

Provincial Autonomy
in
Bengal (1937-1943)

Enayetur Rahim

The Institute of Bangladesh Studies
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*To the cherished memory of my father
Afzalur Rahim (1905-1961)*

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Preface

This study is intended to examine the political developments in Bengal from 1937 to 1943 under the scheme of provincial autonomy of the Government of India Act of 1935. The decade commencing with the implementation of the new constitutional scheme in 1937 is being increasingly emphasized as the most crucial period in the modern history of Bengal. When the provincial autonomy was inaugurated there was scarcely any serious concern that with the ultimate withdrawal of British paramountcy from India, Bengal had to be partitioned as the rest of India to constitute territorial pieces of the two successor states of India and Pakistan. Yet in 1947 Bengal had to be dissected together with the rest of India as the only workable solution of the complex and certainly peculiar constitutional and communal problems of Indian nationalism. It seems, therefore, that a thorough investigation of the course of events and issues of that decade is imperative to examine the unique historical processes culminating in the momentous partition of 1947. Furthermore, the recent emergence of Bangladesh, which apparently shook the *raison d'être* of the partition of 1947 undoubtedly invokes added need to reflect on the period.

This book is a slightly edited version of my doctoral dissertation accepted by Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., in June 1973. When this study was undertaken, the only published work in the field was Professor Broomfield's excellent and pioneering book on twentieth century Bengal, concentrating on institutional politics between

1912 and 1927, with an epilogue carrying the story down to the partition of 1947.¹ Since then several other standard books relevant to the theme of the present study have been produced which only proves that there exists an enormous opportunity for pursuing further research in the field.² While I have no illusion as to this study being either definitive or exhaustive, yet in its scope and interpretation this study may yet contribute to the growing literature on the subject of contemporary Bengal studies. The present study may also prove worthwhile for its extensive documentation of the copious archival sources, governmental and institutional records and contemporary newspapers and periodicals. It is expected that the bibliographic citations in this work would be of assistance to the scholars intending to make further investigation in the field.

While I am alone responsible for all the shortcomings of this work it is my pleasant duty to acknowledge the valuable assistance I received from various individuals and institutions in its preparation and completion. My grateful thanks are due to my mentor at Georgetown, Professor Rev. Joseph Sebes, S. J., for his ungrudging help and encouragement. My special thanks are also due to the members of my graduate committee at Georgetown, Professor John Ruedy and Dr. Lee Houchins for their critique and courtesy. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor A. R. Mallick, formerly Vice-chancellor, University of Chittagong, for reading portions of this paper and for his useful comments. It is difficult to acknowledge properly the enormous benefit I received from Dr. Bazlur Rahman Khan of Dacca College in guiding me through the archives and libraries in London. My gratitude goes deepest to my teacher, Professor Salahuddin Ahmed of Dacca University for his patient reading of the text, for his help in smoothing many rough spots, for his continuing

1. J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society : Twentieth Century Bengal* (Berkeley : Univ. Calif. Press, 1968).

2. e. g; Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937—1947* (New Delhi : Impex India, 1976) ; Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal* (Dacca : Sunny House, 1972) ; Hossainur Rahman, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in Bengal 1905—1947* (Bombay : Nachiketa, 1974) ; and Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal : The Nationalist Movement 1876-1940* (New York : Columbia Univ. Press, 1974).

belief in the merit of this work, and for his encouragement and assistance in publishing it. My debts to my wife, Joyce Rahim are too numerous to be adequately expressed. I must also record my appreciation for my sons Tariq and Ziya for their forbearance and tolerance during my long hours of absence from the domestic scene while preparing this study.

Of the institutions to which I am indebted I must acknowledge the courteous assistance I received from the India Office Library and Records in London, The British Museum, The Cambridge University Library, The Calcutta National Library, the West Bengal Secretariat Library in Calcutta and the Library of Congress in Washington D. C. I am also grateful to the History Department of Georgetown University for awarding me a University Fellowship which made it possible for me to undertake my graduate studies. I am also indebted to Rajshahi University for granting me generous leave of absence to facilitate my studies abroad. The Institute of Bangladesh Studies (Rajshahi University) has done me great honour in undertaking the publication of this study.

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E. R.

Foreword

The political unification of the Indian subcontinent was perhaps the greatest achievement of the British *raj*. During the last decade of its existence divisive forces which were already latent, began to gather strength and eventually succeeded in breaking up the Indian unity. But the 'Great Divide' of 1947 was not inevitable. It was in Bengal that the decisive battle between Indian nationalism and communal separatism was fought with momentous consequences. The tragedy of the situation was that while the central leadership of the Congress and the Muslim League tended to ignore the distinct identity of the Bengalis as a community and the special situation of Bengal, the Bengali Hindu *bhadrolok* and the Bengali Muslim elite failed to come to terms with each other and both were somewhat unable to show any real concern for the hopes and aspirations of the common people. They however did not hesitate to use them to serve their respective class interest and sought to win popular support by exploiting communal prejudices and parochial sentiments. Nevertheless, there were men in Bengal belonging to both the communities who had the wisdom to realize that peace and prosperity of the province depended on closer understanding between Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims who despite religious differences were bound to each other by common linguistic and cultural ties. Among the Hindu leaders C. R. Das and his disciples Sarat and Subhas Bose, and even Shyama Prasad Mookerjee on the one hand, and Muslim leaders like A.K. Fazlul Haq, Syed Nausher Ali and Shamsuddin Ahmed on the other, were

such men who were willing to go to any extent to solve the so-called communal problem. But their efforts were set at naught by the machinations of powerful extraneous elements such as the non-Bengali Muslim business interests, the Marwari merchants and the European commercial community. The situation was further complicated by the exigencies arising out of the Second World War. In this book Dr. Enayetur Rahim has made an objective study of the working of provincial autonomy in Bengal under the Government of India Act of 1935. He has thrown much new light on the chief political events of the period and has treated his subject with commendable historical insight. Rahim's *Provincial Autonomy in Bengal, 1937—1943* along with Shila Sen's recently published work *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937—1947* would, I believe, be regarded as valuable contributions to the study of political development of South Asia during the most crucial period of its history.

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Introduction

The act of 1935 is a landmark in the constitutional and political history of British India. It was the last major effort of the British Government to settle the constitutional and communal problems of India on an all India basis. Failure in its working ultimately led to the partition of India. Bengal politics during the period under investigation offers a valuable scope for a close study into the actual working of the provincial autonomy and the circumstances under which the act failed to create an all India nationhood. It may be said that Bengal held the key to the constitutional and communal problem of India since political developments in Bengal deeply influenced the political course of India. Of the total population of Bengal, 54 per cent were Muslims and 43.8 per cent were Hindus.¹ In the context of an almost balanced distribution of Hindu-Muslim population and in the presence of strong regional sentiment based on common language and culture the prospect for a workable solution of the constitutional and communal questions in Bengal was greater than in any other province in India. Therefore, it seems that if the operation of

1. Government of India, *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V ; *Bengal and Sikkim Part I*, (Calcutta : Central Publication Branch, 1931), pp. 386, 391. In the whole of India Muslims and Hindus formed 22.16 and 65.48 per cent of the population respectively. In other predominantly Muslim provinces the proportion of Hindu population was much smaller. North West Frontier Province with 91.84 per cent Muslim was 8.94 per cent Hindu and the Punjab with 56.54 per cent Muslim was 26.84 per cent Hindu.

the provincial autonomy succeeded in creating communal unity in Bengal, political independence of India would not have necessitated the partitioning of the country.

The major focus in this study will be on the political activities centering in the legislature, although efforts will be made to put them in perspective with the general political developments in the province. The scheme of provincial autonomy for the first time transferred political control of the province, with only a few 'safeguards', to the members of the legislature elected by a newly enfranchised large mass electorate. It was the legislature which became the forum of all political activities, and it was the legislators who greatly determined the political course of the province because their activities within the legislature substantially influenced the public opinion in the province. Before the introduction of provincial autonomy the principal concern of the politicians and political parties was the struggle for constitutional progress for the ultimate realisation of the political goal of 'self rule' and after the fulfilment of that goal, at least in the provincial sphere, as embodied in the constitution of 1935, legislative politics gravitated their main political interest. Therefore, study will largely concentrate on legislative politics.

During the period under study Fazlul Huq, as the leader of the ministerial Coalition Party and as the Chief Minister, was the central figure. The history of six years of Bengal politics was largely the story of Fazlul Huq's political activities. Fazlul Huq was a Muslim but was the only leader who commanded tremendous popularity among the masses, both Hindus and Muslims. This enabled him to provide leadership to the various divergent groups forming the ministerial coalition and to inspire confidence of both communities in his government. He made continuous efforts for a workable political adjustment between the two communities, although the exigency of practical politics of maintaining a majority in the legislature occasionally drew him into communal controversies. To him the cause of communal unity in the province was more important than the political scheme of the Muslim League, the dominating Muslim party in India, which emphasized Muslim separatism. This led to his frequent conflict with the all India leadership of the League but as long as he remained in office he tried to check the course of

communal politics in Bengal. The rigid division of the Hindus and Muslims into hard lines which ultimately led to the partition of 1947 developed only after Huq was ousted from office.

The specific objective of this study is to investigate very closely into the problem of communal relationships in Bengal. It will be evident throughout this paper that, although the working of the provincial autonomy intensified communal rivalry, there was as yet no complete polarisation between the two communities. Prior to the introduction of the reforms of 1935, Hindu-Muslim antagonism was confined to a section of urban elites mainly due to their difference of attitude on the question of constitutional reforms and conflict of interest in educational and employment opportunities. In the countryside the Hindus and Muslims generally lived in harmony and communal ill-feeling did not influence the rural scene. With the introduction of provincial autonomy, especially the extension of franchise to a large segment of the rural population, communal sentiment began to percolate in the countryside through the electioneering campaign of the political elites, many of whom found it convenient to approach the illiterate mass electorate on religious and communal basis. The peculiar nature of the socio economic problem of rural Bengal—most of the feudal and propertied classes being Hindus and the deprived classes being Muslims—only provided a built in advantage to these unscrupulous politicians.

In the election of 1937, three major parties emerged victorious—the Muslim League, the National Congress and the Krishak Proja Samity. While the last one was strictly a provincial party, the other two were all Indian parties. Because the Congress party in Bengal, which constituted the largest single party in the newly elected legislature and claimed wide support among the Hindu population of the province, refused to participate in a ministerial coalition, a Muslim dominated ministry came into power. Remaining in the opposition, the Congress consistently tried to create obstruction to the ministry and tried to bring about its downfall by encouraging defections of the progressive elements of the ministerial coalition. This endeavour of the Congress to cause disruptions in the ministerial coalition resulted in the increasing dependence of the ministry on the European group for legislative majority which forced the ministry in making

compromises on some basic economic issues involving the interests of European trade and commerce but at the cost of jeopardizing its credibility to the masses.

The anti-ministerial activities of the Congress also compelled the ministry to rely more heavily on Muslim support both within and outside the legislature. Because the ministry's political control of the province depended largely on the good will of the Muslim masses, the ministry introduced a series of measures catering to their demands. While some of these measures dealt with the fundamental socio-economic problems in the countryside and were promised in the election manifesto of the Proja Samity, others were undoubtedly inspired by communal considerations. The incidence of these measures seriously threatened the privileges of the Hindu vested interests and their influence in some institutions which were traditionally the strongholds of the Hindus. In opposing these measures, the Hindu elites, in the absence of their control of the legislature, had to rely on the Hindu mass support which could be easily aroused by making religious appeals. To counteract the Hindu pressure the ministry adopted similar tactics and the ultimate outcome was a considerable spread of communal ill-feelings in politics.

This increasing communal emphasis in politics, however, did not totally alienate the two communities. Several attempts were made to resolve their differences by sharing political power but all such efforts proved abortive because of their conflict with the all India policy of the League and the Congress. The political scheme of the League and the Congress involved the whole of India and, therefore, they always stood in the way of all local initiatives for political accommodation between the Hindus and the Muslims. Notwithstanding these obstacles, in December 1941, in an effort to forge communal unity, the leaders of the two communities joined together in forming a broad based inter-communal ministry. The new ministry proved highly successful in putting a check to communal rivalry in the province and when it fell, it fell not because of communal feuds but because of the machinations of the League, who went into the opposition, and the contingency of war.

This study will begin with a preliminary chapter providing the political and constitutional background to the present study. The second

chapter will deal with the electoral activities of the political parties which participated in the election of 1937, an analysis of their ideologies and programmes and the nature of their appeal to the electorate. The next chapter will deal with the election of 1937, the formation of the first coalition ministry and a brief resume on Fazlul Huq, who as the Chief Minister of Bengal greatly directed the political course of the province for the next six years. The following chapter will analyse the various problems which the ministerial coalition had to face and their impact on the political development of the province. The next chapter will deal with the role of the European group in Bengal politics and its effect on rural economy. The final chapter will discuss the various administrative and legislative measures adopted by the ministry and the extent to which those measures influenced the course of Bengal politics. Also included in this chapter will be an account of the circumstances leading to the formation of the inter-communal ministry in December 1941 and its fall.

CHAPTER ONE

Setting the Scene: Political and Constitutional Background

Introduction

This chapter is intended to provide the constitutional and political background to the present study. The following pages will trace the various stages of constitutional processes and national movement in Bengal culminating in the Government of India Act, 1935. During the course of the discussion an attempt will be made to look into the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims, the two major communities in Bengal, and the extent to which political developments in the province were affected by the course of events outside of it. On some occasions the communal relationships went through periods of strain emanating mainly from the difference of attitude to proposals of constitutional reforms, but no rigid line was as yet drawn between the Hindus and Muslims and political separatism was not pronounced.

Nineteenth Century Developments

A self-governing India was the declared objective of the British Government. As early as 1833 Lord Macaulay (1800-1859) speaking on the Charter Bill of 1833 expressed the hope that in the course of time the people of India would become 'fitted' for representative government.¹ The agonising experience of the countrywide revolt of 1857, generally known as the Sepoy Mutiny, left lasting impressions in both India and Britain. Having gone through the tremendous sufferings from the anarchy and disorder of that year, the Indians eagerly looked forward to days of peace and stability to be ushered in. Many of them attributed much of that irreparable misfortune to a complete failure on the part of Britain to gauge public feelings in India and thought that the government's task would be much easier if it could take regular counsel with leading Indians.²

In turn Britain also perceived the impracticability and hazards involved in trying to rule over such a vast country without the least knowledge of the susceptibility of the ruled. Sir Bartle Frere (1815-1884), a member of the governor-general's executive council, in his famous minute of 1860 emphatically pointed out the futility in 'continuing to legislate for millions of people with few means of knowing, except by a rebellion, whether the laws suit them or not.'³

Such opinions and feelings ultimately led to the enactment of the Indian Councils Act of 1861 which marked the beginning of representative institutions and legislative devolution in India.⁴ The act invested the provinces with the privileges of making laws and regulations for the 'peace and good government' of their territories. For the purpose of legislation, provincial legislative councils were constituted by the addition to the governor's executive council of the advocate general (attorney general) and 'not less than four nor more than eight members' to be nominated by the governor for a period of two years, of whom at least half were to be non-officials. Accordingly Bengal got a legislature in 1862 and the first meeting of the council was held on February 1 of that year.⁵

The Councils established by the act were not legislatures either in their organisation or in their functions. They were not deliberative bodies where subjects could be freely discussed, where members could press for enquiries into grievances or call for information or examination of the conduct of the executive. They were simply 'committees by means of which the executive government obtains advice and assistance in their legislations; and the public derive the advantage of full publicity being ensured at every stage of the law-making process.'⁶ In the opinion of Frere, these councils were akin to the *darbars* (public audience) which Indian rulers had traditionally held in order to sound their subjects.⁷

The Councils Act of 1861 fell short of the expectation of the newly developed Hindu elite, the *bhadrolok*.⁸ To the Hindus, British rule did not represent any significant change; it meant the replacement of one alien rule by another. They therefore welcomed the new rulers and the 'West' which led to the emergence of the western educated Hindu elite.⁹ This new Hindu elite wanted to see the councils as true replicas of the British Parliament with its members elected. Their grievances found

expression in a series of political agitations for increasing the association of the Indians in the administration of the country. The viceroyalty of the Gladstonian liberal, Lord Ripon (1880-1884), when responsibility was transferred to elected non-officials in the local self-governing institutions, provided further incentive to such demands.¹⁰

On December 27, 1885, under the inspiration of a retired British civilian, Allen Octavian Hume, and with the blessings of the British Government in India, the Indian National Congress, the first truly political association of the Indians was founded.¹¹ From its very inception the Congress, meeting annually during the Christmas week adopted resolutions pressing the government for the enlargement of the legislative councils, introduction of electoral system for selection of the members of the council, and opening facilities for recruitment of Indians through competitive examinations in governmental services.

To meet the Indian aspiration, a new Indian Councils Act of 1892 was passed by the British Parliament.¹² In the new councils officials still continued to be the majority but their sizes were enlarged, (in Bengal it was raised to twenty) and their authority was extended to discuss the budget and ask questions subject to the assent of the president of the council. The principle of nomination was still continued but in certain cases based on election by select constituencies, namely universities, trading associations, district and municipal boards and representatives of land owners. The principle of election was thus indirectly recognized. An author has commented: the act 'was an attempt at compromise between the official view of the Councils as pocket Legislatures and the educated Indian view of them as embryo Parliament.'¹³

The Muslim Attitude to Political Progress

The three decades between the two councils acts were the most crucial period in the history of the sub-continent. Whereas the western educated Hindu elite took an increasing interest in the administration of the country and pressed for political progress, the less advanced Muslim community adopted a different course of action. The initial reaction of the Muslims to British rule was not the same as that of the Hindus. To them the new order was an anathema; they saw the British rule as a danger to their religion and culture and became involved in a series of fundamentalist religious reform movements, namely the

Tariqa Muhammadiya or the so called Wahhabis and the Faraidis.¹⁴ After the frustrating experience of the Sepoy Mutiny, a group of Muslim aristocrats from northern India, which was the center of Muslim culture and power, led by Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) started a movement in favour of the 'West' and for a true rapprochement between the Muslims and the British.¹⁵ This movement is popularly known as the Aligarh movement. Aligarh being the site of the Anglo-Oriental college established by Syed Ahmad in 1877.

The Indian Councils Act of 1861 which set the direction towards representative institutions in India and the resulting political agitation of the Hindu middle class for further concession did not find favour with the Aligarh loyalists: to them the political agitation of the Hindu middle class was far in advance of the needs of the Muslims. The Muslims should give priority to the acquisition of western education, a profession of loyalty to Britain and should not indulge in political activities. Accordingly, when the Indian National Congress was founded, Syed Ahmad and his colleagues advised the Muslims to stay away from it. They regarded the Congress demand for representative government and recruitment of the Indians for government jobs through open competitive examination as dangerous to the interest of the Muslim community. It was feared that under democratic conditions the more advanced Hindu majority would dominate the backward Muslim minority.

Aligarh's suspicion of the Congress could be partially attributed to the increasing use of Hindu religious symbols by some eminent Congress leaders to generate the spirit of nationalism among the Hindu masses. Its attitude against the Congress was further hardened by the open sympathy shown by some members of the Congress to a Hindu agitation in northern India to replace Urdu, the language of culture of the Muslims, by Hindi in government offices.¹⁶ In 1893 Syed Ahmad established the Muhammadan Defence Association to protect the interests of the Muslims, to prevent political agitation from spreading among them and to promote loyalty to the British Government.¹⁷

The Partition of Bengal, 1905

With the beginning of this century the nationalist movement took a new turn. In 1899 Lord Curzon came to Calcutta as the governor-

general. Imbued with a strong sense of great imperial mission in India, the new viceroy initiated a series of administrative and political measures which aroused great resentment. One such measure which generated strong opposition was the partition of Bengal (October 16, 1905) which led to the creation of a new separate province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. This was done on the grounds of administrative efficiency.¹⁸ The territorial jurisdiction of Bengal which had consisted of Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Choto Nagpur since 1874 was too heavy a charge for a single administration and was therefore a strong justification for such a division. But the dividing line was drawn in such a manner that the new province had a predominance of Muslims and this naturally alarmed the Hindu elite.

