, armed patrols moved about Georgetown and throughout the countryside. During the election itself, election agents of opposition parties were chased from the polling stations, and the armed soliders often collected the ballot boxes themselves. The report of the Committee of Concerned Citize--a citizen body constituted before the referendum--concluded that the entire referendum process was massively rigged.

The PNC proudly announced that 71.45 per cent of the eligible voters had participated. It claimed that 431,120 votes were cast. The "yes" votes amounted to 419,936 or 97.4 per cent of the total; there were only 8,956 "no" votes, or 2.1 per cent of the total.<sup>24</sup>

Not only the opposition parties, but even the church opposed Burnham's action. The middle class, which once accepted Burnham because it feared Jagan, had turned against the PNC. Strikes by labour unions further intensified the protest against Burnham.

After the referendum results were announced, the national assembly voted to suspend the parliamentary elections for fifteen months. The two-third PNC majority then turned the national assembly into a constituent assembly to draw up a new constitution for Guyana armed force, civil servants, police, and Georgetown rowdies came directly under his control.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

Finally, the great day for Forbes Burnham arrived on 6 October, 1980 when the new constitution went into effect; and he was installed as Guyana's first executive president. He immune from prosecution for any offence whatsoever either in his official or personal capacity. As executive president, he was head of state, supreme executive authority, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.<sup>25</sup> Under the new constitution, the next election was stated to be held on 15 December, 1980.

The PNC infiltrated and intimidated opposition meetings until the polling day. Then, because many Blacks stayed at home in Georgetown and throughout the country, the PNC transported its dedicated workers from polling place to polling place. Along the Corentyne coast on the sugar estates, the supporters of Jagan attempted to vote; but they discovered the situation was even more hopeless than it was in 1973. Many names had been removed from the voters list; others, were informed, they had already voted. PPP and UF poll-watchers' were often chased away from the scene when counting of votes began, and the army collected some ballot boxes over the objections of UF and PPP representatives. Hours often elapsed between the disappearance of these ballot boxes and their reappearance for the formal act of counting the votes. The international observers, though, had been courageously active throughout the day, many were harassed and even arrested.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.190.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

The results were dutifully announced; and the PNC awarded itself 312,988 votes, or 78 per cent of the votes and took forty-one of the fifty-three assembly seats. The PPP was given 78,414 votes, that is 19 per cent of the votes and ten seats. The UF was assigned 11,612 votes or 3 per cent of the poll and two seats. Twelve more members of the new national assembly were to be selected by the new units of local government which had also been chosen at the general elections. These were the first local government elections in ten years. Out of the 205 local council seats, the PNC had grabbed 169, the PPP thirty five and the UF one seat.<sup>27</sup>

Hoping to demonstrate a change for the better, Burnham reshuffled his government though many old faces retained office. Delivering his new year message to the nation at the start of 1982, the executive president acknowledged that production of bauxite, sugar and rice had failed to reach their targets in 1981. After seventeen years of power, Burnham still insisted that a better life for all Guyanese would be found in the not-too-distant a future.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, throughout 1981 the opposition was harassed. Homes were searched for incriminating residence; travel abroad was made difficult; newsprint to anti-PNC media was denied; and meetings were impeded. Academics at the University of Guyana who challenged the government were warned that their jobs might soon be gone. Independent trade unions such as the Clerical and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 199.



Commercial Workers Union (CCWU) and the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE) were denounced in the government press when they demanded better conditions for Guyana's working class. The economy continued to deteriorate. In the Budget of 1982-83 Guyanese dollar was devalued by 18 per cent, subsidies and public expenditure were cut down and taxes increased. Twelve per cent of the budget however still went to the GDF and the police.<sup>29</sup>

Within two hours of the death of Forbes Burnham on 6 August, 1985, Hugh Desmond Hoyte, Burnham's prime minister and first vice president, was identified as successor by a joint meeting of the PNC's Central Committee and the cabinet.

Within presidential and parliamentary elections constitutionally due within seven months of his accession to presidency, Hoyte took the opportunity to renew the mandate of the PNC under his stewardship in the elections held on 9 December, 1985. Out of the 65 seats in the unicameral legislature, 53 were to be contested directly, the 10 Regional Development Councils had to elect one representatives for national assembly and the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs (NCLDO) was to elect two representatives for the national assembly. Seven political parties contested the elections; the PNC won 42 of the 53 directly contested national assembly seats and thus returned to power.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>30</sup> Ivelaw L. Griffith, "Political Change, Democracy, and Human Right in Guyana" *Third World Quarterly* (London), vol. 18, no.2, 1997, p.269.

After coming to power Hoyte initiated major political and economic changes. These included privatisation of state-owned corporations, attraction of foreign investment, rapprochement with the USA, Venezuela and the UK and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The "cooperative Socialism" had run its full course: Guyanese economy had registered no real growth since 1976. Nationalisation of the bauxite-mining industry at a time when bauxite prices were declining and substitutes were being discovered spelled disaster, since massive public investment had to be made to keep the bauxite sector going. Declining revenues, instead of being ploughed back to revive the economy, were spent on the salaries and perks of the government officials, public sector managers and PNC bosses. At a time when mining and industrial sector was in recession; and yet state expenditure was rising in the name of "cooperative socialism", agricultural sector could have come to the rescue of the government. But this was not to be PNC governments policies had already depressed the agricultural sector; public spending on irrigation had declined; marketing agencies had been disbanded; credit schemes had been withdrawn; and prices of agricultural inputs had gone up. Burnham was apparently guided by ethnic political consideration and not economic reasoning. With declining revenues and rising expenditures, the government resorted to foreign borrowings. By the time Hoyte took over, the country was saddled with external debts and a persisting balance of payments crisis. There was no choice. Sooner rather than later,

Hoyte had to accept and implement the IMF-style stabilisation package. Stabilisation programmes involving removal of 'subsidies, price increase of essentials and cutting down of government expenses directly under-cut the bases of ethnic and racial politics, that PNC had so assiduously pursued.