The measure was construed by the Congress circle as an attempt on the part of Curzon to weaken the force of nationalism and for the first time agitation went beyond the accepted methods of prayer, petition and protest.¹⁹ A new programme of resistance was launched which passed by the name of the *swadeshi* movement or the movement for the boycott of British goods and educational institutions.²⁰ The *swadeshi* movement was also combined with acts of violence and terrorism by the Hindu middle class youth against the government and the British bureaucracy.²¹ The unrest was accentuated by the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5 and the influx of the extremists in the Congress ranks.²² During the height of the *swadeshi* movement, for the first time, the demand for *swaraj* or self government was made at the annual session of the Congress held in December 1906.²³

Muslim Deputation for Separate Electorate and the Formation of the Muslim League

In November 1905 Lord Minto (1905-1911) replaced Curzon as viceroy of India. To quell the general unrest in the country he started a conciliatory policy. He initiated this with the approval of Lord Morley, the secretary of state for India, by the appointment of a committee to consider among other matters the increase of the representative element in the legislative councils.²⁴ With the knowledge that a further installment of reform was likely to confirm and extend the elective principle, an assortment of Muslim aristocrats of the Aligarh school presented an address on October 1, 1906 to the viceroy at his

summer retreat in Simla. The address was signed by 1,461,183 Muslims from Peshawar to Madras, particularly by those from the urban areas.²⁵ The deputationists in Simla pleaded for separate communal representation of the Muslims in the legislative councils on the basis of their contribution to the defence of the empire and the political traditions of the past.²⁶ In reply the viceroy expressed extreme sympathy with the deputationists:²⁷

I am firmly convinced, as I believe you to be that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to michievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of the continent.

Minto's reply was the first official acknowledgement of the justice of the Muslim claim for separate electorate and was henceforth looked upon as a definite pledge for separate Muslim representation by the British Government in India.

A few months after the deputation, the same group of Muslim aristocrats assembled in Dacca, the capital of the new province, in December 1906 and founded the first political organisation of the Muslims to be known as the All India Muslim League.²⁸ The initiative was taken by Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, the principal nobleman of the new province. As a result of the partition of Bengal, he had considerably increased his prestige and influence.²⁹ The main objective of the League was to promote 'feelings of loyalty to the British Government and to protect and advance the political rights and interests of the Muslims in India.'³⁰

The assembled Muslim nobility at Dacca felt that the League was necessary to keep 'the Moslems from being submerged by an enormous majority of the other race.'³¹ Obviously a political association of the Muslims was needed to counter the Congress agitation against the creation of the predominantly Muslim province of Eastern Bengal which opened new economic, political and educational opportunities for the Muslim middle class. Also the Aligarh school of politicians could no longer remain indifferent to the fact that agitational politics of the Congress and the terrorist groups was catching the imagination of the Bengali Muslim youths.³²

Morley-Minto Reforms

After a period of long deliberations, the British Government finally decided to grant another installment of reform in the form of the Indian Councils Act of 1909, also known as the Morley-Minto Reforms.³³ The act virtually brought India to the threshold of representative government by introducing the principle of direct election in the constitution of the legislative councils. In the enlarged provincial councils the official majority ceased to exist and members were empowered to ask questions and to move resolutions upon matters of general public interest and upon the annual financial statements. The act also granted for the first time special representation for the Muslims through a separate electorate, a principle which was to be adopted in all future constitutional reforms.

The Annulment of the Partition of Bengal and the Muslim Reaction

The reforms of 1909 failed to appease the nationalists and the anti-partition agitation continued unabated as did also the repressive measures of the government to suppress terrorism. The granting of separate electorate to the Muslims added another grievance to the nationalists who regarded the measure as a reactionary policy to sow seeds of divisiveness among the Hindus and Muslims. In the newly reformed legislature both the moderates and the extremists refused to enter as a protest against British failure to reunify the province.³⁴ Faced with this determined opposition the Government of India finally decided to reunify the province on April 1, 1912.³⁵ The reunited province of Bengal was separated from Bihar, Orissa and Assam which were put under separate charges. As a further concession the government decided to increase the number of elected members in the Bengal council by the addition of two elected members, raising the elected seats to 28 in a chamber of 54.³⁶

The Indian Councils Act of 1909 had added inordinate prestige to the infant League by accommodating its demand for separate electorate for the Muslims. But the dissolution of the new province deprived the League of one of its *raison d'être*.³⁷ The League's position was further jeopardized by Great Britain's neutrality in the war which broke out between Italy and Turkey in 1911; it was strongly felt by

the Aligarh loyalists that in deference to the religious susceptibilities of her seventy million Muslim subjects in India, Great Britain ought to have supported Turkey.³⁸

Loyalty did not yield all the dividends the League wished to collect and remorse overtook its leaders. But they were not in a position to challenge the royal announcement; the fact that it came from the king's lips weighed heavily with the League leaders.³⁹ In spite of an intense resentment at the annulment of the partition, most of the eminent leaders of the League decided to follow a line of least resistance to the government's decision and assured their traditional loyalty to the Raj. As a reparation at the loss of the province they tried to squeeze certain favours from the government for preferential treatment of the Muslims in government employment and educational opportunities. The Nawab of Dacca, who played host to the Dacca conference in 1906, was deeply grieved but could not see any viable alternative to a policy of dependence on the British.⁴⁰ Another eminent protagonist of the League, Viqarul Mulk, continued to urge the Muslims against joining hands with the Congress.⁴¹ 'The Swaraj of the Congress is fatal to the Mussalmans. The disappearance of the British Government from or even any decrease of its influence in India would be a calamity for us.'

The annulment of the partition of Bengal made a profound impact on a group of Bengali Muslim youths who were not groomed in the Aligarh school of thought. Unlike the Aligarh leaders, they found little cause to continue the slogan of loyalty to Britain and perceived the futility of remaining aloof from the main current of nationalism. With the exception of a handful of Muslim aristocrats, the Aligarh movement scarcely fascinated the Muslims of Bengal.⁴² Bengal came under the influence of the 'West' much earlier than northern India and towards the middle of the last century a small group of English educated Muslim elite had emerged in the urban centers. Therefore, the slogan of loyalty and educational progress did not appeal to these educated Bengali Muslims in the same way as it did in north India, 'to that section of the Indian bourgeoisie that was late in starting.'⁴³ Being educationally advanced, the small Muslim elite of Bengal needed political associations for putting pressures on the government to advance their interests.⁴⁴

The Muslims constituted the bulk of the population of the province but held only a few jobs under the government.⁴⁵ It was believed by the Bengali Muslims that they were deliberately ignored by the appointing authorities.⁴⁶ The Calcutta National Muhammadan Association made repeated complaints to the government concerning their policy of discrimination against the Muslims.⁴⁷ In northern India, where Syed Ahmad's influence was primarily felt, the Muslim community was a minority but the Muslims held more government jobs than their number would have justified.⁴⁸

One of the main planks of Syed Ahmad's popularity in northern India was his unflinching support for Urdu against the protracted attempts of the Hindus for Sanskritization of Urdu and its replacement by Hindi. The Muslim mind in northern India was greatly agitated when in the year 1900 in the United Provinces, Urdu was replaced by Hindi in government offices. The Muslims naturally regarded the abolition of Urdu as an affront to their culture and religion. But the Hindi-Urdu controversy did not affect the Muslims of Bengal since the overwhelming majority of the Muslims of Bengal spoke Bengali⁴⁹ and had no connection with Urdu.⁵⁰ In Bengal, Urdu was spoken only by the upper class.⁵¹

Due to the influence of the various Muslim revivalist movements of the nineteenth century, a considerable amount of popular Islamic religious literature known as *punthi* had developed in Bengali which removed the dependence of the Bengali Muslims in religious matters on Urdu or Arabic-Persian literatures. The *punthi* literature had a considerable amount of Arabic and Persian loan-words.⁵² This new development of Bengali literature is sometimes referred to as 'Musalmāni Bangla' (Islamic Bengali). Also during the nineteenth century, occasional cleavages between the Bengali Muslims and small Urdu speaking minority on social, cultural, as well as on ethnic and linguistic lines might have made the Bengali Muslims indifferent to the Hindi-Urdu controversy and the Aligarh movement.⁵³

The anti-partition agitation of 1905 for the first time brought the Muslims of Bengal in close contact with the Aligarh school. The creation of the new province was not the result of Muslim agitation. They had not even asked for it, but once it was *fait accompli* they began to appreciate it. The establishment of the new province of Eastern Ben-

gal brought fresh hopes to the Muslim middle class. To them the dazzling prospect in government jobs, political career and legal profession without Hindu competition was naturally very attractive. Therefore, the Congress agitation against the partition was looked upon by many Bengali Muslims as a sinister move to deprive them of the new found benefits. By strongly opposing the anti-partition agitation, the Aligarh loyalists readily won their support. In the absence of any strong Muslim organisation in Bengal that could ventilate their sentiments and grievances to the government, the Bengali Muslims were happy to see the Aligarh leaders taking up their cause. Moreover, this was the first time that the Aligarh loyalists were taking a stand on a political issue and this was pleasing to the Bengali Muslims.

When the League was founded a good number of the Bengali Muslim middle class took a keen interest in it as a forum for their economic and political grievances. From its very inception the League took an uncompromising stand on the issue of separate electorate for the Muslims, extended its unequivocal support to the partition of Bengal and demanded the establishment of a separate High Court in the new province in order to provide judicial facilities to its overwhelming Muslim population.⁵⁴ All these were highly appreciated by many Bengali Muslims. In 1908 the provincial Muslim League for Eastern Bengal was constituted at Dacca and branches of the League sprouted in various district towns.⁵⁵

However, it should be noted here that Muslim opinion in Bengal was not unanimous in favour of the new province; one section of the students and teachers joined the antipartition agitation with the Congress.⁵⁶ In answering to a government query on the scheme for partition, the National Muhammadan Association expressed its opposition to the scheme.⁵⁷ At the 1905 annual session of the Congress, a Bengali Muslim, A.H. Ghuznavi of Mymensingh, declared his opposition to partition and blamed the government for creating disunity among the Hindus and Muslims.⁵⁸ At the next annual session of the Congress, Nawabzada Khwaja Atikullah, brother of the Nawab of Dacca, emphatically disagreed with the partition and said:⁵⁹

I may tell you at once that it is not correct that the Mussalmans of Eastern Bengal are in favour of the partitioning of Bengal. The real fact is that it is only a few leading Muhammadans who for their own purpose supported the measure.

In the same session which was held only a few months after the Muslim deputation to Lord Minto, another Bengali Muslim delegate, Abul Kasim of Burdwan, opposed a resolution for special representation for the Muslims in the elected bodies.⁶⁰

As to the Muhammadans, it is an insult to their intelligence and to their culture to suppose that they are not equal to compete with other races. As for minority, they should not be afraid of their being numerically few. Because, if in India we are in the minority, the Congress safe-guards our interest. If we are minority, the Parsees are in greater minority.

The liquidation of the new province introduced a fundamental shift in the political outlook of the younger generation of Bengali Muslims. They now repudiated the barren path of loyalism and wanted to throw off outside political influence.⁶¹ This new class of Bengali politicians had much in common with the Hindu nationalists. In spite of their religious differences, they all cherished their identity in a Bengali heritage, shared the Bengali language, were proud of its rich literature and conscious of its history. During the anti-partition agitation communal feelings undoubtedly ran high, especially in Eastern Bengal, but the general tone of the appeal made during the agitation in the name of motherland, the Bengali nation, Bengali language and literature, its history, tradition and customs made a tremendous impression among the people in creating a Bengali sentiment which cut across religious differences.

The success of the anti-partition agitation did indeed create a despair among the conservative and older Muslims but it gave the young Muslims a new sense of hope in their political future and they thus became attracted to the nationalist's strategy of reliance on the political strength of the people. With their faith in nationalism they thought it to be an unsound policy to remain aloof from the Hindus in the national political movement and therefore did not consider it essential to lay any particular stress on the position or claim of their community. Since the Muslims were in the majority in the province these young Muslim Bengalis did not entertain the fear of the Aligarh old guards of an oppressive Hindu majority ruling over the Muslim minority in a self-governing India. It was this fear which pushed the Aligarh leaders to a position of absolute dependence on the alien rulers for patronage and support.

Hindu-Muslim Rapprochement

The undoing of the partition forced the conservative and older members of the League in Bengal into the background, thereby leaving control of the party to the younger elements.⁶² In other provinces the League did not undergo such transformation in leadership but for the first time some young professional men began to join the League.⁶³ In addition, following the outbreak of the Balkan wars, a pan-Islamist sentiment overtook some Muslim leaders. At the beginning of the war they demanded intervention by the British Government for the restoration of peace.⁶⁴ But, when Asquith, the Prime Minister of Britain, openly encouraged the enemies of the Turks, it seemed to be a manifestation of European hostility towards Islam and the anguish of the pan-Islamists turned into hostility towards Britain.⁶⁵

All these factors helped to produce a reorientation in the relations between the League and the Hindu community and in matters of policy on the goal of Indian nationalism. Under pressure from the young elements, the League took a new direction when on December 31, 1912 at its annual session in Lucknow the League adopted a new objective:⁶⁶

... the attainment of a system of a self-government suitable to India by bringing about, through constitutional means, a steady reform of the existing system of administration, by promoting national unity and fostering public spirit among the people of India ; and by cooperating with other communities for the said purpose.

The League's new objective of self-government was in substance akin to the *swaraj* of the Congress. This ideological conformity opened the possibility for the two parties to collaborate with each other in the national movement. The outbreak of the First World War further strengthened their understanding. Taking advantage of Britain's calamity both the League and the Congress perceived the value of putting forth a unified front to ensure that at the end of the war Britain would grant a large measure of self-government to India.

The climax of the League-Congress rapprochement was an agreed scheme for constitutional advance known as the Lucknow Pact of December 1916.⁶⁷ In the words of an eminent authority:⁶⁸

This agreement between the two major political organisations may be regarded as the most striking expression of Indian nationalism so far achieved within the bounds of British India.

The guiding spirit behind this League-Congress entente was the young Muslim leaders from Bengal.⁶⁹

The most noteworthy aspect of the scheme was that for the first time the Congress conceded separate Muslim electorates and agreed to allow Muslim representation in the Muslim minority provinces far in excess of their numerical strength in those provinces. This was possible by the acceptance of the Bengali Muslims of only three quarters of the seats in the legislative council to which they would have been entitled on a purely numerical basis. The Congress also agreed to a golden principle that no bill or resolution affecting a community should be proceeded with if three fourths of the representatives of that community were opposed to it. The scheme also assumed relegation of power over provincial governments to popularly elected legislative councils.⁷⁰

Although the Lucknow concordat was cheerfully acclaimed by the progressive young Muslims in Bengal, the conservatives started a propaganda against them for sacrificing the interest of the Muslims of the province.⁷¹ In protest some of them formed the Indian Muslim Association and characterised the Lucknow Pact as 'a snare and a delusion for Muslims and British alike.'⁷² The association organised Muslim conferences in various parts of the province in which resolutions were adopted disavowing the right of the Muslim League to speak for Bengal and urging the British to honour their pledges to the community.⁷³

The 'Dyarchy' and its Impact

The outbreak of the First World War reopened the question of India's future constitutional status. The magnificent war service of the provinces and the people of India were highly appreciated in Britain.⁷⁴ It was widely felt that the reforms of 1909 "from which so much had been expected and by which so much had been achieved" were no longer adequate to India's needs.⁷⁵ The communal concordat of Lucknow undoubtedly strengthened Indian nationalism. Important correspondence on Indian reforms ensued between London and Delhi resulting in the secretary of state for India, Edwin Montagu's (1917-1922) most momentous declaration of August 20, 1917 in the British House of Commons:⁷⁶

The policy of His Majesty's Government with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as the integral part of the British Empire.

In pursuance of the policy laid down in the announcement, Montagu toured India in the winter of 1917-18 in company with Lord Chelmsford, the viceroy of India (1916-1921). The results of this tour and exchange of views appeared in the summer of 1918 in the shape of a report usually called the Montagu-Chelmsford Report.⁷⁷ In the words of Coupland, it was the 'first comprehensive study that had yet been made on the whole problem of Indian Government.'⁷⁸ The recommendations of the report were faithfully embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919 which introduced partial responsible government in the province.

On the administrative side, the most important feature of the scheme was the adoption of the principle of 'dyarchy' by which the functions of the government were divided vertically between 'reserved' and 'transferred' departments. The 'reserved' departments were to be administered by the governor in council responsible to the crown, while the 'transferred' departments were to be administered by the governor acting on the advice of ministers who were elected members of the legislature and were amenable to the control of that body. The main departments which were transferred to the ministers were agriculture, industries, public works, (excluding irrigation), local self-government, public health and education.⁷⁹

Important features of the act on its legislative side were the extension of the franchise and the enlargement of the legislative councils. The total number of electors of all classes who have had any share in returning members of the council in Bengal of the past did not exceed 12,000, but the new electorate numbered approximately one million and twenty thousand.⁸⁰ Significant improvement also took place in the composition and character of the council: the former Bengal council consisted of 53 members, the present council of 139; of the former body, 28 members only or a bare majority were elected; of the total of the present body, 113 or 81 per cent; of the former body, a little over one third were officials; of the present, 13 per cent only.⁸¹ The act also provided separate electorate to the Muslims, the Euro-

pean community and the Anglo-Indians.⁸² Of the 113 seats of the Bengal Council to be filled by election, 46 were assigned to the non-Muslims, 39 to the Muslims and the rest were distributed as follows: Landholders 5, Calcutta University 1, European community 5, European commerce 11, Anglo-Indian community 2, Indian commerce 4.⁸³

When the reform proposals were first made and the act itself was on the anvil, Indian opinion, although seriously critical of the inadequacy of the measure of responsible government granted to the provinces, was in no sense hostile and was prepared to work the reforms.⁸⁴ In the context of the Congress-League concordat of 1916, this general acceptance of the reform scheme by both the Hindus and the Muslims gave positive signs for the prospect of a successful working of the complex machinery of the 'dyarchy' constitution. Since the Congress had accepted the principle of separate electorate for the Muslims, the prospects for greater understanding between the Congress and the League through participation in legislative politics appeared to be certain, but unfortunately matters took a different turn.

By the time the 'dyarchy' was put into effect in January 1921, the Congress had launched a non-cooperation movement and had boycotted the election held in October 1920. Early in 1919 the Government of India introduced a bill into the Indian Legislative Council to amend the provisions of the criminal law relating to public safety. The bill contained provisions for stringent control of the press, the summary trial of political offenders by judges without juries and the internment of persons suspected of subversive aims.⁸⁵

Indian opinion was unanimous against the bill. Gandhi personally headed an agitation against it; he put in operation his doctrine of passive resistance under which the law was defied on the plea of adherence to the ideal (*satyagraha*) but without resistance (*ahimsa*).⁸⁶ The non-violent agitation culminated in the gruesome tragedy of Jallianwalla Bagh (Amritsar, the Punjab) where on April 13, 1919, 379 unarmed Indians protesting against the bill were killed and over 1,208 were wounded by the British army on the orders of General Dyer, the lieutenant governor of the Punjab.⁸⁷

The incident unhappily cast a dark shadow over the inception of the reforms and brought racial feeling out far more bitterly than at

any time since the revolt of 1857.⁸⁸ But it was not General Dyer's action that hurt India most; it was the attitude of the European community in India and of the House of Lords in England. In India Dyer was acclaimed a hero in every European club and in England the House of Lords went to the extent of passing a vote of thanks for his great service to India.⁸⁹

Another factor which caused further estrangement between the Indians and the British affecting the Muslims in the first instance was the attitude of the British Government towards Turkey as seen in the treaty of Sevres, August 20, 1920.⁹⁰ Muslim opinion in India was indignant at what it considered 'a new and more objectionable crusade against Islam.'⁹¹ The outcome of it was the *Khilafat* movement which took a definitely anti-British attitude. With the psychological contagion of the Indian Muslims running so high, Gandhi took the *Khilafat* cause to launch his non-cooperation movement on a wide scale. He viewed this as a valuable opportunity of uniting the two great communities of India in opposition against the government and associating the masses with the national struggle for *swaraj*. In September 1920, in Calcutta a programme of non-cooperation was adopted by the Congress as well as by the Khilafat Conference and the Muslim League.⁹²

Although Gandhi's call for non-cooperation met with a favourable response among the Hindus of Bengal with the exception of a handful of 'moderates' led by Surendra Nath Bannerjee (1848-1925) it failed to obtain the support of the Bengali Muslims; the movement in Bengal was supported mainly by the Muslims from outside of Bengal.⁹³ Thus, while the Congressmen in Bengal withdrew their candidature for election to the Legislative Council in 1920 with a view to wrecking the reforms from outside, the overwhelming majority of the Bengali Muslims enthusiastically participated in it. It was on this occasion that many Muslim politicians of Bengal deserted both the Congress and the League. The constitution had guaranteed them at least 39 of the 139 seats in the council which was sufficient to enable them to hold the balance of power in provincial politics. They were not ready to sacrifice this prospect of wielding political control in the province for the sake of an agitation in favour of this vague and remote institution which did not concern them directly.⁹⁴

The non-cooperation movement was apparently an impressive spectacle of communal unity but it indirectly contributed to the growth of communal sentiments. The movement had deliberately laid stress on religious and communal prejudices with a view to their common employment against the government.⁹⁵ Its sudden withdrawal by Gandhi in February 1922⁹⁶ and the abolition of the *khilafat* by the Turks left heightened sensibilities free to operate against each other. The call to defend the faith against the danger from Christendom which had become the stock-in-trade of the professional upcountry *mullahs*⁹⁷ during the *khilafat* agitation found the Hindus as new targets after the suspension of the movement. However, in Bengal the extent of communal disturbances that took place following the suspension of the non-cooperation movement was much more limited than elsewhere in India.⁹⁸ The sporadic communal violence that took place in Calcutta and some industrial centers was due to events outside of Bengal and was begun and largely carried on by 'foreign elements.'⁹⁹ It is also sufficiently remarkable that the Hindu aggressively proselytising movements, the *suddhi* (purification) and *sangathan* (integration) and their Muslim counterparts, the *tabligh* (preaching) and *tanzim* (organisation) found very few sympathisers among the Bengalis and did not gain as much popularity in Bengal as they did in other parts of India.¹⁰⁰

The non-cooperation movement put the Muslim League in complete disarray in Bengal as elsewhere.¹⁰¹ Confusion overtook the League to such an extent that during the entire period of the operation of the 'dyarchy' between 1921 and 1937 the League failed to participate in the council under its own label. For the purpose of contesting the elections several Muslim splinter groups proliferated, namely the Bengal Moslem Party, the Bengal Moslem Council Party, the Independent Moslem Party. These groups had no roots in the country and developed around a few ambitious individuals who as a short cut to political success often adopted as their main plank communal slogans for 'the protection and safeguarding of Muslim interests.'¹⁰² The constitutional provision for separate electorate was undoubtedly a built-in advantage to appeal to the electorate on a communal basis. Thus politics, religion and communal feelings were confused and led to the crystallization of position between the two communities.

Muslim participation in the 'dyarchy' council in Bengal against the decision of the Congress once again reopened the breach between the Hindus and the Muslims. In January 1923, the Bengali Congress leader, Chitta Ranjan Das (1870-1925), formed the Swaraj Party within the Congress with the aim to enter the council and force the concession of 'full responsible government by making every other form of government impossible.'¹⁰³ In his quest to check the spread of communalism in the province and to associate the Muslims with the Swaraj Party, C.R. Das entered into a pact with the Muslims of Bengal by which he promised separate electorate to the Muslims and representation in the council and local bodies according to their numerical strength. Das also promised that sixty per cent of all new appointments in the government would be offered to the Muslims until such time as they would achieve adequate representation according to population in the services.¹⁰⁴ He was even more generous in the matter of the Muslim share of services under the Calcutta Corporation where he said that eighty per cent of the new appointments would be offered to the Muslims.¹⁰⁵

At the provincial election held towards the end of 1923, the Swaraj Party secured 47 seats thereby constituting the largest party in the Bengal Council. But they refused to accept office and with the general support of the 19 independent members they did their best to produce a constitutional deadlock. During the budget presented in 1924, they rejected almost wholesale the demands for 'reserved' departments and threw out of office the two Muslim ministers, A.H. Ghaznavi and Fazlul Huq, by rejecting their salaries.¹⁰⁶ Due to Swarajist opposition, for most of the period between 1923 and 1929, when the Swarajists sat in the council, no stable ministry could be formed and the 'transferred' departments were administered by the governor.¹⁰⁷

The successful struggle of the Swarajists in 1924 to depose the Muslim ministers and their subsequent obstructionist policy in the council alienated a large segment of the Muslims.¹⁰⁸ An idea gained ground in some Muslim political circles that the Swarajist tactics were aimed at preventing the Muslims from securing political control of the province. Muslim distrust was increased by the refusal of the National Congress at its annual session at Cocanada in 1924 to accept the Bengal Pact and Das's own insistence that its terms were to be ful-

filled only upon the attainment of the *swaraj*.¹⁰⁹ Muslim disappointment was also caused by the apathy of the Hindus to implement C.R. Das's pledge in the Calcutta Corporation's appointment policy.¹¹⁰

Hindu-Muslim relationship was further affected when C.R. Das died in June 1925. From that date the leadership of the Swaraj Party went into the hands of tactless persons who were insensitive to Muslim susceptibilities and 'the Muslims of Bengal moved away from the Congress and the first seeds of partition were sown.'¹¹¹ The C.R. Das formula was scrapped by the Bengal Congress in May 1926 'on the grounds that it had proved a fruitful source of communal discord and had unduly encroached upon the rights of the Hindus.'¹¹² The Muslims naturally felt aggrieved at this but what hurt them even more was the determined opposition of the Hindus to the various legislative proposals of the Muslim members of the council catering to the interests of the Muslim *ryots* (peasants).¹¹³

Fresh Talks for Reforms

In this political climate of Bengal which was showing signs of communal strain a new irritant was added by the appointment of the British Government in November 1927 of a parliamentary commission to study the 'Indian problem in India.' Besides, the fact that educated public opinion in India had long been clamouring for a re-examination and revision of the 'dyarchy' constitution,¹¹⁴ the constitution itself had laid down that after the expiration of ten years a commission shall be appointed 'for the purpose of inquiring into the working of the system of government, the growth of education and the development of representative institutions in India.'¹¹⁵

The commission visited India twice between September 1928 and April 1929 and its reports were published in 1930.¹¹⁶ The commission recommended the abolition of 'dyarchy' and introduction of responsible government in the provinces.¹¹⁷ It disapproved in principle the idea of communal representation but recommended its retention until such time as the Hindus and the Muslims should settle between themselves.¹¹⁸ The depressed classes or lower caste Hindus were granted reserved seats in the legislatures.¹¹⁹

The reopening of talks for constitutional reforms brought communal zeal to the fore. There was a dichotomy in the attitude of the

Hindus and Muslims of Bengal towards political progress. While the Hindus aspired for *swaraj*, they disavowed a total democratisation of the government due to the fear of ultimate political domination of the province by the Muslims who constituted the majority. On the other hand the Muslims welcomed constitutional progress and to ensure their political control agitated for an extension of franchise and safeguard of their interest through separate electorate.¹²⁰ It was, however, not so much the parliamentary enquiry which brought the communal controversy into the open as the Indian effort to draw up a constitution for India. This enterprise was a natural response to the same stimulus as that which prompted the Congress-League scheme in 1916. In early 1928 a small committee was commissioned at an all parties conference 'to consider and determine the principles of the Constitution for India,' and for 'viewing the communal problem as a whole and its relation to the Constitution.'¹²¹

The report of the committee, popularly known as the Nehru Report after its chairman, Motilal Nehru, completely reversed the concordat of 1916. The report referred to what it considered the illogical fear of the Muslims of being dominated by the Hindu majority. It rejected separate electorate and recommended reservation of seats for the Muslims only in provinces where they constituted a minority.¹²² The Nehru Report caused deep anguish among Muslim political circles in Bengal; they saw in it 'the spectre of Hindu domination.'¹²³ The principle of separate electorate had become the *sine quo non* of Muslim politics in Bengal and its sudden rejection was looked upon as a betrayal of the Muslim cause by the Hindus. They claimed that because of their provincial majority they should be granted a majority in the legislature and to protect them from economic and educational exploitation of the Hindus they should continue to have separate electorate.¹²⁴ The Hindus saw no justice in these demands and instead 'claimed that, though they were in a population minority, they fully deserved their present superiority in the house on the grounds of past services and present capacity.'¹²⁵

In the face of this communal tangle in which neither community showed any sign of compromise, and with a general boycott of the parliamentary commission on the ground of its all-British composition, the British Government took another fresh initiative. On Octo-

ber 31, 1929 the British Government announced even before the publication of the report of the commission that the natural issue of Indian constitutional progress was the attainment of Dominion Status and that Indian opinion would be consulted on constitutional progress in India.¹²⁶

Following this announcement between 1930 and 1932 three Round Table Conferences of the Indian and British representatives were held in London to recommend a workable solution of the Indian constitutional problem.¹²⁷ Primarily because of the non-cooperation of the Congress, nothing substantial was resolved in these conferences.¹²⁸ On the failure of the Indian leaders to settle the constitutional and communal issues, the British Government unilaterally issued the 'Communal Decision' also known as the 'Communal Award' on August 16, 1930.¹²⁹

The award doubled the seats in the provincial legislatures and specified the number of seats for the different communities in the legislatures based on separate electorates. The Muslims of Bengal in spite of their numerical majority were allowed to have separate representation; they were to elect 119 members in the Legislative Assembly as opposed to 80 Hindus to be elected by the Hindu votes alone. But the novelty of the award was that the depressed classes for the first time were also recognized as a minority entitled to separate electorate. On this basis 10 seats in the Bengal assembly were to be elected by the depressed classes alone.¹³⁰

The award was shocking to the Hindu political elites of Bengal. They were distressed at the shrinkage of their legislative representation¹³¹ but what perturbed them most was the treatment of the depressed classes as a minority whose interests were distinct from the high caste Hindus. Wide protests were heard against the award all over the province.¹³² Their agitation was reinvigorated further when the award was modified by the British Government on the basis of the Poona Pact of September 1932. Through the pact, Gandhi and the depressed classes came to an agreement whereby the latter gave up their demand for separate electorate but were compensated by increased representation through reserved seats in the general Hindu constituencies. According to this arrangement the depressed classes in Bengal were allocated 30 reserved seats to be filled up by

the Hindus.¹³³

The pact envisaged a double electoral procedure. In the primary elections four candidates from the depressed classes, who were officially called the scheduled castes,¹³⁴ were to be selected by the voters of those castes only for each of the thirty reserved seats.¹³⁵ After any member of the scheduled castes was declared elected at a primary election as a candidate for a reserved seat in a constituency for members of those castes only, he was also deemed as a candidate for election both to the reserved seat as well as to the non-reserved seat in the constituency.¹³⁶ At the general election the reserved seat went to the scheduled caste candidate receiving the highest number of votes irrespective of his place in the general poll.

The Poona Pact, which was drawn hastily by a group of Hindu leaders from outside of Bengal had drastically reduced the representation of the caste Hindus of Bengal. Both the depressed classes and the Muslims were happy to see the Hindu political elite lose their legislative domination. But, to the caste Hindus of Bengal who played 'an outstanding part in the intellectual and political life of the people,' the pact appeared to be a conspiracy to cripple the force of nationalism in the province by securing a permanent segregation of the depressed classes from the rest of the Hindu community.¹³⁷ Even some of the British officials expressed doubt on the justice and wisdom of the Poona Pact so far as Bengal was concerned.¹³⁸ The Hindu *bhadroloks* were undoubtedly aware of their lack of rapport with the depressed classes but were appalled to see outsiders interfere in the provincial affairs without even consulting the people whose interests were being affected. It would have been perhaps easier for the *bhadroloks* to reconcile to the idea of allowing ten seats to the scheduled castes even on the basis of separate electorate than giving away thirty seats, thereby hopelessly reducing their strength to only 50 members as against 119 for the Muslims. The *bhadroloks* were certain that the depressed classes would readily respond to the overtures of the Muslims for a political alignment in the legislature, thus relegating the *bhadroloks* to an ineffective position in the legislature.

In despair a number of them, especially the unemployed educated youth lost faith in constitutional politics and turned into terrorists and revolutionists.¹³⁹ It was this same group of Hindu *bhadroloks* who

forcibly abrogated the Hindu-Muslim pact of C.R. Das in 1926. Others carried agitation against both the award and the pact which led to the hardening of the lines of cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims. The indecision of the Congress in Bengal over the award and the pact also facilitated the Hindu communalist groups to gain the sympathy of the *bhadroloks* by leading anti-award agitation.¹⁴⁰

The Government of India Act 1935

Disregarding this acrimonious controversy over the Communal Decision, the British Government took the next step. In early 1933 it issued a White Paper on Indian constitutional reforms on the basis of their decision in the light of the deliberations during the Round Table Conferences,¹⁴¹ and appointed a parliamentary joint committee to 'consider the future government of India.' The recommendations of this committee¹⁴² were embodied in the Government of India Bill, 1934 and after its passage through the Parliament and receiving of the royal assent on August 2, 1935, came to be known as the Government of India Act, 1935.

The most important feature of the act was that for the first time it committed India to a federal form of government by investing the provinces with separate legal entities; before that the whole of British India was a unitary state. Under the act provincial autonomy was introduced in eleven provinces to be known as 'Governor's Provinces.'¹⁴³ Each of these provinces was furnished with an executive and legislature and was broadly freed from the control of the federal government thereby making the provinces autonomous units of federation. Three lists of subjects were drawn up: the federal, provincial and concurrent.¹⁴⁴ The provinces were granted the right of concurrent legislation with the federal centre with regard to certain matters; however, in case of a conflict between the provincial and central laws in the concurrent field, the latter was to prevail.¹⁴⁵ Also, the division of financial resources between the provinces and the centre was designed to strengthen provincial independence.¹⁴⁶

The act completely abolished 'dyarchy' in the provinces and introduced full responsible government with few 'safeguards'. The executive authority of a province was to be exercised on behalf of His Majesty by the governor who was appointed by a commission under

the Royal Sign Manual.¹⁴⁷ The act prescribed that there shall be a 'council of ministers' responsible to the legislature to aid and advise the governor except in cases when he was required to act at his discretion or exercise his individual judgement.¹⁴⁸ When the governor acted at his discretion he was not at all required to consult his ministers but when he acted in his individual judgement, he was required to consult his ministers but was not bound to take their advice.¹⁴⁹

The governor could act in his discretion in matters such as appointment of ministers,¹⁵⁰ presiding at the meeting of the Council of Ministers,¹⁵¹ summoning the legislature,¹⁵² withholding assent to the bill passed by the legislature,¹⁵³ and withholding police secrets except in a manner and to the authority decided upon by him.¹⁵⁴ The governor was to exercise his individual judgement primarily in the discharge of his special responsibilities, some of which were : prevention of any grave menace to the peace or tranquility of the province; the safeguarding of the legitimate interests of the minorities; protecting the rights of the public services; prevention of administrative discrimination against British commercial interests; the execution of orders from the governor-general (viceroy) with regard to certain federal interests.¹⁵⁵ In addition, in the event of a breakdown of the constitutional machinery, the governor could assume with the concurrence of the governor-general all the powers of the government.¹⁵⁶

The new constitution completely modelled the provincial legislatures to a parliamentary system and granted them a wide range of power. Not only was the council of ministers responsible to the legislature, but it was laid down that a statement of the estimated receipts and expenditures of the province for the year should be presented before the Legislative Assembly which 'shall have power to assent, or refuse assent, to any demand subject to a reduction of the amount specified therein.'¹⁵⁷ Besides, under prescribed rules and regulations, the provincial legislatures were empowered to introduce resolutions having, however, only a recommendary force; table motions for censure of the government (ministry) or for the adjournment of the house to discuss matters of public importance; and with certain restrictions to put questions to the government for eliciting information.¹⁵⁸ The legislative powers of the provincial legislatures were based on the distribution of powers embodied in the legislative list given in the

act.¹⁵⁹

In the matter of the allocation of seats in the legislature the act incorporated the 'Communal Decision' as modified by the Poona Pact. The seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly were distributed as follows : general or Hindu-urban 12, rural 66 including 30 reserved for the scheduled castes; Muhammadan-urban 6, rural 111; Anglo-Indians 3; Europeans 11; Indian Christians 2; representatives of commerce, industry, mining and planting-European 14 and Indians 5; landholders 5; universities 2; representatives of labour 8; and women Hindu 2, Muhammadan 2 and Anglo-Indian 1.¹⁶⁰ The total number of seats in the Bengal Legislative Council was to be not more than 65 and not less than 63 which were distributed in the following way : general-urban 2, rural 8; Muhammadan-urban 1, rural 16; Europeans-3; to be elected by the Legislative Assembly 27; and not less than 6 nor more than 8 seats were to be filled by the governor in nomination.¹⁶¹ The provision for nominations was a legacy of the 'dyarchy' system and was aimed at securing representation of those groups or interests which were in the opinion of the governor inadequately represented.¹⁶² Six persons—1 Muslim woman, 1 Anglo-Indian woman, 1 Buddhist, 1 Jew, and 2 labour representatives (1 Hindu and 1 Muslim) were nominated by the governor in March (1937).¹⁶³

The constitution provided extra representation to some special groups far in excess of their numerical strength by whittling down some Hindu seats. The Europeans and the Anglo-Indians¹⁶⁴ with a numerical strength of 20,904 and 27,573 respectively¹⁶⁵ were given a total of 15 seats in the lower house and 3 in the upper house, whereas the Hindus, with a numerical strength of 22,212,069 or constituting 43.8 per cent of the population of the province,¹⁶⁶ were allocated only 80 seats in the assembly. Similarly the Muslims constituted 54 per cent of the population of the province and were, therefore, entitled to a statutory majority, especially when the Hindus were conceded complete control in the Hindu majority provinces, but they were given only 119 seats in the lower house which made them dependent on others for support in legislative politics. Commerce and landholders, with a constituency of 926 and 1951 respectively were granted 24 seats.¹⁶⁷ These groups, especially the Europeans and the Anglo-Indians with their share in the representation of commerce and industry formed 4

solid bloc in the assembly and became the balance of power factor on which any ministry in Bengal had to rely for the crucial marginal support. Consequently, a ministry with European backing could not claim true political strength and prestige both within and outside the legislature. The framers of the constitution perhaps deliberately provided an inflated quota to the Europeans so that if the Congress followed an obstructionist policy in the legislature, a sufficient number of members would still be available by a combination of the Europeans, the Muslims and the scheduled castes to implement the constitution.¹⁶⁸ What was forgotten in assuming that the constitution could be put into operation in the manner indicated was that it would lead to a bitter sense of helplessness and frustration for the Hindu community.

The details as to the composition of the constituencies for the seats were worked out by a delimitation committee.¹⁶⁹ The work of the delimitation of constituencies was a complicated one in Bengal owing not only to the system of communal electorate which necessitated the preparation of electoral rolls on religious basis, but also to the presence of the variety of separate interests which were to be represented. The actual work for the preparation of electoral roll commenced in late 1932 and was not completed before 1936. A very close scrutiny of the qualifications of associations and chambers claiming votes in the commerce and industries constituencies was found to be necessary. Also, 24 trade unions claimed voting rights for the two trade union constituencies of whom ultimately 7 were declared to be constituents.¹⁷⁰ The problem of delimitation was further complicated by the uneven distribution of Hindus and Muslims in different regions of Bengal. This resulted in the creation of many constituencies of unequal size. The largest territorial roll was in Faridpur general constituency with 137,478 voters and the smallest roll was in the Bankura Muhammadan constituency with 5,158 names.¹⁷¹ The largest rural constituency in terms of area was Midnapore (Muslim) with an area of 5,245 square miles and the smallest was Munshiganj (Muslim) with 126 square miles.

The average territorial area for the Muslim and Hindu constituencies in the lower house was 1,999 and 651 square miles respectively; their average population was 242,168 and 300,706; and their average size of electorate was 29,596 and 37,606.¹⁷² From an all Indian pers-

pective, Bengal had the highest number of voters per seat, both Hindu and Muslim. It was obviously difficult for individuals seeking election to establish close contact with such a large electorate spread over such a huge area. This was rendered even more formidable by general illiteracy, lack of mass media of communication and inadequate transportation facilities.

The most complex problem concerning delimitation was on the issue of determination of the ratio of seats for urban and rural areas. This problem was rendered all the more difficult because there had been a marked change in outlook since the introduction of the 'dyarchy' system and also because the leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities did not approach it from the same point of view. When the question of delimitation was under discussion prior to the introduction of the 'dyarchy', opinion was in favour of weightage to urban areas.¹⁷³ The Southborough Committee, on whose recommendations the constituencies for the legislatures under 'dyarchy' were delimited favoured weightage for urban areas on the grounds that there was a 'higher standard of wealth and intelligence in the towns' than in the rural areas.¹⁷⁴ Under 'dyarchy' only 2.3 per cent of the rural population was enfranchised compared to 5 per cent of the urban,¹⁷⁵ although the total urban population of Bengal was 3,684,330 as compared to 46,429,672 rural population.