To win the approval of funding agencies and foreign governments, Hoyte had also to restore a semblance of electoral party competition and democratic process. He came up with a series of electoral reforms, an end to the harassment of the political opposition, and the removal of restrictions on the media. Among the political reforms undertaken were the abolition of overseas voting, access by opposition parties to state media for campaigning, the sanitising of the tainted voters list, reconstitution of the election commission, tabulation of the votes at the place of voting, and scrutiny of the election process by foreign and domestic poll observers. He also reshuffled the cabinet, cut government bureaucracy, reduced the number of ministries from 18 to 11, and clipped the wings of some politicians who were wedded to Burnham's agenda. He redefined the relationship between the ruling PNC and the government, abandoning the principle of 'paramountcy of the party'. This was a principle introduced by Burnham in 1973, whereby the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government and all organisations and institutions in the country were made subordinate to the PNC.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

By late 1980s, when another round of elections were due, the PNC could foresee the end of the pattern of electoral political process it had dominated since 1965. Hoyte dilly-dallied the elections for another two years. External pressures particularly by the US, UK, Commonwealth, pressures from Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), and no less from the IMF and World Bank finally made Hoyte accept a series of reforms including international observation of the elections due in 1992. Under these changed atmosphere, a largely free and fair election was held in 9 October, 1992, which ensured the return of PPP to the power.

### **PATTERN OF EAST INDIAN POLITICAL OPPOSITION**

The proportional representation system had paved the way for PNC-UF victory in the 1966 elections. Thus PNC assumed power by constitutional fiat. Britain and US forced the PPP to accept changes in the electoral system that reduced the number of seats held by representatives of the East Indian population in the country's legislature from a majority to a minority.<sup>32</sup> With this there was an immediate and widespread loss of faith in the system among the East Indians. Initially, the conditions for survival of the PNC regime in Guyana were inextricably tied to the satisfaction of the accumulative claims of the country's largely urban Black and coloured middle classes who staffed and ran the state apparatus.

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<sup>32</sup> Hintzen, n.18, p. 169.

The conditions for the PNC survival was also dependent on the party's ability to appeal to the country's Black lower classes by employing a racial idiom and by engaging in racial patronage. The idiom of race came to be the basis of mobilisation for the control of the state and it set the stage for endemic political disorder and authoritarianism. The assumption of power by the PNC-UF coalition was accomplished by anti-East Indian racial mobilisation, a protracted period of communal violence and retaliation against the PPP.

To stay in power, the PNC adopted the politics of clientelism. Clientelism was rooted in the use of state resources by the regime to provide financial rewards, status and prestige benefits, service and facilities, and protection to individuals in exchange for support and loyalty or for a commitment not to oppose the political leadership of the PNC. The PNC rule was secured by continued emphasis upon race as the basis of distributing state-controlled resources. The PNC provided opportunities for the socio-economic mobility of its members, mainly Blacks.

Thus, the PNC while providing resources to the Blacks, deprived East Indians of socio-economic benefits. The regime's discriminatory policies forced the East Indians to oppose the discrimination in a constitutional way through political meetings, rallies etc; strikes by East Indian-controlled trade unions, and sporadic unorganised acts such as social violence. The anti-government demonstration sometimes took the form of inter-

ethnic dominated by the Blacks conflict as the government was dominated by Blacks and were targeting and harassing The East Indians. In this way the post-1964 political history of Guyana is marked by social and economic disruption.

The PPP carried out a campaign of “non-cooperation and civil resistance.”<sup>33</sup> This campaign was accompanied by the use of constitutional measures such as strikes and demonstrations to oppose the regime. There were about 273 strikes between 1963 to 1970 in the sugar industry and in 1976 alone 346 strikes were organised.<sup>34</sup> The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), which was affiliated to PPP and dominated by East Indians, was responsible for calling most of these strikes.

After 1976, continuing economic decline made it increasingly impossible for the political leadership to meet the demands of the Blacks and the coloured middle class. The result was a growing disenchantment towards the Burnham regime even among the Blacks. The leadership of one of the Blacks organisation, called the African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA), had become highly integrated into the PNC party structure and enjoyed a powerful position in the government. Without question, these leaders saw their role as the promotion of the interests of Blacks in the country. When the regime virtually abandoned its policy of ‘co operative socialism’, which was in

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>34</sup> Perry Mars, “Ethnic Conflict and Political Control : The Guyanese Case”, *Social and Economic Studies* 39:3, September 1990, p.78.

reality aimed at catapulting members of the Black lower classes into the economic mainstream of business and agriculture, ASCRIA leaders resigned their government posts and began a scathing campaign against the PNC rule.

During the 1970s, the political organisations representing the disparate segments of the population combined into an informal alliance around the Working Peoples Alliance(WPA) which was itself a coalition between ASCRIA and an East Indian group, the Indian Political Revolutionary Associates (IPRA).<sup>35</sup> The WPA began an anti-regime campaign in 1978 based on the explicit rejection of the system and of the regime itself. The centre-piece of the campaign was a call for the establishment of a United Front as an alternative government to the PNC. Almost immediately, the group was able to gain active and explicit support from most of the major political segments of the population. Included among these were the East Indian PPP and its two affiliated unions; the radical intellectual community, particularly the University of Guyana Staff Association; the moderate Clerical and Commercial Workers Union (CCWU), which represented urban middle class workers; the mass membership of all the major unions in the country including those representing state bureaucratic workers; all the Country's moderate and conservative parties; the major churches trade Unionists, and priests. The campaign was supported by workers in

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<sup>35</sup> Hitzen, n.18, p.171.

the two major nationalised industries of sugar and bauxite, who began to engage in a series of anti-regime strikes.<sup>36</sup>

In 1985, as reported there was even a feeble attempt at a coup by a Canada-based organisation of East Indians called Guyanese East Indians against the Guyanese government, in a context in which increasing East Indian animosity was prevalent since the rigged elections of 1973.<sup>37</sup>

Since the anti-government protests often took the shape of ethnic conflicts, as between 1980 and 1989, there were two ethnicity related conflicts and three factional/partisan conflicts.<sup>38</sup> The consistently repressive approach of the Burnham regime did not necessarily bring the peace which the Burnhamites claimed, since inter-ethnic conflicts became even more prevalent at the level of control of economic resources.