The Lothian Franchise Committee, on the basis of which the franchise qualifications in the Government of India Act, 1935 was set, favoured the opposite point of view. They were opposed to giving greater weight to representatives from towns than to those from the country with respect to the franchise, and the corollary followed that towns and country districts should be equally represented.¹⁷⁶ This point of view led to a good deal of controversy between the Hindus and the Muslims. In the past leaders of both the communities had advocated the increase of the seats for the urban areas,¹⁷⁷ but now they took opposite positions. The preponderance of opinion in the Hindu community was still in favour of the Southborough principle of urban weightage, but the Muslims favored the Lothian point of view.¹⁷⁸ While the Hindus submitted numerous representations and memorials to the government requesting more seats for urban areas, Muslims requested a reduction.¹⁷⁹ The reason for this divergence of opinion be-

comes clear from the fact that the cities contained only 3.6 per cent of the Muslim population but 11.1 per cent of the Hindus.¹⁸⁰

The relatively greater proportion of the Hindus in the towns than Muslims was due to their general higher literacy ratio which made them seek such employment as could be found only in towns and their desire for a higher standard of living which could not be found in rural settings. Also the comparative freedom from traditional social taboos which was provided in town life particularly in a great metropolis such as Calcutta was appreciated by many educated Hindus. The census report of India, 1931 commented:¹⁸¹ 'The educated Hindu tends more and more to gravitate to the towns: as a young man his interest in the work of rural improvement is academic, and when he retires his ambition generally is to settle down in some urban area where municipal politics provide more excitement than the monotony of village life and the heart-breaking struggle against its ignorance, prejudice, conservatism and petty faction.'

However, the Muslims had not experienced to the same degree either intellectual dissatisfaction with rural life or a general urge to improve their living standard. An overwhelmingly large number of them especially in Eastern Bengal where they constituted the majority remained attached to their land as the principal means of livelihood and to their traditional values. That they were comparatively more numerous in some towns in Western Bengal was due to the fact that they did not have the same opportunity of obtaining agricultural tenancies in rural areas of that part of the province where the Hindus predominated.¹⁸²

When it came to the actual delimitation of seats there was also a conflict in opinion between the Government of Bengal and the Bengal advisory committee on delimitation of constituencies.¹⁸³ While both agreed that the existing 6 urban Muslim seats should be repeated in the new constitution, there was an acute difference of opinion with regard to the number of urban seats to be allotted to the general community.¹⁸⁴ With the increase in the size of the legislature, 6 urban Muslim seats meant a weightage of only 43 per cent instead of 329 per cent as it was in the old council. The advisory committee resolved to increase the general urban seats to 17, especially in view of the allocation of 30 scheduled caste seats to rural areas.¹⁸⁵ But the government was

unable to accept the committee's opinion since it 'would have meant carrying over to the new constitution the heavy weightage enjoyed by urban areas under the Montagu-Chelmsford system.'¹⁸⁶

The attitude of the government was met with strong criticism and ultimately a compromise formula was adopted by which 12 seats, of which 6 were for Calcutta, were allocated to the general urban areas. The crucial point in the allocation of the general urban seats was the peculiar position of Calcutta, the Hindu metropolis of Bengal.¹⁸⁷ Calcutta was the centre of Hindu learning, Hindu institutions, and Hindu political activities. Naturally Hindu opinion was strongly in favour of weightage for Calcutta and the government had to reconcile with political and social sympathies in favour of that city.

The peculiar circumstances attending the fixing of the Hindu Urban quota inevitably resulted in arithmetical discrepancies in the allocation. Not only did the urban population receive heavy weightage, but Calcutta, with a general urban population of 812,000 out of a total of 2,442,362 for the whole of Bengal, maintained its previous ratio of 6 seats. Containing one-third of the general urban population, Calcutta received one-half of the general urban quota of seats. The municipalities of the Presidency Division,¹⁸⁸ with a general urban population of 600,708 received 2 seats, while, on an arithmetical basis, they should have been given 3.

The remaining 6 urban seats were created by uniting a number of scattered towns of different sizes having no community of interest. A typical example was the East Bengal municipal constituency which consisted of all the municipalities of the Dacca, Faridpur and Bakarganj districts and of the Chittagong Division.¹⁸⁹ The usefulness of a constituency of such a nature could be easily questioned. Person representing such a constituency could neither establish any meaningful contact with his constituents nor could the constituents trust and depend on him for venting their opinion on political issues or grievances in the legislature.

Under the new act, franchise in Bengal was considerably enlarged. From the small beginning in 1909 when a relatively narrow aristocracy and a few select groups were given voting power to select members of the legislative council,¹⁹⁰ in the course of a quarter of a century electoral theory and practice took the gradual direction towards adult

suffrage. The Montagu-Chelmsford report, in more than one passage proposed for an enlarged legislative council with a substantial elected majority 'to be elected by direct election on a broad franchise.'¹⁹¹ The limitations of the franchise were to be 'determined rather with reference to practical difficulties than to any *a priori* considerations as to the degree of education or amount of income which may be held to constitute a qualification.'¹⁹² Nevertheless, it was only found possible to confer the franchise on about one-tenth of the adult male population.¹⁹³ The normal qualifications for the vote was residence within the constituency, coupled with the payment of a small amount in land revenue, rent of local rates in rural areas, and of municipal rates in urban areas.¹⁹⁴ All payers of income tax, and all retired, pensioned or discharged officers or men of the regular forces were also enfranchised.¹⁹⁵

The electoral roll in Bengal under the Act of 1935 enfranchised 6,695,483 persons or approximately 13.4 per cent of the adult population over the age of 20.¹⁹⁶ The Lothian Committee, however, had pleaded for at least 15 per cent enfranchisement of the population.¹⁹⁷ The report of the Lothian committee is the most important document in the history of franchise in India. At a time when the average percentage of enfranchisement throughout India was less than 3 per cent of the population, the committee, while agreeing that adult suffrage was the goal which should be ultimately attained, stopped short of recommending it only because they were convinced that the enfranchisement of so many persons would be unmanageable. It seemed to them to be 'the course of wisdom and statesmanship' to provide a system which would be administratively feasible, and which at the same time would give 'reasonable representation to the main categories of the population.'¹⁹⁸ The committee also recommended that further extension of the franchise would be left to the reformed legislatures after the lapse of an interval.¹⁹⁹

Both the Government of Bengal and the Bengal Provincial Franchise Committee²⁰⁰ took a conservative stand and were in favour of restricting the franchise to a much lower percentage on the grounds of administrative difficulty in handling a large electorate.²⁰¹ They also argued that if 15 per cent of the population were enfranchised, then recourse would have to be taken to indirect election since it would be

physically impossible and financially too expensive for candidates to try to get in touch with such a huge electorate.²⁰² Earlier in a despatch the Government of Bengal had recommended that for administrative reasons no more than 8 per cent of the population should be enfranchised.²⁰³ But in 1929 a similar committee consisting of the members of the Bengal legislative council expressed their opinion against a broad electorate 'for the obvious reason of the illiteracy of the masses, millions of whom do not know what the vote means nor do they understand the implications of representative government.'²⁰⁴ They argued later that extension of the franchise would give opportunities to the 'men with very little stake' to sweep the polls by pushing aside the 'older and soberer' elements which will lead to anti-British agitation and communal violence.²⁰⁵ Therefore, it seems the Bengali public leaders who sat in the Provincial Franchise Committee betrayed their elitist political concept in denying electoral rights to a larger proportion of the masses with whom they had very little political contact. It has to be recorded in this connection that the 'accumulated wisdom' of official and non-official alike was mistaken, for in 1937 an actual electorate of 6,695,483 or 13.4 per cent of the population, to which were added many difficult and complex special constituencies, was polled on the direct system without serious administrative difficulty.²⁰⁶

In enfranchising 13.4 per cent of the population of Bengal, the franchise qualification was laid down in such a way that everyone in the province who was a resident and over the age of 21 and who paid any tax, rate or fee was eligible to vote in the assembly constituencies provided he was not otherwise disqualified.²⁰⁷ Persons having certain educational qualifications (matriculation or final middle school examination) and certain other attainments like military service were also qualified to vote.²⁰⁸ In the case of women, wifehood or widowhood of men enfranchised on high property tax qualification or military service or certain other prescribed conditions were in themselves qualifications.²⁰⁹ Franchise qualifications were determined not by any pre-conceived idea of social justice or injustice with respect to different classes of the population, but to secure what from time to time was regarded by competent authorities as a reasonable quota of election.²¹⁰

The franchise qualification for the council was more restrictive and only persons with high property qualifications and services in certain

distinguished public offices were enlisted as voters. Those qualifications were somewhat lowered for the Muslims. Differential qualifications between the Hindu and Muslim communities were necessary in order to secure reasonably even communal electorates. In Bengal the problem of fixing the pitch of qualifications was to some extent simplified by the fact that 27 seats (40 per cent) in the upper house were to be filled by the legislative assembly. It was held that this number provided a reasonable quota for the representation of the less propertied classes since the prepondering majority of that house was to be elected on a very broad franchise. The reservation of 30 seats in the lower house for the scheduled castes and the fact that the population of the scheduled castes formed the majority of the general population in several constituencies of the assembly obviated the necessity of prescribing special qualifications for them. If the representatives of these castes properly organised their votes at the indirect elections, it was clear that they could secure a minimum of at least three seats in the upper house. The council franchise was not complicated by administrative questions, for no difficulties were anticipated in the management of the relatively few constituencies.²¹¹

The adoption of the new franchise qualification increased the number of women voters. Their number rose from 42,000 in 1929—the last roll prepared under the old constitution—to 970,000 in 1936.²¹² The increase in the women's roll was considered to be necessary to compel the candidates to consider their interests and opinions, to awaken political interest among the women and to make their votes an effective lever particularly in providing reforms of special concern to women and children.²¹³ The increase of women's franchise was a welcome progressive step no doubt, but in reality it was far in advance of the state of social condition of the province. The great majority of enfranchised women could not be accessible to the normal methods of electioneering due to the prevalent custom of *pardah* or seclusion. Also, the progress achieved by the Muslims was phenomenal. From an approximate total electorate of a little over nine thousand (9,289) in 1921, it went up to almost three and half million (3,458,364) in 1936.²¹⁴ The size of the Muslim electorate reflected closely their percentage to the total population of Bengal.

Conclusion

The evolution of provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935 was the result of a long process of constitutional growth and political movement for self-government. From a modest beginning in 1861, in the course of three quarters of a century, full responsible government with few 'safeguards' was granted to Bengal along with ten other provinces in British India. A marked feature throughout the period was that for the first time there was a cleavage of political feeling on communal lines in Bengal. Both the Hindus and the Muslims demanded political and constitutional reforms but the knowledge that reform would give greater opportunity for political power accentuated communal zeal. The Hindus felt that constitutional progress especially involving an extension of franchise, would mean the political subjugation of the province by the Muslims who were in numerical superiority. Similarly, the Muslims feared that any extension of self-government would lead to the political hegemony of the Hindus. This conflict in attitude was not based on religious differences. Due to the unequal development of the two communities during the British rule any broader political ideas could not establish themselves and therefore political awakening took a communal complexion which could be easily appreciated.

A major factor affecting the communal relations in the province was the influence of outside political forces. Communal sentiments hardly overtook the Bengali Muslims till the Aligarh politicians could gain a foothold in the province during the anti-partition agitation. The Simla deputation and the creation of the Muslim League which set the course of Muslim separatism was engineered by the Aligarh leaders. Notwithstanding the bitterness of the anti-partition agitation, the Bengalis successfully brushed aside their communal conflict by working a communal settlement as enunciated in the Lucknow Pact. In this new climate of communal amity the reform scheme of 1919 provided a unique opportunity for ironing out communal differences by working the reforms together. But the non-cooperation movement ruined this possibility. In addition fresh breaches were caused by the refusal of the Congress to concur with the Hindu-Muslim Pact of C.R. Das and the abrogation of the Lucknow Pact by the Nehru Report. The Congress was not interested in a regional communal solution that

was not applicable to the rest of the country. The stand taken by the Congress instigated the Bengali Hindu communalists to sabotage any attempt at communal compromise in the province which in effect turned the Muslims against the Hindus. Further estrangement of the two communities took place on the issue of the 'Communal Award'. But it is difficult to ascertain whether it was the 'Communal Award' or the Poona Pact which outraged the Hindu susceptibility in the province.

Throughout the preceding discussion a striking fact emerged that in spite of communal overtones in Bengal politics, the Hindus and Muslims ordinarily lived together in peace, and the struggle for political power between the two communities did not totally alienate one another. During this period a communal stigmatism undoubtedly vitiated the outlook of the political elites but its symptoms manifested themselves only in the few cosmopolitan urban centres and as yet did not percolate in the countryside. No doubt until now the rural population was mostly beyond the range of the influence of the middle class. But more important, in Bengal the frontier territory of Indian Islam there was considerable assimilation of Islam with local ideas and practices, and consequently the Muslims in Bengal were liberal and accommodating in their attitude to the sister community.

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103. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. VIII, p. 111; and *Indian Annual Register* (hereinafter referred to as *IAR*), 1923, vol. II, pp. 219-220.
104. Abdul Karim, *Letters on Hindu Muslim Pact* (Calcutta: The Oriental Printers and Publishers, n.d.), appendix A; *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1923-24*, p. 11.
105. Sayeed, *Pakistan*, p. 67.
106. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. I, pp. 205-6.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.
108. *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 104.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
110. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1923-24*, p.v.
111. Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1959), p. 21.
112. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1925-26*, p. xv.
113. See chapter II.
114. Great Britain, Parliament, East India, *Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee* (London: HMSO, 1925), pp. 201-203.
115. Anil Chandra Banerjee (ed.), *Indian Constitutional Documents*, vol. III, *Calcutta* (Calcutta: S. Mukherjee and Co., 1961), p. 53.
116. Indian Statutory Commission, vols. I and II.
117. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 312-13.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
119. *Ibid.*
120. Two extremely valuable documents on the divergences of views on reforms are the notes submitted by the Hindu and Muslim members of the 'dyarchy' government in Bengal on the subject of communal representation. See *Despatches from Provincial Governments*, pp. 71-91.
121. The Indian National Congress, *The Report of the Committee Appointed by the All Parties Conference to Determine the Principles of the Constitution of India* (Allahabad: All India Congress Committee, 1928), p. 23. About 28 organisations

representing different shades of opinion were represented at the conference. Cheloblu Devadanam, "The Development of Provincial Autonomy in India, 1919-1949" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York Univ., 1964), p. 40.

122. *All Parties Conference, 1928*, p. 25.

123. *Report on Administration of Bengal, 1927-28*, p. 9.

124. Government of Bengal, *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press), vol. XXX, No. 1, July 31, 1928, pp. 51-104.

125. Great Britain, India Office Library and Records, *Templewood Collection*, Anderson to Templewood, May 5, 1932.

126. Philips, *Evolution of India*, pp. 286-88.

127. For the deliberations of these conferences see Great Britain, Parliament, East India, Indian Round Table Conference, *Proceedings* (London: HMSO, 1931-33).

128. The Congress attended only the second session and was engaged in non-cooperation movement while the other two sessions were held.

129. Great Britain, Parliament, East India, (Constitutional Reforms), *Communal Decision* (London: HMSO, 1932).

130. The term 'depressed classes' was used to describe those members of the Hindu community who in common social estimation were considered to be untouchable, inferior, degraded, outcast or not fit in any way for social and religious intercourse on reasonably equal terms with members of the clean or higher castes. *Census of India, 131*, vol. V, Bengal, Part I, p. 494. Thirty eight per cent of the Hindu population were in the depressed classes, *Ibid.*, p. 503.

131. In the 'dyarchy' constitution they enjoyed forty eight per cent of the seats in the council while the Muslims had only thirty nine per cent.

132. *Templewood Collection*, Anderson to Templewood, Sept. 8, 1932.

133. For the text of the pact see All India Congress Committee, *Indian National Congress, 1930-34* (Allahabad: All India Congress Committee, n.d.), pp.170-172; and Maurice Gwyer, and A. Appadorai, *Sepeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 1921-47* (Bombay: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), vol. I. pp. 265-66.

134. The Government of Bengal by a special order issued on April 30, 1936 'scheduled' 76 castes in Bengal previously known as 'depressed classes' as coming within this special electoral provisions. Government of Bengal, *The Calcutta Gazette* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press, April 30, 1936).

135. Government of Bengal, Appointment Dept., *The Bengal Electoral Conduct of Election Rules* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press, 1936), rule 9 (2).

136. *Ibid.*, rule 14 (1).

137. *Templewood Collection*, Confidential note by Lord Zetland on Bengal and the Poona Pact, May 30, 1933.

138. *Templewood Collection*, Templewood to Anderson, Aug. 2, 1933.

139. *Report on the Administration [of Bengal, 1931-32*, pp. xv-xxi; 1932-33, pp. xviii-xx; and Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part I, p. 127.

140. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1932-33*, p. xxvii.

141. Great Britain, Parliament, East India, Constitutional Reforms, *Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reform, 1932-33* (London: HMSO, 1933).

142. Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Reports and Papers (1932-33), Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, vol. I, Part I, *Reports* (London: HMSO, 1934).

143. Great Britain, Parliament, India Office, *Government of India Act, 1935* (London: HMSO, 1936), sec. 46 (11).

144. *Ibid.*, Schedule vii.

145. *Ibid.*, sec. 107.

146. *Ibid.*, secs. 136-144.

147. *Ibid.*, secs. 48-49.

148. *Ibid.*, secs. 50-51.

149. Great Britain, Parliament, India Office, *Instruments of Instructions to the Governor Generals and the Governors* (London: HMSO, 1935), sec. BVIII.

150. *Government of India Act, 1935*, sec. 51.

151. *Ibid.*, sec. 50.

152. *Ibid.*, secs. 62, 74.

153. *Ibid.*, sec. 75.

154. *Ibid.*, sec. 58.

155. *Ibid.*, sec. 52.

156. *Ibid.*, sec. 93.

157. *Ibid.*, sec. 79. In a province with a bicameral legislature like Bengal, only the lower house or the Legislative Assembly had the right to vote the demands. The upper house was called the Legislative Council.

158. Government of Bengal, Home Dept., Legislative Dept., *Bengal Legislative Assembly Rules and Standing Orders* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press, 1937), Parts iii-vii.

159. *Government of India Act, 1935*, schedule vii.

160. *Ibid.*, 5th schedule, Table of Seats. The fixing of ratio of the commerce and industry seats between the European and Indian interests was done arbitrarily by the Govt. of Bengal and there was no constitutional provision to that effect. Government of Bengal, Home Dept. *Report of the Reforms Office, Bengal 1932-1937* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press, 1938), p. 29. For a short summary of the report by the director of public information see *Star of India*, Jan. 23, 1938. The reforms office was first established on June 11, 1932 and was subsequently in charge of the introduction of the reforms and holding the elections.

161. *Government of India Act, 1935*, 5th schedule, Table of Seats.

162. The instruments of instruction issued to the governors stated that the nominated seats 'shall be so apportioned as in general to redress so far as may be, inequalities of representation which may have resulted from election and in particular to secure representation for women and scheduled castes.' *Instruments of Instructions*, article xix.

163. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 137.

164. The constitution described a European as a 'person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent and who is not a native of India.' *Govt. of India Act, 1935*, 1st schedule, section 26. An Anglo-Indian means a 'person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India.' *Ibid.*

165. *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V. Part 1, pp. 451-52.

166. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

167. Great Britain, Parliament, East India, *Return Showing the Results of Elections in India* (London: HMSO, 1937), p. 40.

168. *Despatches from Provincial Governments*, pp. 82-83.

169. Great Britain, Parliament, Govt. of India Act, 1935, Delimitation Committee, *Report of the Committee Appointed in Connection with the Delimitation of Constituencies and Connected Matters*, Sir Laurie Hammond, chairman, 3 vols. (London: HMSO, 1936).

170. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1935-36*, p. iv.

171. *Return Showing Results of Elections*, pp. 42, 45. In the district of Faridpur the total population was 2,362, 215, of which 1,507, 157 were Muslims and 847,064 Hindus. Out of the total population of Bankura district numbering 1,111,721, only 51,021 were Muslims and 1,011,654 were Hindus. *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, Part II, pp. 220-21.

172. Delimitation Committee, *Report*, vol. II, *Proposals for the Delimitation of Constituencies*, p. xii.

173. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 20.

174. Great Britain, Parliament, East India, Constitutional Reforms, *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Secretary of State for India to Enquire into Questions Connected with the Franchise and Other Matters Relating to Constitutional Reforms*, Lord Southborough, chairman (London: HMSO, 1919), vol. I, par. 10.

175. Great Britain, Parliament, East India (Constitutional Reforms), Indian Franchise Committee, vol. I, *Report of the Indian Franchise Committee 1932*, Marquess of Lothian, chairman (London: HMSO, 1932), p. 56. Appointed by the prime minister at the end of 1931 this committee toured India in the early months of 1932.

176. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-46.

177. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. III, *Reports of the Committees Appointed by the Provincial Legislative Councils to Cooperate with the Indian Statutory Commission*, p. 174.

178. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 20.

179. *Ibid.*

180. *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, Part 1, p. 387.

181. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

182. *Ibid.*

183. The Bengal advisory committee was mostly a non-official body which was at work between 1932 and 1935. The final report of the committee was never pub-

lished but certain relevant references may be found in the *Report of the Reforms Office*. For the printed deliberations of the committee see Government of Bengal, *Report of the Provincial Advisory Committee of the Delimitation of Constituencies, 1933-34* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press, 1934-35).

184. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 23.

185. Under the old council there were eleven general urban seats with a 116 per cent weightage. The increase to seventeen meant a weightage of twenty nine per cent.

186. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 23.

187. 68.7 per cent of the population were Hindu. *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, Part I, p. 98.

188. For administrative purposes the twenty seven districts in Bengal were grouped into five divisions, each headed by a commissioner.

189. Delimitation Committee, *Report*, vol. II, Appendix VI.

190. The Indian Councils Act of 1909 provided for 28 elected members to the Bengal Legislative Council. The number of electors was a little over 6000. See Indian Statutory Commission, vol. VIII, p. 128.

191. *Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 1918*, p. 184.

192. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

193. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. I, p. 134.

194. *Ibid.*

195. *Ibid.*

196. The total population of Bengal was 51,087,338 of whom 25,348,818 were adults. See *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, Part II, pp. 4 and 36. The following table adopted from the Indian Statutory Commission, vol. VIII, p. 130 and *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1935-36*, p. iv, will show the growth of electorate in Bengal since the introduction of 'dyarchy':

Year:	1920	1923	1926	1929	1936
Voters:	996,316	1,021,300	1,153,212	1,344,316	6,695,483
Percentage enfranchised:	2.2	2.2	2.4	2.6	13.4

197. Indian Franchise Committee, vol. I, p. 34.

198. Indian Franchise Committee, vol. I, p. 21.

199. The latter recommendation was included in the *Govt. of India Act, 1935*, section 308, which provided that, after 10 years, provincial legislatures may pass resolutions on motions proposed on behalf of the cabinet recommending amendments of the act in respect of franchise, provided that such resolutions do not adversely affect any minority.

200. Provincial franchise committees, composed mainly of members of the provincial councils and usually presided over by non-officials, were associated with the Lothian committee for compilation of information, examination of witnesses.

and the formulation of advice. The reports of the provincial committees were published separately. The Bengal committee consisted of 16 members: 4 Muslim, 7 Hindu, 5 European, and was presided over by Sir Nazimuddin.

201. Indian Franchise Committee, vol. I, pp. 57-88.

202. *Ibid.*

203. *Despatches from Provincial Governments*, p. 61.

204. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. III, p. 173.

205. *Despatches from Provincial Governments*, pp. 67-77.

206. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 3.

207. *Government of India Act, 1935*, 6th schedule.

208. *Ibid.*

209. *Ibid.*

210. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 5.

211. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 10.

212. *Star of India*, Jan. 23, 1938. The recommendation of the Indian Franchise Committee was for 1,500,000 women voters.

213. Indian Franchise Committee, vol. I, p. 85.

214. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 3.

CHAPTER TWO

Parties and Politics of Separatism

Introduction

Provincial autonomy in Bengal under the Government of India Act of 1935 was officially inaugurated on April 1, 1937, and the administrative machinery for conducting elections was set up early in 1936. With the introduction of provincial autonomy, the centre of political activities shifted to the provinces and political parties became quickened with electioneering activities. In Bengal both the all Indian political parties, the National Congress and the Muslim League, entered into election contests. Unlike other provinces of India, in Bengal there were few fresh aspirants to compete for the votes of the millions of newly enfranchised peasants, since the ground was already held by the Nikhil Banga Krishak Proja Samity (The All Bengal Peasants and Tenants Association), a regional peasant oriented party. The few splinter groups led by the middle class elements like the Nationalist Party or the United Muslim Party were symbolical of post-electoral tactics and did not have any great impact on the election itself.

The announcement of elections resulted in protracted attempts at alliances among the political parties and interest groups to form united fronts. The extension of franchise to a large segment of the rural population had given them a vote value which the parties appreciated promptly but which they were ill prepared to tackle. The nature of the electorate was such that there was hardly any scope for non-communal parties to appeal across communal lines to the voters belonging to the pluralistic society of Bengal.

In the following pages an attempt will be made to discuss the election activities of the different political parties who participated in the election of 1937. The discussion will include the responses of the par-

ties to the act of 1935, their ideologies and programmes, and the nature of their appeal to the electorate. An attempt will also be made to analyse the various forces accentuating the politics of separatism. For, communalism, which in the past had influenced the political outlook of a section of urban elite only, was indiscriminately used by some political parties in appealing to the new mass electorate.

The Congress in Bengal

The Indian National Congress lost no time in repudiating the Government of India Act, 1935.¹ The Congress had already rejected the report of the joint parliamentary committee as 'unsatisfactory and unacceptable.'² In a debate in the Indian Legislative Assembly on the report, Bhula Bhai Desai, the Secretary of the Congress Parliamentary Committee, moved a motion rejecting the report 'root and branch' but maintaining neutrality on the 'Communal Award.'³ Jawaharlal Nehru in his presidential address at the annual session of the Congress held in Lucknow (April, 1936) called the act a 'new charter of slavery,' designed to perpetuate the hold of British imperialism in India.⁴ Independence, in his view, must be attained the Congress way—it must come by means of a democratic constituent assembly elected by the people of India. Meanwhile the Congress should contest the elections to the provincial legislatures, but on no account should Congressmen accept office.

While both the left and the right wings of the Congress were agreed on the desirability of contesting the elections, they were divided on the question of acceptance of office. At its annual session in Faizpur (Maharashtra) in December 1936, the Congress decided to contest the elections but postponed decision on the controversial issue of office acceptance until after the elections.⁵

In its manifesto, the Congress laid down its objectives in sending Congressmen to the legislatures as 'not to cooperate in any way with the act but to combat it and seek to end it' and to 'resist British imperialism in its attempts to strengthen its hold on India.'⁶ It drew up a moderate programme for the upliftment of the masses: reform of the system of land tenure, reduction of agriculturist's rent and relief of their indebtedness, improvement of industrial conditions in the towns, insurance against old age, sickness and unemployment, maintenance

of trade unions and the right to strike, the removal of sex disabilities and untouchability, and social and economic progress of the backward classes. Its political programme included the repeal of all repressive laws and regulations, release of all political prisoners and the full establishment of civil liberty. The manifesto condemned the 'Communal Award' as inconsistent with the democratic principle and disruptive to Indian unity but warned against the futility of any agitation concerning the 'Communal Award' and 'sought an agreed solution which would strengthen the unity of India.'

The manifesto, however, failed to commend itself to all Congressmen in Bengal where difference of opinion on the two burning issues of 'Communal Award' and the acceptance of office led to official Congress candidates being opposed by other Congressmen in more than one constituency.⁷ The Bengal Congress also did not adopt any supplementary programme to meet local conditions as was authorised by the Congress 'High Command.'⁸

Although the Bengal Provincial Congress was the 'only well organised and well established political party in Bengal,'⁹ prior to the election its hold in the province was very weak and had ceased to wield any influence in the wider sphere of the All India Congress policy.¹⁰ Two factors contributed to this sad state of affairs of the Bengal Congress: personal rivalry and ideological conflicts among the provincial leaders and clashes between the Bengal leaders and the 'High Command' over issues involving personality and interest of the province.

In 1920 when Gandhi launched his first non-cooperation movement he received an enthusiastic response in Bengal. The much respected and prominent Congress leader of Bengal, C.R. Das¹¹ also offered his support to Gandhi, but this friendship proved to be a short-lived phenomenon and C.R. Das headed a challenge to Gandhi's leadership and strategy.¹² In 1923, C.R. Das established the Swaraj Party 'within the Congress' primarily to contest the election to the Legislative Council and continue to work at non-cooperation from within the council and municipal offices.

Das's strategy was in contravention of the Congress policy of boycott of the council. The Gandhian group who were called the 'No-Changers' offered tooth and nail opposition to C.R. Das but finally conceded and the Congress approved of Das's policy of entering the

government to disrupt it.¹³ C.R. Das won a signal victory in the election of 1923 in Bengal and was also elected mayor of the Calcutta Corporation in the following year.

With the death of C.R. Das in 1925 personal ambition and jealousies overtook the Swaraj Party in Bengal. Gandhi came to Calcutta to mediate but his intervention only succeeded in advancing the interest of one faction. With the full backing of Gandhi, J.M. Sen Gupta, a wealthy barrister from Chittagong, gained the much coveted 'triple crown' which included the mayoralty of the Calcutta Corporation, presidentship of the Bengal Congress and leadership of the Swaraj Party in the Bengal Council.¹⁴ The arrangements made by Gandhi also resulted in creating cleavages within the 'Big Five' or the so-called 'brain trust' of the Swarajists consisting of Sarat Chandra Bose, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Tulsi Charan Goswami, Nirmal Chandra Chunder and Bidhan Chandra Roy.¹⁵

A fresh struggle for control over the Bengal Congress ensued when in 1927 Subhas Chandra Bose, a lieutenant of C.R. Das and younger brother of Sarat Chandra Bose was released from prison.¹⁶ The followers of Gandhi supported the moderate J.M. Sen Gupta and the more extremists supported Subhas Bose.¹⁷ Of the two revolutionary terrorist youth societies, the *Jugantar* representing the upper middle class supported Subhas Bose and the *Anushilan* representing the more socialistic outlook supported the Sen Gupta group.¹⁸

The dispute was personal and was chiefly due to the ambition of Bose to replace Sen Gupta both as mayor of the Calcutta Corporation and as leader of the Swaraj Party, 'but there was also an underlying difference in outlook, if not in policy.'¹⁹ In the annual session of the Congress in Calcutta at the end of 1928, Sen Gupta had professed to see in Dominion Status a means for the furtherance of the ideal of independence.²⁰ In the first hours of the new year, Bose's amendment demanding complete independence was defeated and Gandhi succeeded in carrying his compromise resolution approving the constitution proposed by the Nehru Report, threatening non-cooperation if it were not accepted by the end of the year 1929 and in the meantime permitting propaganda for complete independence to be carried on in the name of the Congress.²¹ While Sen Gupta was in favour of boycotting the councils as an integral part of the civil disobedience pro-

gramme as proposed by Gandhi earlier, Bose desired to remain in the council for achieving the goal of complete independence.²³

Between January 1930 and September 1934, Bengal went through the traumatic experience of another civil disobedience movement for the purpose of achieving *purna swaraj* (full self rule) under the leadership of Gandhi.²⁴ In Bengal all the members of the Swaraj Party excluding the Muslims resigned their seats from the Legislative Council.²⁴ The inevitable government reaction in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, was the arrest of prominent Congressmen and the imposition of severe restrictions on Congress activities.²⁵ This was a staggering setback to the Congress organisation. Deprived of leadership and lacking the privileges of a lawful organisation, the Congress in Bengal turned into a hotbed of terrorist youths who had no faith in constitutionalism and who advocated armed uprising to oust the British from India.

The civil disobedience movement was suspended in April 1934 and the Congress returned to constitutionalism after four and a half years of 'disasterous experience in illegal political activity.'²⁶ The despondency of the civil disobedience era only intensified the factionalism in Congress politics in Bengal.²⁷ Sen Gupta died in 1932 and the leadership of his group fell on his close associate, the pro-Gandhian B.C. Roy. Roy was able to increase his prestige considerably by reviving the Swaraj Party in 1934 for the purpose of formulating a 'constructive programme' and contesting the elections to the Indian Legislative Assembly.²⁸ The chief protagonist of the civil disobedience movement, Gandhi, also gave his blessings in reviving the Swaraj Party.

Roy was elected president of the Bengal Congress in 1935 over Subhas Bose, who spent the year in exile in Europe.²⁹ Sarat Bose, who was arrested in 1932 was released in late 1935. In his bid for the leadership of the Bengal Congress, Sarat Bose found himself isolated by the other four of the 'Big Five',³⁰ but Roy became also paralysed since the pro-Bose group of the provincial executive committee resigned.³¹

Roy's position became precarious as the grievances of the Congressmen of Bengal increased in quick progression against the Congress 'High Command.' Bengal felt aggrieved to have only one representative in the Working Committee of the All India National Congress³² although ten of the first thirty presidents of that body were from

Bengal.³³ The Bengal Congress felt insulted when the right of its delegates to enter the Lucknow session of the Congress was challenged on the grounds that subscription had not been duly paid.³⁴ The sentiments of the Bengal Congressmen were aroused by the scornful remarks made by the Congress leaders from time to time about Bengal's twin troubles of terrorism and party faction.³⁵ Much impatience was felt in Bengal on the failure of the Congress 'High Command' to reach a firm decision on the question of office acceptance. One of the popular vernacular dailies, *Dainik Basumati* in July 1936 urged the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee to 'throw off the shackles of the All-India Committee.'³⁶

Roy also failed to inspire any enthusiasm in the Congress organisation in Bengal with the frustrations of the civil disobedience period still so fresh in their memory. The annual provincial conference held in Dinajpur in 1935 drew very little interest and several prominent Congress workers were absent.³⁷ No provincial conference was held in the next year.³⁸ Congress also lost its control over the Calcutta Corporation which had been its stronghold since 1923.³⁹

In the face of mounting criticism by the radical elements for his failure to assert Bengal's proper influence in the All India National Congress lobby and his inability to consolidate his leadership, Roy resigned towards the end of 1936 from the presidentship of the Bengal Congress and the provincial nominating committee to run the election under the new constitution.⁴⁰ The exit of Roy had great political significance in the struggle for leadership in the Bengal Congress the liberal right wing finally yielded to the left. Forced out of the presidentship, Roy stayed out of legislative politics for the next decade. With Roy was thrown out another moderate but opportunist leader, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, who was also President of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce. While the former stayed loyal to the Congress, the latter quit the Congress. Both believed in working within the framework of the constitution and had their counsel been available to the Bengal Congress during the post election days, its political strategy could have been different.

Sarat Bose now assumed the responsibility of running the election as the president of the Bengal Congress Parliamentary Committee.⁴¹ He was not only the champion of the left and radical elements but

also represented the proud, brilliant and sensitive upper middle class Hindus who by long tradition in the past controlled the administration of Bengal regardless of whoever may have been its rulers. Full of charisma and uncompromising to a degree, Bose lacked the political vision to work with a parliamentary system in a plural society as was Bengal's.

Sarat Bose was able to strengthen his position by including some dissident elements in his enlarged parliamentary committee,⁴² but he soon found himself at odds with the Executive Committee of the Bengal Congress, which adopted a resolution on September 2, 1936 to the effect that it was the duty of the Congressmen in Bengal to carry on agitation both within and outside the legislature for the rejection of the 'Communal Decision' and that the Congress manifesto should be amended accordingly.

The decision of the Bengal Congress estranged the Bengal Congress Socialist Party, a group working within the Congress.⁴³ The group recognised that the 'Communal Award' was a negation of the basic principles of democracy but held the opinion that the Bengal Congress decision would drag the Congress into communal squabbles. The only way to end the mischief lay in strengthening the anti-imperialist movement.⁴⁴

The resolution was also highly embarrassing to the Congress 'High Command' whose socialistic plans for organising the peasantry *en masse* were likely to be prejudiced by such a policy.⁴⁵ Agitation against the 'Communal Decision' would not only alienate the Muslims from the Congress but also the scheduled castes since rejection of the 'award' would mean an end to the special representation they were assured of. Nehru deprecated the 'confused state of Bengal politics' and called the controversy over the 'award' a 'tussle between the reactionary groups and progressive elements.'⁴⁶ But in reality the resolution was symptomatic of the general fear of the Hindus of Bengal at the imminent prospect of Muslim majority rule in the province—a fear which was subscribed by most of the Hindus of Bengal, perhaps with the exception of the hardcore leftists—a fear which was not appreciated by the Congress 'High Command'.

In deference to the wishes of the Bengal Congress leaders, Nehru came to Bengal early in November 1936 to mediate between its con-

flucting factions. After 'prolonged and heated discussions' a compromise resolution moved by Sarat Bose and strongly supported by Nehru was finally passed. The resolution called upon all the Congress organisations in the province to give full publicity to the election manifesto of the National Congress, to agitate in combating the whole constitutional scheme including the 'Communal Decision' but to lay stress always on the 'objectives of the Congress, namely independence and on the economic demands of the masses.'⁴⁷ To gain Muslim confidence the resolution appended that the effective and correct method of seeking an end of the 'Communal Decision' must be on the basis of an 'agreed solution' consistent with independence and the principles of democracy.⁴⁸

The compromise formula was aimed at placating the conservative Hindu middle class and the Muslims but it failed in achieving either. Bengali Muslim feelings were deeply hurt when they saw congressmen openly agitating against the 'Communal Decision'. Disillusioned, many of them left the Congress in protest; some of them joined the non-communal Krishak Proja Samity but a good many of them joined the ranks of the communal party, the Muslim League.⁴⁹

The Congress, since its birth in 1885, professed to represent all the communities of India including the Muslims, but in reality its appeal did not touch the over-whelming majority of Muslims. Congress overtures to the Muslims from the wilderness of unconstitutionalism of the civic disobedience era did not carry the same force as to the Hindus. While the Congress boycotted the legislatures and all the pronouncements of His Majesty's government on the subject of constitutional reforms in India, the Muslims continued to be engaged in an anxious consideration of the reforms policy.⁵⁰ To them the civil disobedience movement was intended to coerce the government to grant '*swaraj*' defined in the Nehru Report of 1928.⁵¹

In its war against British imperialism the bourgeois Congress leadership was oblivious to the interest of the masses, the majority of whom in Bengal were Muslims. They were afraid that any support of the peasant and workers was certain to antagonise the landlord and vested interests within the Congress, since it will necessarily raise the issue of class conflict.⁵² According to Gandhi landlords and capitalists were merely 'trustees of the wealth of the society.'⁵³ In this im-

plicit defence of the feudal system there was no message of hope for the Bengal peasantry. Similarly Gandhi's glorification of poverty⁵⁴ was definitely idealistic but could not be a practical philosophy of life to the poverty stricken peasantry of Bengal.

The Problems of the Congress

When in August 1935 the Government of India Act, 1935, found place in the British Statute Book, the Congress was still under a hypnotic trance from the frustrations of the civil disobedience movement, and had wasted much time in formulating its policy towards the reform. Finally in December 1936, when it decided to contest the election, there was a painful realisation of the shortcomings in the Congress machinery to handle the millions of peasant votes. It quickly adopted at Faizpur (a village in Maharashtra) a mass contact programme for bringing the organisation in 'close touch with the daily lives and struggle of the people.'⁵⁵ It was, however, only too obvious that the programme was directed to elicit Muslim support.

The hastily adopted 'mass contact' programme of the Congress, however, failed to produce any miracle. For the 119 seats reserved for the Muslims in the Legislative Assembly only one Muslim applied for Congress nomination.⁵⁶ In the end Congress decided not to contest any Muslim seats in Bengal,⁵⁷ although the Congress Parliamentary Committee had decided that Congress candidates should be set up for Muslim constituencies.⁵⁸ In the election propaganda the Bengal Congress lent their moral support to the Proja Samity,⁵⁹ as in the United Provinces the Congress adopted the League candidates.⁶⁰

The Congress was 'oddly indifferent' to the idea of coming to some understanding with the Scheduled Castes.⁶¹ To the Congressman, the political and economic interest of all the poor classes in the society from which the 'depressed classes' were drawn, was identical and that the special representation given to the 'depressed classes' in the new constitution was only a device to check the social classes from uniting their strength.

The Congress polemics was too sophisticated to be comprehended by the illiterate lower castes. The antitouchability campaign launched by Gandhi after the suspension of the civil disobedience movement evoked very little response. The depressed classes were quite critical

of the fact that whenever Gandhi visited orthodox strong-holds he avoided reference to the subject of 'temple-entry' which was understood to have formed the main plank of his campaign.⁶² Some of them even resented the use of the term *Harijan* (God's man) by Gandhi as the community itself had not been consulted before coining a name for it.⁶³

The Scheduled Castes of the province did not organise themselves into a separate political party to contest the elections primarily due to a lack of leadership. In other provinces, however, 'a whole crop of political parties sprang up to represent the interest of the 'depressed classes.'⁶⁴ The Bengal Namasudra Association, which was organised in 1920 and which was quite vociferous in demanding reservation of one third of all non-Muslim seats in the legislature for the community⁶⁵ had ceased to be active due to strong caste Hindu opposition and a lack of government patronage. Prior to the election the community in Bengal was courted by the Congress but 'by community of interest' they sided with the Muslims whose interests, like theirs, were predominantly rural.⁶⁶ A good many of them also supported independent candidates.