In short, East Indian opposition to the PNC rule remained largely within the confines of constitutional opposition politics. Although there were a number of attempts to forge multi-ethnic coalitions or a nation-wide labour movement, such efforts largely failed. For that matter, neither economic crises discouraged PNC from reversing many of its ethnically-driven programmes. As state, economic crises and the need to except IMF stabilisation packages combined with changed regional and international context of the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.171.

<sup>37</sup> Perry Mars, "State Intervention and Ethnic Conflict Resolution : The Guyanese & Caribbean Experience", *Comparative Politics*. vol. 27, no.2, January 1992, p.177.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.178.



late 1980s somewhat forced the government to hold free and fair elections. Ethnic polarisation reached one of its highest points in 1992, as reflected in the highly ethnicised voting pattern in the national elections. This voting pattern only proves the depth and intensity of East Indian opposition to the PNC regime.

### **1992 ELECTIONS AND THE PROGRAMME AND POLICIES OF PPP**

General election held on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1992 produced a narrow victory for the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The PPP's veteran leader Cheddi Jagan was sworn in on 9<sup>th</sup>, October 1992 as the new President, with his running mate Sam Hinds as prime minister.

The election, which ended the twenty-eight-year rule of the People's National Congress (PNC), had been postponed repeatedly. The PPP list headed by Jagan received 52.3 per-cent of the votes with 36 seats compared with 43.6 per cent for the PNC list with 26 seats, headed by incumbent president Desmond Hoyte. The left-of-centre Working People's Alliance (WPA) took 1.7 per cent with 2 seats. The United Force(TUF) -- conservative and representing Portuguese and others -- won 1.2 per cent of the votes; seven other parties each received the negligible proportion of the remaining votes.<sup>39</sup>

The PPP engaged in protracted negotiations with the WPA and TUF, over the ensuing weeks, to secure a clear majority with

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<sup>39</sup> Kissing's Record of World Event, (Aranel, J.J.) vol. 38, no.1, 1992 Mercury Airfreight International Ltd. Inc. pp. 39137-8.

35 seats in the national assembly. The Assembly had 65 seats, made up as follows : 53 seats allocated directly to party list on the basis of proportional representative; 10 representation; the 10 seats Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs); and two chosen by the National Congress of Local Democratic Organisations -- NCLDO, which in turn is elected by RDC members themselves.

Out of the 53 party list seats the PPP had won 28 seats, the PNC 23, the WPA and TUF one seat each. The RDC seats were initially distributed as follows: The PPP and PNC four each whereas the WPA was persuaded to give up its seat to the PPP, as did the TUF. In return the PPP, which as the majority party had the constitutional right to determine the two NCLDO seats, allocated one to itself and the other to the WPA. The final distribution of assembly seats was: PPP 35 seats, PNC 27, WPA two and TUF had one seat.

Jagan chose a Black leader Samuel Hinds as his running mate as part of an election campaign to win the support of the Blacks so far identified largely with the PNC and remove fears of domination by the mainly PPP-supporting East Indian majority. PPP thus by aligning with the Samuel Hinds who headed party Civic Movement tried to romp in elements of civil society. Civic movement comprised of prominent local businessmen, professionals and intellectuals. It was thus called PPP-Civic alliance.

During, the 1992 electioneering, the constitutional reforms were the key issues in the PPP-Civic election campaign. The PPP-Civic alliance recognised the urgent need for constitutional reforms and proposed:

- i) the fundamental right section of the constitution be preserved and strengthened wherever possible;
- ii) the Directive Principles be reviewed and abandoned where irrelevant, inapplicable, or inappropriate;
- iii) the power of the elections commission be more adequately and unambiguously defined and its composition reviewed; and
- iv) the PPP-Civic if elected, will propose that the power of the president be reduced so that both the president and the office are more accountable to the people.

In addition to the above, the PPP-Civic alliance also promised that all political, cultural, social and other organisations and the communities would be invited to join in a meaningful way in fashioning a constitution which will serve Guyana.<sup>40</sup>

Among its other manifesto promises were a commitment to the promotion of sustainable development; a flexible approach to privatisation; infrastructural rehabilitation; financial

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<sup>40</sup> Irelaw L. Griffith, *Political Change, Democracy and Human Rights in Guyana* *Third World Quarterly*, (London) vol. 18, no.2., 1997, p.273.

accountability; and the provision of accelerated development for Amerindian community.<sup>41</sup>

These changes were significant as, in view of the changed global scenario after the demise of erstwhile Soviet-led socialist block, the PPP had climbed down from its radical socialistic rhetoric of the past. Jagan himself had to be guided by IMF conditionalities in formulating programmes of structural adjustment including privatisation of state owned enterprises and opening up of different sectors of the economy to foreign investment.

After forming the government, president Jagan sent mixed signals about his commitment to constitutional reforms. PPP itself was ambivalent on the question. At one time, it declared that nothing was wrong with the constitutional provisions relating to the presidency; it was just the manner in which they were used. At another time he announced that a constitution review commission would be created, even mentioning the name of the noted constitutional scholar Harold Lutchman as a nominee on the commission. However, the commission was never appointed. It appears that, after the PPP-Civic had secured power, Jagan was comfortable with the range of powers and immunities attached to the presidency; which he had condemned when in opposition, and was now reluctant to take concrete measures to change them.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *The Report of Commonwealth Observer Group: The General and Regional Elections in Guyana; 5 October, 1992*, (London, 1992), p.13.

<sup>42</sup> Griffith, n.40, p.275.