In approaching the electorate the Congress in Bengal had to encounter opposition from other Hindu groups. The oldest and most active of these groups was the Bengal Hindu Sabha (association) which was established in 1923 to organise the Hindus against the rising power of the Muslims.⁶⁷ The Sabha was aggressively communal but outspoken and was extremely zealous to safeguard Hindu interests. It was also very adept at making political capital by putting forth a tireless propaganda that Bengal was being oppressed by an outside intrigue in which both the British and the Congress were involved.⁶⁸ Its influence was, however, limited to the high caste Hindus who were afraid that they would lose their century old privileges under a democratic system. The Sabha appealed to the Congress to organise a united Hindu party but the Congress refused to join.⁶⁹

The Bengal Hindu Sabha later became affiliated with the All India Hindu Mahasabha which was organised in 1928 to become the protector of Hindu culture and traditions in the political and non-political spheres of work.⁷⁰ The Hindu Mahasabha regarded the act of 1935 as 'highly inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing' but

decided to contest the elections to the legislature "with a view to protecting and upholding Hindu interests."⁷¹ They also vehemently condemned the 'Communal Award' as "grossly unjust to the Hindus" and felt it should therefore be scrapped.⁷²

A few weeks before the election, a section of disgruntled Hindus, some of whom belonged to the Congress, organised the Nationalist Party.⁷³ They put up their candidates in a certain number of constituencies against the Congress⁷⁴ after the Congress had refused to accept their minimum demand of adopting five candidates for the election.⁷⁵ Their basic grievance, as publicly proclaimed, was against the 'Communal Decision'⁷⁶ but in reality they were an organisation of the feudal elements to protect their class interests. Most of the members of this group, who were also affiliated with the Bengal Landholders Association, expressed concern in an address presented to the governor-general, Lord Linlithgow (1935-1944) at the future problem concerning the Permanent Settlement and wanted assurances that their status as landlords would not be affected.⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that similar views were expressed to the governor-general by the Central National Muhammadan Association of Calcutta which was also predominantly a body of landowners.⁷⁸ When it came to the question of protecting feudal class interests there was considerable unanimity in views between the Hindus and the Muslims who otherwise held differing views on political problems.

The Nationalist Party was formed also with the objective of post election negotiations.⁷⁹ They proclaimed that they would not accept office unless an equal number of ministers was allotted between the Hindus and the Muslims.⁸⁰ They admitted that the Congress was the premier political organisation in the country but raised the cry of 'Hindu interests in danger' in the hands of the Congress.⁸¹ Obviously the Nationalist Party found a ready sympathy with a section of the Hindu middle class who saw the danger to their community in the face of a Muslim majority in the legislature. The Poona Pact, which increased the Scheduled Caste seats to thirty at the cost of general Hindu seats, made the Bengali Hindus believe that the Congress had no respect for their interests and susceptibilities. The independent Hindu candidates, most of whom were landlords and liberal in political orientation, also opposed the Congress since they were afraid of

Congress radicalism.⁸²

Opposition to the Congress came from the United Labour Party also which was formed in January 1937 'for the purpose of guiding and controlling the political side of the organised labour movement in the provinces.'⁸³ Unlike the Congress, the United Labour Party decided that the new constitution, however short it fell of Indian aspirations, must be worked to the best advantage of labour.⁸⁴ The party was non-communal and anti-communist but represented only a segment of the labouring class. A large number of the workers were members of the Trade Union Congress which was an adjunct of the Congress Party.⁸⁵

The United Labour Party set up a parliamentary board called the United Front Parliamentary Board. Some of its candidates were adopted by the Congress but many others in spite of 'financial and other help' refused to join the Congress.⁸⁶ The party changed its nomenclature after the election to the Bengal Parliamentary Peasant and Labour Party, which contained only half a dozen members.⁸⁷ Its membership dwindled when two of its founding members, Aftab Ali and J.N. Gupta,⁸⁸ resigned in protest to its leader's, Kamini Kumar Datta Majumdar,⁸⁹ increasing support of the Congress in the Bengal Legislative Assembly.⁹⁰

The Muslim League

The Muslim League, like the Congress was also very emphatic in condemning the act of 1935. But, while it rejected the federal scheme as 'fundamentally bad' and 'totally unacceptable,' it was willing to try the provincial scheme 'for what it is worth in spite of the most objectionable feature contained in it.'⁹¹ A similar opinion was also expressed in the Indian Legislative Assembly. Jinnah, the guiding spirit of the League, who led an independent group of 22 members, proposed resolutions rejecting the federation but welcoming the provincial autonomy in principle and accepting the 'Communal Award' 'so far as it goes until a substitute is agreed upon by the various communities concerned.' All these resolutions were passed by the combined support of the Congress and the Muslims.⁹²

Jinnah was authorised by the Bombay session of the League (1936) to constitute a central election board. He announced the personnel

of the Muslim League Central Parliamentary Board on May 21.⁹³ It is hard to ascertain whether Jinnah consulted the members of the board before nominating them.⁹⁴ He had to face considerable difficulty in forming the board since he was late in entering the field of electoral contest and Muslim leaders in the provinces representing different parties had already launched their election campaign under the auspices of their respective parties.⁹⁵ But Jinnah showed extraordinary determination to constitute the provincial branches of the League Parliamentary Board and 'accomplished a great deal more than could be expected from him under the circumstances.'⁹⁶

The Muslim League Parliamentary Board met in June 1936 in Lahore and issued an election manifesto.⁹⁷ The socio-economic programme as enunciated in the League manifesto was very similar to that of the Congress; the only exception being that the League was against any appropriation of private property. There was also no basic difference in the political grievances expressed in both the documents. The repressive measures of the government found as much condemnation in the League manifesto as it had in the Congress. The League demanded that the new constitution should be replaced immediately by a more democratic one granting full self-government but in the meantime the League would utilize the legislatures in order to extract the maximum benefit from the constitution for the people.

The League manifesto differed from the Congress manifesto on certain issues. The Congress rejected the 'Communal Decision' but the League hailed it; the League was in favour of preservation of the Urdu language, but the Congress was very much known to be inclined for its replacement by Hindi although there was no specific mention of this in the Congress manifesto.⁹⁸ One peculiar aspect of the Muslim League manifesto was that in the contest for elections its principal appeal to the Muslim electorate was to be the protection of their religious rights and in achieving this the League sought the support of the Muslim *ulemas* and *mujtahids*.⁹⁹ It however, assured other communities that the League would cooperate with any other group whose ideals approximate those of the League, but warned the Muslim community against the danger of class struggle based on economic issues.

Peasant Politics

The only important provincial party to participate in the election was the Nikhil Banga Krishak Proja Samity. The Samity grew out of the peasantry's fight for agrarian reform. It was based on an economic programme and its members belonged to all communities although its leadership and composition was predominantly Muslim and 'even communalist Muslim.'¹⁰⁰ It aimed at 'agrarian revolution but through parliamentary and constitutional methods.'¹⁰¹ The Samity sympathised with the political aspirations of the Congress but looked at its economic programme as 'too halting and half hearted.'¹⁰² Ideologically non-communal, it preferred to stay away from the Muslim League although a good many of its leaders were also members of the Muslim League.

The cornerstone of the party's programme was the conviction that in order to make political democracy real and effective, a fundamental reconstruction of the economic framework of the society was the first prerequisite. In its preoccupation with the economic grievances of the peasantry, the Samity did not pass as many judgements on the act of 1935 as did the League or the Congress. It welcomed the act without much reservation and expressed its willingness to work it.¹⁰³ The Samity also accepted the general scheme of the all India federation with constituent autonomous provinces but advocated that the federating units must be organised as to be republics controlled by the workers and peasants.¹⁰⁴ The party was not satisfied with the 'Communal Decision' on the grounds that the Bengali peasants, both the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes, were given less representation than what their numbers entitled them to.¹⁰⁵ However, it condemned the agitation against the 'Decision' by the 'vested interests' as such agitation was liable to intensify communal feelings.¹⁰⁶

In spite of the very important political role played by the Samity in Bengal politics, it lacked in a systematic and organised career and materials on its history are rather limited. The origin of the Samity could be, however, unmistakably traced from the sporadic agrarian movements during the second decade of this century when the possibility of constitutional advancement with extended franchise had created a sudden interest among the political elite to woo the *ryots* of Bengal. As early as 1914 the first All Bengal Proja Conference was held in Mymensingh as the rallying ground to ventilate the econo-

mic grievances of the peasants.¹⁰⁷

In December 1917 a group of Calcutta lawyers and journalists led by Fazlul Huq, who will figure so prominently in subsequent pages, organised the Calcutta Agricultural Association.¹⁰⁸ In early 1920 another body, the Bengal Jotdars and Raiyat's Association, was formed and its office-bearers were drawn from Calcutta and the towns of Eastern Bengal.¹⁰⁹ The leaders of these and similar groups were both Muslims and Hindus.¹¹⁰ These groups did not achieve much success but symbolised the predominant role the *ryots* were going to play in Bengal politics and contributed in arousing the interest of the peasants in politics. It also brought home to the elite groups the reality of practical politics that their future success will depend largely on their ability to manipulate favourably the *ryots* of Bengal.

The Samity was formally established in 1929 under the name of Nikhil Banga Proja Samity with Sir Abdur Rahim as president. Abdur Rahim was a retired justice who was appointed a minister in 1927 but had to resign because no Hindu would serve under him.¹¹¹ In the Bengal council, the Samity had a solid support of eighteen members and was led by Fazlul Huq.¹¹² The Samity was primarily composed of Muslims but could also claim a few Hindu members in its ranks like Prof. J.L. Banerjee and Naresh Sen Gupta who were very vocal in supporting the demands of the peasants.¹¹³ The formation of the party in 1929 undoubtedly reflected the frustration of the Muslim members of the council at the very hostile opposition of the Hindu members as a solid bloc, irrespective of party affiliations, during the debates on the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill (1928) and the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Bill (1928). The provisions of both the bills were intended to benefit the peasants. In the council the landlords and high caste Hindus were at one extreme and a small group of Muslims, low caste Hindus and representatives of labour who fought hard in the interests of the small men were at the other.¹¹⁴ To the chagrin of the latter group the Congressmen remained neutral but put most of the weight of their opinion in favour of the former.¹¹⁵ This was a warning to the Muslims and low caste Hindus that the interest of the peasantry was not safe at the hands of the Congress.

The Samity functioned mainly in the rural regions of Eastern Bengal where the population was predominantly Muslim. It primarily

catered to the needs of the peasantry and, therefore, failed to build up much support from the dominant section of the Muslim middle class and the caste Hindus. With its non-communal ideology, the party tried to build its support across communal lines. But the danger of the *Proja* movement turning into an exclusively Muslim movement was inherent in the very nature of the movement. Since the majority of the *ryots* and *khataks* (debtors) were Muslims and the *zamindars* and *mahajans* (creditors) were Hindus, the socio-economic grievances of the peasants were bound to take on a communal character. Of the numerous grievances the one which intensified communal resentment most was the forced collection by the *zamindars* of an *abwab* (illegal exaction) called *mathat* (a head tax) for the worship of the Hindu goddess Kali.¹¹⁶ Writing on a *proja* disturbance in the Kishoreganj subdivision the District Magistrate of Mymensingh reported:¹¹⁷

They were primarily economic with a necessary communal tinge because more than 90 per cent of the tenants and debtors in the affected area are Mohammedans, while the large majority of the money lenders are Hindus. Mohammedan money lenders have, however, been proportionately threatened and looted...(and) I have personally received several requests for protection from Mohammedan *Mahajans*. It is also significant that, so far as I have been able to ascertain, there has not been a single instance of looting or threatening demands for anyone except money lenders as that no attempt has been made to molest Hindus as Hindus.

Soon after the Samity was established it became the rallying point of the Muslim *jotedars*¹¹⁸ and a few small Muslim landlords who had their grievances against the Hindu *zamindars*.¹¹⁹ The small Muslim landlords were bent on limiting the privileges of the Hindu *zamindars*, and the *jotedars* were eager to gain control of the intermediary commercial activities and credit operations among the peasants which were largely controlled by the Hindu *mahajans*. By skillful manipulation, the Muslim *jotedars* and small landlords tried to divert the peasant discontent away from themselves and turn it into Hindu-Muslim antagonism.

The economic depression of the early thirties gave a fresh momentum to the peasant movement in Bengal. Between 1930 and 1935 various *krishak* and *proja* associations made their appearance in several districts. During this period the Congress and occasionally communist agents tried to control these associations but with little success.¹²⁰ Under extraneous influence these associations sometimes made spora-

dic campaigns against payment of rents which, however, did not succeed due to the repressive measures adopted by the government and the rise of the price of agricultural commodities beginning in 1935.¹²¹ The *krishak* and *proja* associations, however, were able to gain control over the local self-governing institutions.¹²²

With the election in 1935 of Fazlul Huq as the president of the Proja Samity, the Samity was thoroughly reorganised and the scattered groups were consolidated under it. In the next year, the name of the party was changed to Nikhil Bangla Krishak Proja Samity,¹²³ and it adopted a radical socio-economic programme.¹²⁴ In the process of reorganisation, the Muslim 'landed interests' were eliminated from the party and 'land to the tillers' became the slogan of the party now dominated by the left-wing members.¹²⁵

To fight the election the Proja Samity adopted a short but precise programme aimed at bringing about a far reaching socio-economic change in the countryside of Bengal.¹²⁶ The primary emphasis of the programme was on the agrarian problems. It demanded the abolition of the *zamindari* system or the Permanent Settlement and the introduction of new tenancy legislations aimed at giving more rights to the tenants. It demanded an examination of the problems of rural indebtedness, better prices for agricultural products and the introduction of measures of public health and sanitation. It also demanded immediate introduction of free and compulsory primary education without taxation to the poor. The programme also included a demand for repeal of repressive laws and release of political prisoners and 'detenus.' In actual electoral contest, the main issue of Fazlul Huq's campaign was *dal-bhat*¹²⁷ for everyone.¹²⁸ To the Muslim masses of Bengal, Fazlul Huq and the Samity promised food for the poor while the League promised to protect their religious rights.

Apart from the Krishak Proja Samity, another peasant organisation, of Marxist orientation, known as the Bengal Kisan Sabha, functioned in some districts of West Bengal where the overwhelming majority of the population was Hindu.¹²⁹ In the early thirties the organisation of the party was undertaken by a few Congressmen.¹³⁰ This was an obvious move by the Congressmen to establish a rival party after they had failed to establish their hold over the Muslim peasantry of Eastern Bengal. The Hindu *zamindars* of East Bengal also secretly supported

the Sabha with the hope of neutralising the peasant movement by dividing its ranks.¹³¹ In 1936 organising committees of the Sabha were established in a few districts¹³² and an elaborate programme was adopted which called for the abolition of the *zamindari*, redistribution of land and relief of the peasantry from indebtedness.¹³³

In the election of 1937 the Bengal Kisan Sabha set up its own candidates in only two districts—Tippera and Noakhali in East Bengal but supported the candidates of the Congress or the Proja Samity in others.¹³⁴ In those two districts the Muslims were in the majority but the Congress had considerable influence due to the fact that many of the influential Muslim political leaders were Congressmen. The Sabha supported the Congress candidates as it was advised by its central body to cooperate with the Congress although the Congress election manifesto fell far short of their demands.¹³⁵ The sympathetic attitude adopted by the Sabha towards the Proja Samity during the election¹³⁶ was later abandoned and the Sabha became critical of the Samity for their delay in implementing the programme adopted by them before the election.¹³⁷ By the same token, the Kisan Sabha also criticized the Congress governments.

The popularity of the Kisan Sabha in Bengal fluctuated from time to time but at no stage was it able to get support from more than a fraction of the countryside of West Bengal.¹³⁸ To the illiterate peasantry of Bengal, the Marxist dialectic of class struggle failed to create much enthusiasm. The Congress 'High Command' was also suspicious of the Sabha as they felt that the peasants should not be organised separately.¹³⁹

The Bengal Kisan Sabha did not have an organisation of its own. It never functioned as a full fledged political party and served only as an auxiliary of either the Congress or the Communist Party of India.¹⁴⁰ In 1937 when the Sabha broke away from the Congress it had no organisation of its own on which it could fall back.¹⁴¹ Working as it did, within the framework of the centralised party machinery of the Congress or the Communist Party, the Sabha had very little opportunity to build a programme oriented towards catering to the peculiar needs of the local peasantry. In Bengal, for example, the system of land tenure was based on Permanent Settlement but in most provinces of South India the *ryotwari* system was prevalent under which the *ryot* paid tax directly to the government.

Attempt at Muslim Unity

Prior to the election of 1937 the position of the Muslim League in Bengal was far from satisfactory, 'it existed only in name and had died years before.'¹⁴² In the first meeting of the Muslim League Central Parliamentary Board held in Lahore (June 6, 1936), out of 40 Muslim leaders invited from Bengal only two were present.¹⁴³ Both Abdur Rahman Siddiqui and M.A.H. Ispahani, who represented Bengal in Lahore, belonged to the non-Bengali trading community of Calcutta. To placate the Bengali Muslim public opinion Jinnah nominated the veteran Bengali leader Fazlul Huq to the working committee of the board although Huq was not present in Lahore.¹⁴⁴

While Jinnah was busy organising the League Parliamentary Board, a new party, the United Muslim Party, came into existence in Calcutta. It was an attempt made by a group of reactionary Muslims, mainly drawn from landed aristocracy, and Calcutta non-Bengali Muslim business interests, aided by orthodox religious elements, to consolidate their leadership among the Muslims of Bengal under the facade of Muslim unity. They as much exploited the Muslim fear created by the agitation of the Hindus against the act of 1935 as they did the emotional fury of the Muslims generated over the Calcutta Corporation issue.

Early in January 1936, the Muslims of Calcutta revolted against the city's Corporation over its repeated failure to secure reasonable representation of the Muslims in the services of the Corporation, and the Muslim councillors, except one, and the first Muslim mayor, Fazlul Huq, resigned. Protest meetings of the Muslims were held in Calcutta and some district towns in East Bengal 'against the tyranny of the Hindu majority of the Calcutta Corporation.'¹⁴⁵ By a 'general consensus of opinion' the Muslims decided to boycott the Corporation and *ulemas* issued *fatwas* (religious injunctions) recommending social and political boycott of those Muslims retaining their association with the Corporation.¹⁴⁶

The affairs of the Corporation had whipped the Muslims into a united front and had undoubtedly provided the ground-work for the United Muslim Party. The Party was hurriedly organised in a private meeting on May 24 with a huge fund contributed by Muslim landlords.¹⁴⁷ The programme of the party was drafted in a somewhat stereo-

typed line with the emphasis on Muslim unity and improvement of the lot of the cultivators. It was, however, accompanied by an assurance that in working out the policy the new party 'shall always promote peace, goodwill and better understanding among all sections of the people of Bengal and shall keep in view the absolute necessity of justice being done to all interests and communities.'¹⁴⁸ But not too long before this, the president of the party, Nawab Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca, openly advocated the 'Islamisation' of the *harijans* or the low caste Hindus, and lent his enthusiastic support to the *Tabligh* movement.¹⁴⁹

The much publicised objective of the party to unite the Muslims 'under one banner' proved futile.¹⁵⁰ The only support the party received was from the Calcutta Khilafat Committee¹⁵¹ and the Calcutta New Muslim Majlis.¹⁵² But the support of these two organisations could not be of any political value since the influence of both was limited within the city of Calcutta and their political interest was limited to municipal politics.

The Proja Samity which consisted of progressive elements among the Muslims of Bengal stayed away from the United Party. There was very little scope for the Proja Samity with its peasant oriented ideology to make a compromise with the United Party, most of the leaders of which were landlords or rich merchants.¹⁵³ The Proja Samity called the United Party's attempt to unite the Muslims 'an election dodge with a view to capture the votes and to make the position of the leaders of the movement secure in the forthcoming legislature.'¹⁵⁴ Further dialogue in the matter by the United Party leaders that Muslim unity would mean the triumph of the peasantry¹⁵⁵ and that the Proja Samity leadership, if accepted, would result in class struggle¹⁵⁶ only helped to expose the reactionary nature of its leadership.