One of the criticism made of Jagan government by both the press and the political analysts was over its abandonment of the pledge to consolidate democracy and racial harmony by establishing a government of national unity. The PPP-Civic had made a bold and laudable offer in its election manifesto which had stated that the PPP-Civic is convinced that the true interest of all Guyanese lie in working towards national unity and the eventual elimination of ethnic insecurity. The proposal for a multi-ethnic, multi-class, broad-based national PPP-Civic list to contest these election reflected the PPP's unending search of and means to promote national unity. The commitment of the PPP-Civic to winner-does-not-take-all politics and to the formation of a government of national unity and winning the elections, attests to our belief that national unity and ethnic security from the cornerstone on which a truly democratic system will be built in Guyana.<sup>43</sup>

However, this pledge was abandoned by the PPP-Civic which, after winning 36 seats in the National Assembly, decided to exercise the power exclusively. After some delay, it offered the WPA only one Cabinet position – the Ministry of Planning and Production. But given the authority constraints-expected to accompany the person holding to ministerial position, that move seemed part of a PPP-Civic tactics to make an offer they knew the WPA could only refuse. Ironically the Ministry of Planning and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.277.

Production was never created. Hence the PPP-Civic were able to retain full and absolute control, a total about-face from the election commitment.

The new PPP-Civic alliance which formed the government was a opposition for 28 years, harboured a certain distrust for the bureaucrats in the government once run by their political nemesis. It therefore wanted to bring its own trusted cadre into the executive and judicial branches. As it is true that in the context of patronage politics, which is accepted in Guyana, this was expected. But there has been a noticeable callousness and political witch hunting by the new government in dealing with some of the officials of the former administration, often reflected in short term notices, reassignment to positions of lesser responsibility and suspension from duty, in many cases violating their administrative and constitutional rights. In most cases the competence of these officials was not questioned; it was their political loyalty that was suspect. Worse than the administrative and management implications of such actions, given the dearth of managerial skill in the country, are the racial ones, since the action is pregnant with racial overtones, giving rise to charges of "ethnic cleansing" by the opposition PNC. While those charges were exaggerated in reality; in most cases the people removed were Afro-Guyanese and their replacements were mostly East Indians. Although some top non-Black functionaries in the former government were also removed,

here again, there replacements were almost all people of Indian descent.

Regarding the question of human rights concern in Guyana it was extended to civil and political rights as well as social and economic ones. In referring to the issue, President Jagan once remarked, "some states emphasise civil and political rights but fail to note the centrality of economic, social and cultural rights. Both sets of rights are essential."<sup>44</sup> The PPP-Civic government has some bold plans to promote economic democracy and fulfil some of the economic, social and cultural rights specified under the constitution. These include promoting private sector development and public sector reform, rehabilitating the social and economic infrastructure, searching for maximum debt relief, and offering incentives for investment and production.

In conclusion, it can be said, since 1992, some steps have been taken – constitutional or otherwise – for racial reconciliation. Though the levels of racial antagonism and antipathies are not the same as those of the 1960s. The doubt and suspicion still persists and is strongly harboured by the two main political parties. Though the racial rhetoric are no more used overtly, covertly it is supported by the system of patronage. In aspiring East Indian professionals. The opening of the economy immediately further increased racial antipathy and distrust not only professionals but business interests for instance in the rice exports and other areas

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.279.

of small business, where East Indian predominate, seems to be going ahead in the contest of economic liberalisation. Jagan's death in 1997 sometime prior to the scheduled general elections, once more brought the spectre of racial disturbance and hatred to the fore. The electoral outcome was not very different from the results of 1992 as PPP-Civic alliance once again gained legislative majority. What, however, is important is that the elections took place in a more democratic and constitutional order.



## **CHAPTER - IV**

### **TOWARDS ETHNIC AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION**

The present monograph, divided into five chapters focuses especially on the performance and electoral chapter gives an overview of the racial and ethnic profile of Guyana. By way of setting the discussion for the race based politics and electoral political behaviour of East Indians. The chapter deals in a separate section the beginning of political organisations among East Indians and the factors responsible for the initiation of race based politics and electoral political behaviour of East Indians. The chapter deals in a separate section the beginning of political organisations among East Indian and the factors responsible for the initiation of race based politics. To build the discussion of subsequent chapters an independent section also sums up the party system, competitive electoral process, colonial politics and constitutional maneuverings prior to 1966.

The second chapter deals substantively with the political economy of East Indian electoral and political behaviour. Notably, political fortunes of the East Indians have remained tied to the role of the sugar industry; the ability of East Indians to modernise the agricultural sector and diversify into other agricultural activity particularly rice. Education came late to the East Indians, however, from the decades of 1960s, onwards, education became an

important medium of economic and professional mobility among East Indians. Ironically, this at a time when private enterprise and profession were being smothered by the government in the name of 'cooperative socialism'.

While the second chapters looks into the economic structures and professional opportunities that have shaped political behaviour of East Indians, the third process over a period of nearly three decades after independence. The chapters details the political process which was dominated by the predominantly Black ruling PNC led by L.F.S. Burnham until 1985 and his successor Desmond Hoyte until 1992 elections. How racial and ethnic considerations can and did sabotage the electoral democratic process; potently racial and partisan considerations; and even shape the economic development process have been discussed. Evidently East India's were outmaneuvered from both the electoral sectors suffered neglect and discrimination further depressing the lots of East Indians but also damaging the national economy. It is interesting to observe that when all seemed to be lost for East Indians the PPP headed by Cheddi Jagan gained an electoral victory in 1992 amidst a deteriorating economy, rising social tension, authoritarian rule of the PNC and regional and international context bereft of Cold War. Though it is too early to pay what contributed to PPP's electoral victory in 1992, important nevertheless in the context of present study in the behaviour of PPP government 1992 and its implications for racial and ethnic

relations especially between the East Indians and the Blacks. The key issue raised above has been dealt with in separate section length descriptions in the third chapter of the monograph.

The penultimate chapter examines efforts at building a democratic; pluralist political process in a context of heightened racial and ethnic discord and distrust. A number of issues including a process of constitutional and electoral reforms; initiative towards building pluralist political coalitions have been examined. Admittedly reforms and rebuilding a pluralist democracy are limited, and the results are even more modest. The chapter makes an analysis of the 1997 elections to highlight the depth of racial animosities and the how racial and ethnic appeals continue to mar the prospects of both democracy and a modicum of economic development.

The concluding chapter makes an attempt to draw certain conclusions that may be somewhat tentative, nevertheless, they may have some bearing and insight into the theoretical formulations of racialised and ethnicised politics.

Returning to the present chapter several questions have been attempted in the following pages.

### **POLITICAL DYNAMICS SINCE THE 1980**

The Burnhamite regime went far beyond the authoritarianism that sometimes creeps in the electoral democratic practices of countries. Burnham entrenched the ruling PNC as

'paramount' in authority over the government and the state and thus transformed Guyana into an authoritarian state. The result was a host of arbitrary and corrupt practices ranging from the rigging of elections to the making of laws that furthered the marginalisation or elimination political opposition, and worst, concentrating powers in the hands of the president. Thus the relationship between the government and different cultural and ethnic groups in the country followed the authoritarian pattern which included repressiveness, racial dominance, and racially-determined allocation of resources including choice of economic policies.

At the same time, the Burnham regime pursued a policy invoking the rhetoric of 'cooperative socialism' and making populist and nationalist appeals both at domestic and foreign policy levels. His policy was ethnically driven and took recourse to the employment of a very biased reward distribution system which strongly favoured ruling party members and supports, and importantly the urban lower and middle class Blacks. Needless to say the biased distribution of rewards and resources created a lot of resentment and open hostility on the part of the political opponents and ethnic groups principally the East Indians who saw themselves unrepresented in the political system, discriminated against in the economic resource allocation.

Guyana inherited much of the negative, divisive and draconian legal structures of colonial rule. Alongside the

parliamentary system and pluralistic democracy stood the readiness to use authoritarian practices methods against the articulation of political and economic demands. The Burnhamite regime in Guyana passed the National Security Act, which, up to 1989 when it was withdrawn, gave sweeping powers to the police and military over the population at large, powers which were extensively used to contain opposition political protests especially from the East Indians in the country. The state power was always used by the regime to exacerbate rather than mitigate the racial and the ethnic conflicts.

The death of Burnham in 1985 and the succession of Desmond Hoyte to the presidency of Guyana saw an attempt to make certain changes in the repressive approach. Hoyte proceeded among others to liberalise the economy and political system; and even made appeals to cut across racial mobilising patterns to attract East Indians to an already Black-dominated ruling party. However, the Burnhamite structures of electoral manipulations and authoritarianism as enshrined in the 1908 constitutions still remained intact until their partial dismantling in 1992, following steeply increased popular unrest and the intervention of international bodies interested in greater democratisation of the country. Ethnic tensions and hostilities continued under the Hoyte regime, not only because of continued electoral manipulations which blocked access to political power for the East Indian majority, but also because the Hoyte regime systematically

employed by tactics of accusing Cheddi Jagan and PPP opposition of racial mobilisation and for plotting the genocidal political violence.

The ethnic polarisation in Guyana had reached its apex in 1992, as reflected in the highly ethnicised voting patterns in the national elections that year. In the election, PPP received 53.5 per cent of the total votes polled whereas PNC received 42.3 percent. It only confirmed that both the parties still resort to their ethnic vote banks, as East Indians constitutes 51 per cent of the population and the Blacks 42 percent.

Movements towards political alliances and reconciliation which embrace the variety of ethnic group interests in society were started. The Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (PCD) in Guyana was formed in opposition against the dictatorial regime by various ethnic groups of the society. However, it failed mainly because of tactical or ideological differences between the various factions that composed the alliance.<sup>1</sup>

The source of the breakup of multi-ethnic communities and political organisations takes many forms including ideological factionalism, personal power ambitions, divisive external pressures, electoral contrivances, and state or party intervention. And all these were in play in Guyana before it gained independence. Once in power, the ruling PNC was almost

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<sup>1</sup> Perry Mars, "State Intervention and Ethnic Conflict Resolution: Guyana and the Caribbean Experience". *Comparative Politics*, vol. 27, no.2, January 1995, p.175.

invariably intransigent and rejected all ideas and efforts of political cooperation. The state itself had become authoritarian and exclusionary towards the redressal of ethnic grievances that were articulated by opposition political force particularly by the East Indians and the PPP. The consistent refusal of the PNC government to join in reconciliation efforts made by opposition such as Cheddi Jagan's 1977 proposal for a National Patriotic Front government comprising all the racial groups and political parties with socialism as its objective, was case in point.<sup>2</sup>

One of the major initiative undertaken by the government with late 1980s towards ethnic reconciliation and reducing racial tension was amendments to the constitution, in order to make the electoral process more representative. Since electoral process has become a major means of electoral manipulation and ethnic polarisation, hence avoiding ethnic hatredness in election was indispensable for ethnic cooperation. Keeping in mind all these factors, several constitutional amendments in 1995 were made which have strictly prohibited the use of racial rhetoric in election campaigns. Free and fair elections under international observers have also been also ensured by the amended provisions of the constitution.

The process of ethnic reconciliation, initiated by the Hoyte regime and continued by Jagan, has still to go much further in the

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<sup>2</sup> T.J. Spinner, *A political and Social History of Guyana: 1945-1983*, (Boulder, Col, 1984), p.161.

direction of ethnic cooperation and reconciliation. Constitutional amendments are only one step in that direction.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL REFORMS**

During the Desmond Hoyte regime, several legal and other reform measures were undertaken between 1990 and 1992. Over a long period before that, the confidence of opposition parties, the Guyanese public and the international community in the electoral process had suffered considerable erosion. Serious criticisms had been persistently made, specifically alleging lack of transparency and fraud in the organisation and conduct of overseas, proxy and postal voting. The ethnicised patronage system that PNC had established in the 1970s had unravelled by the early 1980s in the wake of deep recessionary conditions and heavy external debt obligations of approximately US \$2 billion. Urban lower class Blacks were the first to suffer from the withdrawal of state patronage and subsidies. As austerity measures had to be adopted to stem the downward economic slide, the salaried middle class, predominantly the Black bureaucracy and managers of state owned enterprises, began expressing resentment against the PNC regime.