Jinnah was closely watching the political developments in Bengal. In his effort to rehabilitate the League in Bengal he sought the cooperation of the United Party but he received only cold responses. The secretary of the party, Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy, wrote to Jinnah on behalf of the party: 'local conditions may compel the Muslims for the purposes of the forthcoming elections to make local arrangements' and that elections in Bengal should be run under the ticket of the United Muslim Party and not the League.¹⁵⁷ Public expression of the United Party's indifference towards the League's appeal was made

by its president. Speaking at a meeting in Dacca, Nawab Habibullah said that the League should not have anything to do with the provincial elections; it 'has a justification for its existence only in dealing with the matters of inter-provincial concern and affecting Muslim community as a whole in India.'¹⁵⁸

The dazzling prospect of forming the first government in Bengal under the new constitution was the primary reason for the United Party's decision not to yield to the League's appeal.¹⁵⁹ Its leaders were afraid that by coalescing with the League they would lose their dominating position in the party since most of the provincial Muslim League leaders were sympathetic to their rival, Fazlul Huq.¹⁶⁰ The election programme adopted by the League was more progressive than the vested interests in the United Party were willing to subscribe to. The United Party leaders also believed that since in Bengal economic cleavage ran to a large extent parallel with the communal cleavage, an appeal to Muslim unity would result in acquiring a solid support for the party.¹⁶¹ Jinnah's opportunity soon came. The Muslims of Bengal felt a strong urge for unity to face the fury of the renewed Hindu agitation against the 'Communal Award'. On June 27, a memorial signed by 120 prominent Hindu leaders of all shades of opinion, including the much respected poet Rabindranath Tagore, was submitted to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland (1935-1940).¹⁶² It demanded the annulment of the 'Communal Award' and special protection for the Hindus by increasing the number of Hindu seats in the legislature on the grounds of their cultural and intellectual superiority and the contribution they make to the revenues of the province far in excess of their population strength.

The Hindu memorial was supported by a 'monster' meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall on July 15 presided over by Tagore, and by numerous other meetings in the districts.¹⁶³ In his presidential speech Tagore not only condemned the 'Award' in unequivocal terms but also made a caustic remark in complete disregard of Muslim sentiments about the possible danger to the Bengali language and literature if the political predominance of the Muslims was allowed to be established in the province. In his speech Tagore commented:¹⁶⁴ 'Ever since the very suggestion of this proposal ('Communal Award'), the atmosphere in our province has become turbid with passion menacing

amenities of civilized life, based upon mutual tolerance and cooperation. Already a spirit of wanton destructiveness seems to be creeping even in the commonwealth of our literature, threatening violence to our language.... This is the first red signal of danger presaging a fatal collision between neighbouring communities whose duty it is to create a comprehensive life of common welfare.' This was taken as a great insult to the new generation of Bengali Muslim intelligentsia who were using the Bengali language as the vehicle of literary expression after years of neglecting it, and they were very vocal, in spite of much opposition, in asserting that Bengali should be the national language of the Muslims of Bengal and not Urdu.¹⁶⁵

The Hindu agitation against the 'Award' reminded the Muslims of the anti-partition agitation which led to the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 and they became concerned that the same fate might await the 'Communal Award'. The Muslims held a series of protest meetings in which appeals were made for Muslim unity to protect Muslim interests. In a representative Muslim meeting held on August 10 in the Calcutta Town Hall a unanimous recommendation was made to form a 'Committee of Three' consisting of Fazlul Huq, the Nawab of Dacca and Jinnah to 'bring together Muslims of different parties under one organisation.'¹⁶⁶ The Muslims felt a sense of relief when Lord Zetland in a letter to the viceroy rejected the Hindu prayer and made a definite declaration that the 'Award' could not be altered unless it was desired by the communities themselves.¹⁶⁷

On an invitation from some Muslim leaders of Bengal Jinnah came to Calcutta on August 17 and started negotiations with both the United Muslim Party and the Proja Samity in order to achieve Muslim unity under the League platform.¹⁶⁸ His objective was to get the support of both or either parties which would leave no scope for an alliance between them without the League in the future as such an alliance would isolate the League completely. Jinnah, however, was more inclined to come to an understanding with the Proja Samity because of the Samity's progressive leadership and its strong support in the *mufassil* (countryside). Jinnah was also influenced by earlier unfavorable responses he had received from the United Muslim Party. At a reception by the Calcutta students, Jinnah made it abundantly clear that to achieve Muslim solidarity, the progressive elements must

dominate and the reactionaries must be overpowered.¹⁶⁹ In making his approach to the Samity, Jinnah was encouraged by Sir Muhammad Iqbal who was particularly impressed by the non-communal nature of the party.¹⁷⁰ But a settlement with the non-communal Proja Samity was bound to be difficult since that party was against any merger with the Muslim League¹⁷¹ and its radical elements were not ready to make any compromise on the socialistic agrarian programme of the party.¹⁷²

On August 25, on the eve of Jinnah's departure from Calcutta, a press release was made without the knowledge of Fazlul Huq of an agreement that the United Muslim Party and the New Muslim Majlis¹⁷² had gone into voluntary liquidation and joined the Parliamentary Board of the Muslim League.¹⁷⁴ Both the Majlis and the United Party were too apprehensive that a League-Proja entente would completely ruin their political future and were too anxious to prevent such a development. A provincial parliamentary board was formed with the Nawab of Dacca as its president. The membership of the board consisted of: United Muslim Party, 15; Muslim League, 7; New Muslim Majlis, 7; and independent non-party members to be nominated by Jinnah.¹⁷⁵ A provision was appended to the announcement that a quota of 15 members had been agreed upon for the Proja Party in case they decided to merge with the board.

Obviously Jinnah wanted to confront Huq with an accomplished fact so that if Huq failed to act on the arrangements, the blame for breaking the unity of the Muslims in Bengal would be laid on Huq's shoulders. Huq and his party refused to enter the board under the terms imposed by the board.¹⁷⁶ Jinnah retaliated by removing Huq's name from the membership of the League Central Parliamentary Board on his 'being guilty of breach of the Bengal agreement.'¹⁷⁷ Huq was removed from a body to which he never belonged by his own consent, and was held responsible for breach of an agreement in which he had never entered.

The announcement of the agreement evoked general resentment among the Bengali Muslims.¹⁷⁸ The provincial board was under the dominating influence of a handful of non-Bengali businessmen through the blessings of Jinnah. A political observer commented:¹⁷⁹

Bengal does not know of any organisation like the 'Muslim Majlis' nor has it any importance, if any at all beyond the city of Calcutta, nor has it ever

taken active part in any politics or in the amelioration of the teeming millions of Bengal who perhaps have never even heard the name of such an organisation. The Muslim League in Bengal is at present not an active organisation. Further many of the nominees of the League and the Muslim Majlis as well as the non-party members are rank outsiders—non-Bengalis, and in these days of provincial autonomy it would be doing sheer injustice to Bengal to have foreigners to wield its destiny.

The governor of Bengal also doubted the credibility of the Calcutta group and their influence on the Muslims of Bengal.¹⁸⁰

The Proja Samity demanded the abolition of the *zamindari* system without compensation and the introduction of universal free primary education without taxation.¹⁸¹ But the League refused to concede these 'minimum demands' on the argument that abolition of the *zamindari* without compensation would be against Islamic principles of private ownership and that free primary education could not be introduced with the inadequate financial resources of the province.¹⁸² Speaking before the students of Dacca University after the breakdown of the Huq-Jinnah negotiations, Huq said that the non-Bengali Muslim business interests in Calcutta, who were favoured by Jinnah,¹⁸³ were responsible for the failure to achieve unity among the Bengali Muslims.¹⁸⁴ These traders were afraid that unity among the Bengali Muslims might result in an emotional upsurge of regionalism to the detriment of their business interests.

It was also suggested by Huq in an open letter to Jinnah that a secret political intrigue involving the governor of the province and the British bureaucracy was responsible for Jinnah's sudden reconciliation with the United Party and the turning away from the Proja Samity.¹⁸⁵ Surprisingly, there was no protest to such a serious allegation either from Jinnah or from the government house. It seems, therefore, probable that at the prospect of a Huq-Jinnah rapprochement, the United Party became panicky and sought the intercession of the provincial governor who was already aggrieved against Huq. Huq had earlier written a letter to the governor in which he accused the governor of taking a partisan spirit in favour of some candidates seeking election.¹⁸⁶

The European business community of Calcutta, most of whom were in the jute mill industry, had also a role to play in the development of the party alliances in the province. The European jute traders of Calcutta interceded in favour of the United Party, for in the past

they had cultivated good relationship with many of the leaders of that party.¹⁸⁷ With the approach of provincial autonomy they felt that their commercial interests would be safer in the hands of the United Muslim Party than in those of the Proja Samity since the Samity's programme of a minimum price for jute for the cultivators would mean a cut in the profits of the European merchants.¹⁸⁸

Huq also explained that his party could not agree to the nominees of the United Muslim Party or the League to the parliamentary board because most of them were landlords and city dwellers. The prospect of their cooperation with the Proja members was very slight:¹⁸⁹

Their interests are not the interest of the *Projas* for their position and their prestige, their very livelihood and their importance are based upon their denial of fundamental rights to the masses, whom they have for so long exploited.

Fazlul Huq also objected to any nomination to the parliamentary board by Jinnah as that would give access to the undesirable elements in the board and would create confusion.¹⁹⁰

The political strategy of Jinnah was all Indian and he was trying to fit Bengal into his broad framework. He wanted to unite all the Muslims of India under the League with the objective of achieving for the Muslims their due share in the administration of the country.¹⁹¹

If you achieve unity in Bengal of a solid and substantial section of the Muslims, there is bright day for Bengal.....If the entire Muslims of India were politically organised and if they remained united then they will be forging sanctions behind them in order to play their part in the decision of all India questions. . . . The fate of the Muslims of all provinces is bound together. They constitute an individual whole and a single political unity. They must rise and fall together.

But on this issue the Proja Samity had nothing to do with Jinnah and his League Parliamentary Board. Because it was regional in orientation, the Samity did not aspire to look beyond Bengal and its appeal was not based on a promise of 'sharing the administration' but rather on a promise to solve the basic problems of the livelihood of the peasantry, both Hindu and Muslim. To it all talks of Muslim unity and solidarity for merely political ends were worse than useless and in the words of its leader:¹⁹²

On the question of the interests of the *Projas* and *Krishaks*, the tillers of the soil who sweat so that others might enjoy the fruits of their labour there is no difference whatever between the Hindus and the Muslims for their interests are

welded into one another, together they stand and together, we are confident, they shall triumph.

The formation of the Muslim League Parliamentary Board of Bengal without the Samity meant nothing more than a change in the nomenclature of the United Muslim Party. The Bengal Presidency Muslim League which was by passed by Jinnah in his negotiations severed its connection with the parliamentary board and chose to lend its sympathy to the Proja Party.¹⁹³ Jinnah's influence was limited to a section of the Muslim urban elite of Dacca and Calcutta and he did not count very much in rural areas, and with the exception of a few limited areas, the board had no prospect of setting candidates of its own.¹⁹⁴ In spite of Jinnah's claim that the board in Bengal represented 'everyone who is counted in public life.'¹⁹⁵ it turned into a parlour of the conservative forces and opportunists. The progressive elements remained steadfast with the Proja Samity but it lacked both organisational strength and financial support. It was to their credit that all attempts to forge Muslim unity on communal lines were thwarted.

After the failure of the Proja-League Board negotiations, the Muslim electorate in Bengal was approached by both the parties. The Bengal Parliamentary Board adopted a 25 point programme 'setting out the special and peculiar needs of Bengal' in addition to the creed, policy and programme of the central board.¹⁹⁶ On the fundamental questions affecting the interests of the peasantry, such as Permanent Settlement and rural indebtedness, the manifesto was extremely vague, but it was abundantly clear on one point: that in its confrontation with the Proja Samity its primary appeal to the Muslim masses would be based on Islam and Muslim unity. It read :¹⁹⁷

His (Muslim voter's) salvation lies in holding fast to the Rope of Allah and in his eternal faith in the Brotherhood of Islam. Our Faith, the most democratic yet known to history, does not contemplate the division of Muslim society into groups on any economic basis. On the contrary under its banner the highest and the lowest have always stood shoulder to shoulder in the service of Allah and his people.

To bolster its propaganda the League also obtained a *fatwa* from Maulana Abu Bakr Siddiqui, President of the Jamiat-e-Ulema, Bengal.¹⁹⁸ The *fatwa* enjoined upon the Muslims the imperative need of being united under the Bengal League Parliamentary Board which was

the 'true Muslim Party and the real Muslim Proja Samity.' It also warned the Muslims to stay away from the Proja Samity which was subservient to the Hindu Congress.

Rumours were also widely circulated by the League Parliamentary Board's agents that Fazlul Huq was negotiating with the Hindus even at the cost of sacrificing Proja interests.¹⁹⁹ The secretary of the board in Bengal, H.S. Suhrawardy, branded the Proja Samity as the *Maharaja-Mahajan Dal* (the group of landlords and creditors).²⁰⁰ To create hatred against the Proja Samity, he also called that party a collaborator of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, both of whom were bent on replacing the 'Communal Decision.'²⁰¹ Should not the Muslims therefore vote for the League, which was also the 'Islam Party'? The symbol of the League Parliamentary Board thus soon became 'Vote for the Muslim league, Vote for Islam.'²⁰²

Jinnah, who had realised that the Proja Samity constituted the principal threat to the League's position in Bengal, also joined the rhetorics against the Proja Samity. In his first election speech in Bengal he warned the voters against the 'electioneering catch phrases and empty promises' of the Proja Samity. He called the Proja Samity's promise of abolition of Permanent Settlement a 'false promise which could not be accomplished.'²⁰³

But the League still functioned, in the words of Nehru, in the 'higher regions of the upper middle class'²⁰⁴ and its appeal was mostly limited to the urban middle class whose economic interest was in direct clash with the Hindu middle class. In the Bengal countryside the Proja Samity's 'full blooded radical programme of economic reconstruction' appealed in a special manner to the peasantry.²⁰⁵ The 'grim fight' on which the Proja Samity was determined was 'between *zamindars* and capitalists on the one side, and poor people on the other'—a fight 'in which the people of Bengal are divided on a purely economic issue.'²⁰⁶

In the villages of Eastern Bengal the Muslims were in overwhelming majority and they could not see any real threat from the Hindus.²⁰⁷ Their primary grievance was against the evils associated with the *zamindari* system and the Proja Samity had promised to abolish it. The Samity had also 'deeper roots in Bengal'²⁰⁸ as its leaders had more contact with the Muslim masses and addressed meetings in all corners of Bengal.²⁰⁹ In contrast most of the League leaders could not speak

Bengali fluently and had considerable difficulty in establishing rapport with the masses.³¹⁰ In this circumstance the League slogan of Muslim unity failed to produce much response.

Conclusion

Due to the introduction of the principle of communal representation there was very little scope for the parties to appeal to the electorate across the communal lines on a broad programme or policy. In spite of this practical difficulty emanating from the Government of India Act of 1935, non-communal parties still held the ground in Bengal. Attempts made by the Bengal Hindu Sabha and the Muslim League to close the ranks of their respective communities were responded to only by the vested interest and the conservative section of the middle class who competed with each other in matters of job opportunities and protection of their special privileges.

Communal politics had no appeal to the villages of Bengal where communities were bound together as a class through common experiences of economic deprivations and social discriminations. But to the class consciousness of the peasantry who were overwhelmingly Muslim in certain regions of Bengal, a community consciousness could be generated by making repeated appeals to religion and pointing out the difference in faith of the haves and the have nots. The poor and illiterate peasants of Bengal who were also the very orthodox in their religious convictions could be whipped into religious fanatics by crafty manipulators. Through election politics much religious and communal propaganda was made but as yet communalism remained a dormant political force.

With the talk about election, political parties became suddenly aware of the significant role they were going to play in the politics of the province. However, the party machineries lacked in organisational strength and practical experience to contest the election on a large scale. In the past parties had been primarily busy in anti-British agitation and their experience in parliamentary politics was very limited. The most well organised and the oldest of the parties, the Congress, stayed away from the constructive legislative politics except for brief periods since the introduction of reforms in 1919. When the Government of India Act of 1935 was introduced the party was psychologically

not prepared to enter constitutional politics and wasted much time in settling internal disaffection and in determining its attitude towards the new reforms. The League's influence was limited to the urban upper middle class and thrived on communal propaganda. Both the League and the Congress were all India parties and their party hierarchies allowed very little flexibility in adapting to the local needs and conditions. The only regional party with future potentiality was the Proja Samity but since its primary concern was the problems of the *ryots*, the middle class had very little interest in the Samity. The party was also fraught with the danger of turning into a communal party due to the peculiar nature of the socio-economic structure of rural Bengal.

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2. Great Britain, Parliament, East India, Progress and Condition, *Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India During the Year 1934-1935* (London: HMSO, 1935), p. 41.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 97 and Government of India, *Legislative Assembly Debates* (Simla: Govt. of India, 1935), vol. I, Feb. 4, 1935, p. 262. Desai's motion was rejected by a vote of 72 to 61.
4. Coupland, *The Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 12 and *IAR*, Part I, 1936, pp. 248-49.
5. *IAR*, Part II, 1936, p. 205 and Sitaramayya, *Congress*, vol. II, p. 35.
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7. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1935-36*, p. vi. Prof. Coupland held a different view; he asserted that "All Congressmen accepted the election manifesto as their common platform in all Provinces." Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 13.

8. A very popularly used term which referred to the inner core of Congress leadership and which followed a single policy during these years. See Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 11.

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16. He was arrested in 1924 under Regulation III of 1818 shortly after he was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation by C.R. Das.

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20. *Ibid.*, 1927-28, p. 15.

21. *Ibid.*,

22. *Ibid.*, 1928-29, p. xii.

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81. *The Statesman*, Jan. 21, 1937.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1937.
84. *Ibid.*
85. *JAR*, vol. I, 1937, p. 218.
86. *Ibid.*
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88. Both of them returned unopposed to the Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Water Transport and Railway Trade Union Constituencies respectively.
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98. See Coupland, *Indian Problem*. Part II, pp. 13-14.
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104. Kabir, *Muslim Politics*, p. 29.
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106. *Ibid.*
107. K. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 8 and A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha*, p. 14.
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113. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha*, p. 56.

114. Drummond, "Legislative Council," pp. 206, 217-18.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

116. A.H. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha*, pp. 11-12, 15.

117. Great Britain, India Office Library and Records, *Public and Judicial Files*, 1930, From L.B. Burrows to the Chief Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, No. 902-3 dated the 18th July, 1930.

118. Ordinarily means a rich peasant or holder of land for the purpose of cultivation not necessarily with proprietary right.

119. Yuri Gankovski and Polonskaya, *A History of Pakistan* (Moscow: "Nauka" Publishing House, 1964), p. 65.

120. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1934-35*, pp. xxx-xxxii.

121. *Ibid.*, pp. xxviii and xxx-xxxii.

122. *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

123. Beforehand the peasant movement in Noakhali and Tippera was known as the *Krishak* movement. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha*, p. 99.

124. K. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 26 and A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948), p. 192.

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126. For the programme see A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha*, p. 99 and *Star of India*, July 18, 1936.

127. It meant lentil soup and rice which constituted the ordinary meals of the Bengali peasant.

128. K. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 30.

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132. Weiner, *Politics*, p. 135.

133. *IAR*, vol. II, 1936, pp. 293-96.

134. Weiner, *Politics*, p. 135.

135. *IAR*, vol. II, 1936, p. 281.

136. At one point the Sabha advocated its merger with the Proja Samity, Weiner, *Politics*, p. 135.

137. *IAR*, vol. I, 1939, p. 411.

138. In April 1938 it claimed a total membership of 35,575. Weiner, *Politics*, p. 134.

139. *IAR*, vol. II, 1936, p. 286.