Rising discontentment, specially among the Blacks was a source of concern at a time when the PNC regime was facing international criticism; for instance, from the regional Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) about its



authoritarian policies and electoral malpractices. The economic crisis and implementation of IMF-style stabilisation programmes had also seriously impaired the regime's ability to carry on with its previous policies and style of governance. Admittedly, soon after assuming power, Hoyte had begin hinting at impending economic and political-electoral reforms; however it was not until late 1980s that a minimal set of electoral reforms were agreed upon by the PNC regime under external pressures and persuasion. The general elections that were due in 1990 could be held only in 1992 as PNC leadership and government officials only reluctantly agreed to these changes. The reforms described briefly below were necessary to restore a semblance of confidence and to ensure the conduct of free and fair elections under international observation in the renewed climate of a multi-ethnic and multi-party democracy.

These reforms though minimal were still far-reaching. Though lacking a properly thought out conceptual framework, they still changed the pattern of electoral politics in Guyana. Opposition parties could see little practical improvement arising from them but in the end, they were the main beneficiaries. Some of the more prominent reforms were as under:

- (i) The first measure was the formulation of the Electoral Law (Reform) Act of 1990, which has restored to the election commission the responsibility for compiling of the register of voters. It has also transferred to the commission the functions previously preformed by the ministry responsible

for all electoral matters under the Representation of the People Act and the National Registration Act.<sup>3</sup>

- (ii) A further measure, the Election Law (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1990, has also consolidated the powers of the election commission over the registration process. The Act lays down clear procedures to enable eligible persons to register as voters; and in a significant departure from past practice, enables the political parties to scrutinise the transparency of the process.
- (iii) The preparation of non-resident (overseas) electors' roll has also been placed under the control of the election commission.
- (iv) The reforming legislation also deals with the vexed question of ballot counting procedure. In the light of the widespread perception that the vote counting process had been subverted in the past, the treatment of that issue is of particular importance. An amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1990 provides for the ballots to be counted at the polling stations, and for that count to be deemed as the final count unless a recount is requested by the noon of the day immediately after polling. A similar procedure is also to be used in the counting of the non resident electors' vote at specially-designated polling places.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Report of Commonwealth Observer Group: The General and Regional Elections in Guyana*, 5 October, 1992, (London), 1992.

- (v) Counting has now to take place in the presence of all those persons including party agents who are entitled to be present in the polling places.

The changes are no doubt of a minimal type but went a long way in transforming the arena of electoral competition. This was evident in the outcome of the 1992 general elections when PPP-Civic alliance garnered a clear majority of the votes cast and a majority of legislative seats as well. The presence of foreign electoral observers including a Commonwealth group and a team of independent observers led by former US president Jimmy Carter ensured that the chances of bogus voting, booth capturing, shifting of the ballot boxes were eliminated.

- (vi) Yet another significant change that allowed free and fair elections in 1992 was the separation of Guyanese Defence Forces from the electoral process.

Making an analysis of the electoral results that allowed him to return to power after a gap of forty years. Cheddi Jagan attributed his electoral victory, among others, to “winding down of the Cold War” and the transformative changes taking place in the international economic and political system. Be that as it may, the process of electoral and political reforms have continued after the formation of PPP-Civic alliance government.

- (vii) To make the election commission more representative, certain amendments were further undertaken in 1995. The chairman of the election commission is to be appointed by

the president and has to be a person who holds or has held office as a judge of a court having unlimited jurisdiction in civil and criminal matters in some part of the Commonwealth; or in a court having jurisdiction in appeals from any such court or who is qualified to be appointed as any such judge, or any other fit and proper person. The chairman of the election commission may be appointed from a list of six persons--not unacceptable to the president--submitted by the opposition leader after consultations with all the political parties represented in the national assembly, other than the party to which the president himself belongs. Provided that if the minority leader fails to submit the list as provided for, the president shall appoint a person who holds or has held office as a judge of a court having jurisdiction in appeals from any such court or who is qualified to be appointed as any such court or who is qualified to be appointed as any such judge. In addition to the chairman, there shall be other six members of the commission who shall be appointed in the following manner:

- a) Three members to be appointed by the president, acting in his own deliberate judgement; and
- b) Three members to be appointed by the president acting in accordance with the advice of the minority leader tendered after consultation with political parties represented in the

national assembly, other than the party to which the president belongs.

(viii) A source of controversy related to the arrangements for voting by eligible voters who were resident abroad. Opposition parties in the past had alleged that the overseas votes' were used by the ruling party to pad the voters roll. As part of the electoral reforms, and in an attempt to address these and other allegations of electoral malpractices in the counting of overseas votes, the provision of the Representation of People Act dealing with the non-resident electoral ballot were amended to restrict the overseas vote to only the heads of Guyana missions abroad and their staff. This has had the effect of drastically reducing the number of potential overseas voters, as became evident during the elections held in 1997.

(ix) To prevent the racial hatred during election campaigns, Article 227 of the Constitution was amended to the effect that, notwithstanding any provision of this Constitution relating to the making of appointments to, removal of persons from, or the vacation of any office, parliament may provide for the imposition or disqualification for any office prescribed by parliament or any person convicted by a court of any offence relating to an excitement of hostility or ill-will against any person or class or persons on the grounds of his or her race.

As stated earlier, the reforms were of a minimal nature but produced significant consequences, evident in the form of the electoral victory of PPP in 1992. Besides, the reforms, though lacking a clear direction, at least restored the independence, impartiality and supremacy of the election commission. Even other changes like the presence of independent electoral observers, were repeated in the 1997 elections. Moreover, the reforms sought to restore the functions assigned to institutions in the constitution which the PNC's 'paramountcy' had largely subverted.

That the government had to go some distance in improving the quality of both democracy and building a multi-ethnic society has become amply clear since 1992. As the next section describes, not only ethnic division remains wide as ever but also the PPP in power has on occasions shown intolerance and intransigence towards its political opponents.

### **THE 1997 ELECTIONS**

After the death of Cheddi Jagan in office on 6 March, 1997, prime minister Samuel Hinds became acting president and Janet Jagan, the widow of Cheddi Jagan, the first vice-president and prime minister. The opposition PNC characterised her as "a ruthless and vicious person", and portrayed her as one who was unqualified to head the government mainly because she was White and of American origin. The attack drew widespread condemnation

from a variety of sources including the Anglican Bishop of Guyana, who was reported to have been “deeply saddened” by it.

The December 1997 elections campaign was, like the past elections, dominated by racial appeals. Janet Jagan’s age, who was then 77 years and racial type were frequently denounced by the PNC during the election campaign, leading her opponents face the charges of attempting to foster racism.

With 90 per cent of the votes counted, Jagan’s PPP alliance Civic was declared winner by the election commission chairman, Doodhnath Singh. He announced that the party has polled 56 per cent of the votes and a total of 34 seats; whereas PNC of Desmond Hoyte has polled 42 per cent of the votes with 26 seats; rest of the seats were won by other smaller parties.<sup>4</sup>

Although observers from the Organisation of American States (OAS) declared that the polling had been free and fair, Hoyte objected to Singh’s declaration of the PPP-Civic victory on the grounds that the counting was incomplete. He also accused the PPP-Civic of electoral fraud, and obtained a High Court injunction to prevent Janet Jagan from taking the oath of office. Jagan disregarded the injunction and was inaugurated President as scheduled. This led to a large scale violence in Georgetown and other cities perpetrated by PNC supporters. Later, an agreement was brokered by CARICOM representatives, which ended a month-

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<sup>4</sup> *Kissing’s Record of World Events*, December 1997, p. 41954.

old agitation and violence. The accord, signed by Hoyte and Jagan, provided for fresh elections to be held by 2000 and for a constitutional reform commission to be established to propose a new basic law.

In the elections, despite the issue of Janet Jagan's US origin issue raised by PNC, East Indians overwhelmingly voted in favour of PPP. The PPP's percentage of vote share proves that even the death of Cheddi Jagan has not deterred the East Indians from voting for PPP. The elections show that the party and not the leadership alone has attracted the loyalty and support of the East Indians although no racial appeals were made by Janet Jagan and other PPP-Civic leaders during the election campaigns. Hoyte and other PNC leaders once again resorted to racial appeals.

The largely peaceful transfer of power from PNC to PPP in a free and fair election, and the PPP-Civic victory once again in the elections held in 1997 is pregnant with certain interesting possibilities. Guyana has made considerable progress towards building and strengthening democratic institutions and competitive electoral processes. The constitutional and electoral reforms introduced before and after the 1992 elections have brought competitive electoral politics back in Guyana.

The process is similar in many respects to the process of 'redemocratisation' witnessed currently in some of the South American countries that are emerging out of the long interlude of authoritarianism. As in some of these countries, so also in Guyana,



Jagan in office exhibited not only authoritarian tendencies, but PPP too has not risen above partisan and racial considerations. This is true of the opposition PNC as well. While the proposed constitutional changes including circumscribing the powers of the president would dent the all-powerful office of the president and restore a constitutional balance among different organs of the government hopefully before the proposed elections in the year 2000, the racial and ethnic politics remains the same in Guyana now and in the foreseeable future.

## **CHAPTER – V**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The discussion and description of East Indians in the political and electoral process of Guyana spread over the preceding four chapters represent a modest effort to deal with a highly complex subject. East Indians migrated to Guyana in nineteenth century as indentured labourer have played a creative role in shaping the Guyanese society. However, notwithstanding their contribution to the economy and cultural environment of Guyanese society, East Indians have not fared as well especially since Guyana's independence in 1966.

As the first chapter has detailed indentureship had largely shaped the socio-economic status and future political opportunities of the East Indians. One notable structural features of the multi-ethnic mosaic of Guyana is that besides the East Indian, who constitute nearly 51 per cent of the population today and the Blacks--the inheriters of the legacy of slavery--who constitutes 43 per cent of the population, there are several others racial and ethnic groups of varied types and mixes. The English, Portuguese, Chinese, the indigenous Amerindians along with a variety of mixed complete the ethnic and racial mosaic. Yet another notable feature, particularly relevant for the East Indians is their residential and occupational pattern. Overwhelmingly they are rural population

engaged in economic activities such as agricultural labour, small independent farmers cultivating sugar and rice among others, artisans and craftsmen, petty traders and merchants, as well as a small class of rich farmers, businessmen and importantly professionals.

Significantly, the same structural factors are important in understanding the racial and ethnic politics in Guyana in the last fifty years. Blacks are predominantly urban bauxite workers. Government bureaucracy including defence forces and police and the small but economically important middle class of educated and business is predominantly Black.

The sugar economy shaped the society and the political process prior to independence. Yet what is notable is that the initiation of labour movement and the formation of trade unions in the forties began on a multi-ethnic, secular and labour-based ideas. Sugar estate workers who were predominantly East Indians were first to organise into trade unions and reach out to bauxite mining workers who were predominantly Blacks. Labour leadership—many who were educated in Great Britain--had brought socialistic ideas especially of the British Labour party. It is pertinent to observe here that varieties of social and cultural groups working among the East Indian such as Arya Samaj and Sadre Islamic Aujuman were active in raising the social and cultural awakening yet were also imbued with pluralistic ideas. It was the introduction of universal adult suffrage under the 1951

Waddington constitution that not only neutralised these efforts of building a multi-cultural society and a secular labour based political discourse, but also deepened the racial and ethnic divide. People Progressive Party (PPP), led by the East Indian Cheddi Jagan and the Black Forbes Burnham was formed as an umbrella organisation in 1950. The emerging political organisation had its root in labour movement. The colonial policy of granting incremental self rule leading towards independence had begun arousing ethnic fears and racial affinities. It was not very long after the dismissal of the Cheddi Jagan government in 1953 that the PPP stood split on racial lines with Forbes Burnham soon forming the People's National Congress (PNC) with the support of the Blacks and certain section of the mixed. Colonial policies clearly were instrumental in further incensing the racial and ethnic animosities. Jagan government was dismissed on grounds of it being 'communist'. After 1951 until 1966 Guyana had three different elections for the legislative assembly; each one under a different constitution; and each time the Jagan-led PPP securing the majority was still denied accession to power. Analysts have also pointed to the context of the Cold War and US intransigence towards 'threats of communist subversion' in the Caribbean and Latin American region. After 1964 elections when Jagan once more secured the legislative majority, the colonial administration worked to the disadvantage of the East Indians by opting for the proportional representation system. Amidst racial tensions and

violence Guyana gained independence in 1966 with Burnham heading a PNC-United Force coalition government. The United Force (UF) represented the small class of Portuguese and other White businessmen who constituted the private sector of the economy.

To understand the post-independence political mobilisation and electoral behaviour of East Indians, one needs to look into the position of the Indian in the economy of the country. The second Chapter has described in three separate sections, the importance of the sugar industry, the contribution of East India to the growth of the rice sector, and the spread of modern education and emergence of a small class of professional among the East Indians. PPP has continued to draw its popular support from the predominantly sugar workers who were organised into PPP affiliated trade unions importantly the Guyana Sugar Workers Union (GSWU). Post-Independence economic policies pursued by Burnham government (1966-1985) worked largely to the detriment of the sugar workers. The nationalisation of sugar industry in the wake of the declaration of 'cooperative socialism' brought increased governmental control over all aspects of sugar including production; pricing, exports and investments in infrastructure. Likewise, the rice sector which enabled East Indians not only to diversify the economy of Guyana but also experience a relatively faster economic mobility out of the rural-agricultural activities suffered even more after 1966. Jagan's first government in the 1950s was nicknamed the 'rice

government'. The nationalisation of key economic sectors including, sugar, rice etc., increasing governmental control over allocation of resources and grant or withdrawal infrastructural support. There, thus, evolved a patronage system wherein the PNC government was allocating resources to keep its lower class urban Blacks satisfied and punish its political opponents in the rural agricultural sectors.

It is interesting to note spreading of education among the East Indians and the emergence of middle class professionals at a time when many profession were the exclusive monopoly of the 'socialistic' government.

The above structural features explain, the persistence of ethnic and racial divide and the continued support of the East Indian<sup>^</sup> to the PPP. One outcome of governmental policies and party based electoral competition along ethnic and racial lines was the erosion of democratic institutions and values in Guyana. Burnham regime in power had soon developed features of authoritarianism like concentration of power in the presidency, 'paramountcy' of the PNC over the structures of the government including defence forces and the police; and in the 1980 constitution a change making Burnham the executive head of the country. Elections took place in 1966, then 1973, and 1985 along side the 1980 referendum that legitimised the PNC rule and Burnham's presidency. Understandably, PPP lost in all the elections and PNC's victories were simply astounding. Independent electoral commission had

just disappeared and government departments including importantly Guyana Defence Force (GDF) had a direct role in organising the election including counting of the votes.

As the third Chapter describes coercion, electoral fraud and regime violence had reached such levels that concerns began to be expressed by the surviving known political elements of the Guyanese society and at the regional and international levels particularly by Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Some feeble attempts at forming multiracial democratic and more radical opposition to the PNC as well as to the PNC-PPP political spectrum largely failed. This happened, for instance, to WPA.

Worsening economic situation caused by the decline in demand and price of bauxite and the rising cost of resource particularly energy from the mid-seventies undermined regime's efforts at establishing state domination over economy in the name of 'cooperative socialism'. The discriminatory policy towards sugar and rice had already caused lower production in these sectors and increasing food shortages in the country. Therefore, agriculture could not come to the rescue of mining sector and economy in general during the period of economic down turn.

It is worthy to note that despite discriminatory economic policy and authoritarian rule of PNC, the PPP and its affiliated trade unions representing almost exclusively the East Indians, remained steadfastly committed to parliamentary and

constitutional politics. PNC government after 1985 under the leadership of Desmond Hoyte had to perforce accept IMF stabilisation programme and also make moves to the opening up of the political system. After delaying for about two years the 1992 elections finally took place with certain minimum electoral and political reforms in place including importantly the establishment of an independence election commission, presence of independent electoral observers and impartial counting of the votes. PPP won the elections in alliance with a political prominent citizen group called The Civic. Jagan returned to head the government after forty years and attributed his victory to the changed post-Cold War international context. Noteworthy, however, was some sort of a democratic breakthrough in the case of Guyana. The Civic component and its electoral alliance with the PPP gave the much needed breakthrough, and opportunity to Jagan to push Guyana towards a pluralistic democracy. More constitutional and electoral reforms have followed the 1997 elections and as Guyana once again goes to the poll in the year 2000 more constitutional changes are in the offing. A common problem faced by countries undergoing democratisation/ redemocratisation is the persistence of many authoritarian vestiges. Guyana is no exception to this. In office Jagan not only expressed satisfaction with powers that characterised the presidency but also found nothing wrong with the 1980 constitution. May be he responded to the PPP rank and



file pressures and expectations, PPP rule under him, showed occasionally undemocratic practices and tendencies.

The 1997 election took place in the back drop of Jagan's death with Samuel Hinds of the Civic component as president and Jagan's widow Janet acting as prime minister. PPP had fielded Janet Jagan as its presidential candidate and PNC once again nominated Desmond Hoyte. Janet won and PPP also gained majority of the legislative seats in alliance with the Civic and few smaller parties. More constitutional and political reforms are promised or are in the offing. No gainsaying Guyana still has to go some distance in building a multi-ethnic democratic polity. Both elections of 1992 and 1997 saw voting taking place patently along the racial and ethnic lines. The pattern is unlikely to be different in the elections of 2000. Civil society in Guyana is almost moribund. It is a long way before elements of civil society and smaller programme-based parties are able to break the ethnic and racial divides. For the present, a good deal depends on both the larger parties, the PPP and the PNC. Whether the post-Jagan leadership of PPP and the post Burnham leadership of PNC would have the capacity to transcend the racial and ethnic divide remains to be seen. Apart, the process of economic structural adjustment in its own tortuous ways is shaping the economy and is already beginning to produce significant political consequences through its own patterns of resource allocation, production and investments in a small, weak and vulnerable economy.

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