140. Gene D. Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1957), pp. 384-85.
141. Weiner, *Politics*, p. 22.
142. K. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 29.
143. Ispahani, *Jinnah*, p. 16.
144. *Star of India*, June 15, 1936.
145. *Ibid.*, Jan. 20, Feb. 13, 1936.
146. *Ibid.*, May 16, 1936.
147. *Star of India*, May 25, 1936.
148. *Public and Judicial Files*, No. 320 of 1936.
149. *Star of India*, Jan. 4, 7, 1936.
150. *Public and Judicial Files*, No. 4135 of 1936.
151. It was established in 1919 in connection with the Khilafat movement.
152. A group founded in 1932 as a 'sporting club' but which also took interest in corporation politics. Ispahani, *Jinnah*, p. 4.
153. Zaidi's remark (Zaidi, "Muslim League Policy" in Philips, *Partition*, p. 248) that Fazlul Huq was willing to come to some settlement with the United Party but backed out at the last moment is questionable since the sources he cites, namely *Star of India*, June 16 and 17 do not suggest such conclusions.
154. Statement of Fazlul Huq and 119 other leaders. *Star of India*, June 16, 1936.
155. Statement of H.S. Suhrawardy, the secretary of the party, *Star of India*, June 16, 1936.
156. Sir Khwaja Nazimuddin's speech at a reception by Anjuman-i-Islam at Darjeeling. *Star of India*, June 24, 1936. He was one of the organisers of the party.
157. Suhrawardy to Jinnah, Calcutta, June 4, 1936, in Mukhtar Masood (ed.), *Eye Witnesses of History. A Collection of Letters Addressed to Quaid-e-Azam* (Karachi: Guild Publishing House, 1958), pp. 8-10.
158. *Star of India*, June 26, 1936.
159. Ispahani, *Jinnah*, p. 17.
160. See Suhrawardy's letter to Jinnah in Masood, *Eye-Witnesses*, pp. 8-10.
161. *Modern Review*, vol. LX, No. 1, July 1936, p. 107 and *Indian Review*, vol. XXXVIII, No. 8, Aug. 1936, p. 495.
162. *Star of India*, July 16, 1936 and *IAR*, vol. II, 1936, p. 266.
163. For the full text of his speech see *Modern Review*, vol. LX, No. 2, Aug., 1936, pp. 184-86. Tagore was obviously referring to the recent writings of the Bengali Muslims in which spoken dialects of Eastern Bengal and the commonly used Arabic and Persian words found place.
164. For details see Fazlul K. Sardar, *Pakistan Andolana o Musalima Sahitya* (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1968).
165. *Star of India*, Aug. 10, 1936.
166. *IAR*, vol. II, 1936, p. 268.
167. *Star of India*, Aug. 20, 1936 and Ispahani, *Jinnah*, p. 17.
168. *Star of India*, Aug. 19, 1936.

169. Iqbal to Jinnah, Aug. 23, 1936. M.A. Jinnah (ed.), *Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, n.d.), p. 10.
170. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec. 3, 1936.
171. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha*, pp. 106-7, and *Star of India*, Sept. 7, 1936.
172. The Majlis had broken away from the United Party when the latter in early June decided not to join the League. *Star of India*, July 20, 1936 and Ispahani, *Jinnah*, p. 18.
173. *Star of India*, Aug. 25, 1936.
174. *Ibid.*
175. *Star of India*, Sept. 7, 1936.
176. *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1936.
177. When Jinnah left Calcutta only 2 per cent of the crowd collected on the railway platform were Bengali Muslims. *Ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1936.
178. *Star of India*, Aug. 29, 1936.
179. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec. 3, 1936.
180. Ispahani, *Jinnah*, p. 32.
181. *Ibid.*, and A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha*, p. 104. See also Huq's letter to the Nawab of Dacca, *Star of India*, Sept. 10, 1936.
182. While Jinnah was in Calcutta a big reception was accorded him by the Calcutta non-Muslim business community. *Star of India*, Aug. 21, 1936.
183. K. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 30.
184. Huq's letter to Jinnah, *Star of India*, Oct. 30, 1936.
185. Huq's appeal to Anderson, *Public and Judicial Files*, File No. 4135 of 1936.
186. Kalipada Biswas, *Ukta Banlara Sesha Adyaya* (Calcutta: Orient Book Co., 1963), p. 35.
187. At a luncheon reception by the Calcutta European Association, Sir Khawaja Nazimuddin sought the cooperation of the Europeans and assured them that their interest would not be ignored by the United Party. *Star of India*, July 29, 1936.
188. Huq's statement, *Star of India*, Sept. 1, 1936.
189. Huq's letter to Jinnah, *Star of India*, Oct. 30, 1936.
190. Jinnah's speech at Calcutta, *Star of India*, Aug. 21, 1936.
191. Huq's statement, *Star of India*, Sept. 1, 1936.
192. *Star of India*, Sept. 16 and Oct. 30, 1936. Most of the prominent leaders of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League were also members of the Proja Samity.
193. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec 3, 1936.
194. *Star of India*, Sept. 21, 1936.
195. For the full text of the programme see *Star of India*, Sept. 12, 1936.
196. *Star of India*, Sept. 12, 1936.
197. *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1936. The Maulana as a *Pir* (holy man) had considerable influence among the illiterate Muslim peasantry of Bengal.
198. *Star of India*, Oct. 16, 1936.
199. *Ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1936.
200. *Ibid.*

201. *Ibid*, Jan. 12, 1937.

202. *The Statesman*, Jan. 7, 1937.

203. *Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1937.

204. *Ibid.*, Jan. 21, 1937.

205. Huq's letter to Muslim leaders, *Star of India*, Sept. 12, 1936.

206. The 1931 Census Report recorded that the Muslims in the country districts of Bengal were religiously "tolerant enough." *Census of India*, 1931, vol. V., Part I, p. 390.

207. *The Statesman*, Jan. 21, 1937.

208. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 31.

209. *Ibid.*, and also see Sir Robert Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1966), p. 121, and Abbasuddin Ahmed, *Amara Shilpi Jibanera Katha* (Dacca: Standard Publishers Limited, 1960), p. 100.

CHAPTER THREE

Election and Coalition

Introduction

One of the most important events in the history of twentieth century Bengal is the election of 1937. The legislators who were elected remained seated until 1945 and determined substantially the course of political development in the province. As the principal actors of the political drama during most of the years of a crucial decade in the largest populated province, they bore the major responsibility for the success or failure of the constitutional arrangement of 1935 which aimed at establishing a self-governing federation of India. The election of 1937 was also important from another point of view. It was for the first time that a large segment of the population was given the right of direct franchise. It was on the ability of the newly enfranchised masses, the majority of whom were too illiterate to understand the privileges and obligations of their freshly acquired right, that the future political direction of the province depended.

It is, therefore, necessary for this study to discuss the first election under the act of 1935 and the formation of the first coalition ministry which took over the responsibility of the government from April 1, 1937. The chapter will discuss the nature of the electoral participation, an analysis of the election results, and the occupational status of the elected members. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the post election negotiations among the parties for gaining political control of the province, and a brief reference to Fazlul Huq, who became the first Chief Minister of Bengal and led the coalition party in the legislature for the next six years.

Electoral Participation

In the early months of 1937 Bengal went to the polls. Direct election to all the 250 seats of the Legislative Assembly and 30 seats of the

Legislative Council was held from January 16 to 25. Indirect election to 27 seats of the council by members of the assembly 'in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote'¹ was held on February 27. Primary election for 30 reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes in the lower house was carried through in November 1936. All the elections, including two bye-elections caused in constituencies where the same candidates had been returned were completed by the end of February.

Bengal, with the biggest electorate and the highest number of seats in the legislature recorded the lowest turnout of voters.²

	Total number of voters in contested consti- tuencies	Total votes polled	Percentage
Legislative Assembly	6,299,429	2,586,404	40.5
Legislative Council	12,005	5,593	46.6

Even in Calcutta with the highest literacy ratio in Bengal,³ in spite of vigorous election campaigning, in some constituencies only 30 per cent of the electors exercised their rights.⁴ One of the polling stations of the city, on the day of the election (Jan. 18), was 'still and silent as the grave' and only 8 votes were recorded.⁵

In the Scheduled Caste primary elections involving the six contested constituencies the percentage of the electorate which voted was even lower than the average at 27.03 per cent.⁶ Considering the fact that this was the first election of its kind, and that most of the voters never before had the privilege of exercising a parliamentary franchise, the percentage compared favourably with the provincial average of 40.05 per cent at the final elections. There were so few contests because of the expense involved in the 'double system' of election. Local leaders made determined efforts to prevent more than four candidates from being nominated for each seat. In one three seated constituency, with two reserved seats, only two candidates were nominated, both of whom were declared duly elected to the assembly at the primary stage. The reason reported for this was that a concordat was reached between the local Scheduled Caste leaders and the caste Hindu dominated Congress party. In the constituency in question the Scheduled Castes could have captured all three seats as they were in large majority

in the district.⁷ In four other constituencies the full panel of four was not completed. The total number of candidates nominated for the 30 reserved seats was 128—only eight more than the maximum number of seats on the panels.⁸

The polling in 1937 was, however, an improvement over previous records.⁹ The table below shows the percentage of votes polled during the four previous general elections in the province.¹⁰

Year :	1920	1923	1926	1929
Percentage of votes polled:	34.4	39.0	39.2	26.1

The low turnout of votes was not due to lack of competition. As many as 644 candidates contested for the 222 seats of both houses, and the 47 seats in the lower house and 11 seats in the upper house which were filled without contest represented special interests and consisted of small electorates.¹¹ One primary reason for the low polling in Bengal was the lack of interest shown in the elections by the new women's electorate. In spite of special arrangements made for recording their votes only 5.2 per cent of the women voters cast their votes.¹² Although in some urban areas their attendance was slightly better, in most of the rural constituencies the number of women voters was almost nil. In one district, out of 48,741 women electors, only 120 voted.¹³ Lack of interest was particularly noticeable in Muslim women voters. While the percentage of Hindu women who voted in the contested constituencies was 5.8, the percentage of Muslim women voters was only 1.1.¹⁴ The most common cause reported by the local officers for the unusually poor women's poll was the observance of *purdah* and the lack of canvassing.¹⁵ The attendance of prostitutes in the polling stations in the past also discouraged many respectable women from casting their votes.¹⁶

Further explanation for the low polling should be sought in the fact that in the countryside elections to the legislature in the past on a restrictive franchise had failed to evoke much enthusiasm. It was the local elections to the rural self-governing institutions with a broader franchise which provided all the fun and excitement. There was very little, if any, of propaganda and publicity by the parties and candidates in the villages due to their obvious lack of experience and preparation to face such a wide electorate. For many illiterate and

conservative villagers lacking political education, it was difficult to appreciate the significance of exercising the right of franchise in a provincial election on issues which were not directly concerned with local affairs. But considering the comparatively long distances that voters had to trek to arrive at polling booths, the number of voters who exercised their franchise was rather impressive.

Reports of the district officers on the electoral contest of 1937 indicated great variation in the interest of the electorate; it was keenest where party or personal rivalry was greatest, and where good travelling facilities were available.¹⁷ Quite surprisingly, more interest was exhibited in the rural areas than in the urban areas and in Muslim constituencies than in Hindu constituencies. In the general urban contested constituencies the percentage of votes was only 21.1 per cent, whereas in rural constituencies it was 40.3.¹⁸

Owing to the wide extension of electorate particularly to the illiterate masses, an entirely new system of polling was introduced, whereby votes were recorded by being placed in a particular ballot box marked with a distinctive symbol instead of by means of a mark upon the ballot paper.¹⁹ The symbol system apparently gave cause for merriment. In a case in a labour constituency, it was reported that some of the mill workers thought that the *tamasha* or merrymaking in which they were called upon to partake was a raffle, the prize in which was a bicycle (the symbol of the candidate) and they were overjoyed to find that no fee was charged for entering the booths.²⁰

The ignorance of the electors who were brought to the voting stations for the first time produced many amusing incidents. In one case an old man of 80, after entering the voting compartment, loudly called for help. When the presiding officer came to his rescue, the old man asked which box was favoured by God. He wanted to please God only and receive reward after his death.²¹ Some villagers were reported to have expressed the desire to vote for the village headman and not for any of the candidates. Such incidents were perhaps normal in the preliminary stages of political education; as one district officer reported:²²

The first election appeared to be a mystery and joke rather than a serious business. Yet it is expected that the voters will soon feel their real position as they get accustomed to the new order of things and are more seriously canvassed by the candidates.

A remarkable feature of the elections in Bengal was that they were held peacefully.²³ This was in marked contrast to the rowdy scenes in Calcutta and other towns during the municipal elections and in the *mufassil* in connection with the local self-governing institutions. The comparative absence of disorder may be attributed partly to the fact that excitements over the Legislative Council elections under the 'dyarchy' were not usually strong because of limited electorate.²⁴ The secrecy of the ballot was also a factor which tended to prevent disorder by making it difficult to practice intimidation or to marshal voters in blocs. Explanation could also be sought in the fact that much of the earlier bitter Hindu agitation against the act was replaced, as the election drew closer, by frequent attempts at reconciliation inspired by a desire to share in the power which was being transferred.²⁵ Also, the Congress participation in the election gave it a sanction of legality which undoubtedly helped in the peaceful conduct of the election.

Throughout the election activities communal relations between the Hindus and the Muslims were unusually cordial. This was in spite of the communally charged rhetorics of many influential men in public speeches, the indiscriminately intemperate language of a section of the press in dealing with controversies affecting communal interests and many irresponsible appeals to the voters on almost exclusively religious grounds.²⁶ The few occasions when communal feelings were excited were of local interest only and of short duration, and never developed into any actual disturbances of the peace.²⁷ There were also no repercussions in Bengal to the communal riots which raged in a few provinces of India.

Hindu-Muslim relations in the Bengal countryside at normal times were cordial and tension developed mostly when it was provoked by outside forces. Most of the major parties, such as the Congress and the Proja Samity, avoided communal controversies and were able to counteract the communal propaganda of the Hindu Sabha and the League. Also a surprise political move by a few Hindu and Muslim politicians of the province for a communal concordat contributed in improving communal relations. Only a few days before the elections, a formula to settle communal tension in Bengal was reached between the Maharaja of Burdwan, president of the Bengal Anti-Communal Award Committee, and Sir A.H. Ghuznavi, a member of the central

Legislative Assembly and an ex-minister of the Bengal Government under 'dyarchy'. This formula embodied a scheme for the equal division of executive power between the Hindus and the Muslims. The division of power was to consist of an equal allotment of seats in the provincial ministry to the two communities and equal recruitment of Hindus and Muslims into the provincial services subject to their satisfying an efficiency test and to reservations for other communities.²⁸ The dramatic announcement was perhaps influenced by the personal ambitions of Burdwan and Ghuznavi to make their weight felt in Bengal politics, especially since their previous endeavour towards the end of 1936 to organise a political party on a similar formula had failed.²⁹ However, the very fact that the scheme was hatched by two unpopular politicians belonging to the class of landed aristocracy greatly reduced the possibility of its acceptance by members of either community.

The substance of the idea of a working arrangement between the Hindus and Muslims 'on the basis of a division of spoils' was nothing new and had been mooted on several occasions in the past.³⁰ The renewed attempt to resuscitate the old concept was undoubtedly aimed at establishing an atmosphere of Hindu-Muslim amity prior to the inauguration of the new provincial government. To many sober minds of both communities, it was an obvious truth that in the emergence of some kind of political rapprochement between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal depended ultimately the prospect of peaceful development of an autonomous province of Bengal in the future.

The fundamental weakness of the formula was that it did not satisfy the real aspirations or allay the real apprehensions of many of those on either side who were capable of controlling opinion among their followers as a whole. To the large number of middle class Hindus few things were more galling than the system of reservation of government jobs for Muslims and others; 'they see themselves continually excluded from positions in the public service by persons whose talents they knew to be inferior to their own.'³¹ They simply recoiled from a settlement that sought to perpetuate separate electorate,³² and preferred 'to take their chances of eventually doing better in spite of the 'Communal Award' by the old but dangerous game of 'splitting the Muslim'.³³

So far as the Muslims were concerned, other things being equal,

the appeal to communal sentiment no doubt provided a strong incentive to unity in some segments of their middle class but on the basis of the '50-50 formula' there were not enough plums to go around among the various leaders capable of taking a following with them. A 'reasoned argument' employed by some of the Muslims was that it was preposterous to consider granting an equal share of representation in government to the Hindus when the best organised section of that community declined to support a government. Therefore, the Hindus could not expect representation in a government disproportionate to the degree of support they were willing to provide for it in the legislature.³⁴

The Burdwan-Ghuznavi pact failed to receive favourable response from both the Congress and the League; Jinnah showed complete indifference to the agreement³⁵ and Pandit Nehru 'sneered' at it.³⁶ The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee also did not lend any support to the scheme.³⁷ It is not difficult to understand the unfavourable reaction of both Jinnah and Nehru to the pact. The pact was essentially directed towards a settlement of the communal issues in Bengal only and could not be applied to other provinces with different Hindu-Muslim population ratios. Moreover, neither the League nor the Congress was prepared to accept a scheme in the formulation of which they had no share. The top echelon leaders of both the parties were zealous to reserve for their respective parties the right of settling any major constitutional issues. The pact was, however, strongly supported by Fazlul Huq and a few other Muslim leaders of Bengal.³⁸ Obviously the primary consideration for their support to the pact was practical politics. The Muslims were in the majority in the province, but for the government to be effective, it had to be based on the goodwill of the Hindus and in order to gain that goodwill, the Hindus should have been given guarantee of an adequate share in the government and in jobs. In the absence of substantial Hindu support, the pact was ultimately scrapped but its principle influenced the composition of the ministry in Bengal after the election in distributing equal shares to the Hindus and Muslims.

Although election campaigns were carried on peacefully and polling took place without any disorder, there was some public agitation about interference by the government servants and employees of local

self-governing bodies in the election campaign in favour of some individuals and parties. The Congress vehemently protested that in spite of the declared policy of the government to be neutral in the elections, the government was not enforcing its policy and public servants were showing favour to some parties.³⁹ Charges were heard on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Council that in various departments of the government appointments were being released to facilitate the 'ministerial party'.⁴⁰

Speaking in a debate in the Central Legislative Assembly on a resolution on the 'interference from public servants in ensuing elections,' Fazlul Huq complained of favouritism shown by the Bengal governor to some executive councillors and ministers who were candidates for election by allowing them to be in office until the last day of March 1937.⁴¹ He drew attention to the fact that those councillors and ministers held office since 1929 which allowed them ample opportunity 'to consolidate their position and to nurse their electors to their heart's content.'⁴² Fazlul Huq also complained of harrassment of his party workers by the district officers under the directives of the ministers and councillors, which was 'putting the ministerial party in a position of tremendous advantage over the other parties in the province.'⁴³ Earlier in August he had addressed a letter to the governor of Bengal containing similar allegations.⁴⁴ Huq's letter received wide publicity and was enthusiastically acclaimed by the people.⁴⁵ It may be pointed out in this connection that there was no constitutional provision banning the existing executive councillors and ministers from carrying on the election campaign while they were in office. Nevertheless, the propriety of the governor in allowing them to remain in office in the face of public protest was liable to be questioned by many.

On an enquiry made by Sir Stafford Cripps, a member of the British Parliament, on the alleged charges of interference in the elections by government officials, the Government of Bengal reported that they found 'some substance' in the allegations and adopted precautionary measures in laying down 'clearly the line they expect their officers to adopt,'⁴⁶ but curiously enough the same government denied such charges in public.⁴⁷ Fazlul Huq, however, felt vindicated when on January 22, 1938 an election tribunal in Bengal set aside the election of Nawab K.G.M. Faruqui, an ex-minister, on the grounds of his use

of his office for election purposes.⁴⁸

The Faruqi case had been regarded as “the most important of all the cases arising from the first elections and one of the most important election cases ever heard in India.”⁴⁹ It brought to light the fact that a number of government officers took an active part in canvassing during the election in spite of the fact that such action was forbidden by the conduct rules for government servants. The tribunal also found evidence of coercion of the voters by circulation of *fatwas* containing threats of divine displeasure and spiritual censure. The tribunal concluded that the government’s instructions were inadequate to prevent the intervention of officials where they were subordinate to a minister who was ‘prepared to subordinate the interests of the departments within his portfolio to the promotion of his private ambition or to the furtherance of his own purposes.’⁵⁰

After the elections were held the Bengal Government conducted an enquiry ‘on the extent to which employees of local bodies canvassed for candidates either on their own free will or because of *force majeure*.’⁵¹ The issue was complicated by the absence of any definite law stating the legal position of such employees on matters concerning election canvassing. The reports of local officers indicated that canvassing by the employees of local self-governing bodies during the first elections was common and they unanimously recommended adopting measures against such canvassing. To quote one district magistrate:⁵²

The employees of local bodies actively canvassed on behalf of particular candidates in the last elections these employees of the local bodies often promised official favours to the leaders of the villagers and influenced them to secure votes in favour of particular candidates who were their official superiors. The allowing of employees of local bodies to canvass on behalf of candidates is likely to give the candidates who were the official heads of local bodies, undue advantage over the other candidates.

To what extent the result of the election of 1937 in Bengal was affected by the canvassing of the officials in favour of candidates or parties, it is very difficult to ascertain. It seems that the Muslim League was the major recipient of the benefit of the ‘interference’ since all the Muslim ex-ministers and executive councillors strongly supported the League and the government officials who were found canvassing were doing so in favour of the League candidates.⁵³

A charge of adopting corrupt practices, although of a different nature, by the Congress in the election in Bengal was brought in by A.H. Ghuznavi: 'They set up candidates unknown in Bengal and finance them, and the man who ought to be elected finds himself in a difficult position to contest them.'⁵⁴ Essentially an opportunist, Ghuznavi's outburst against the Congress was aroused by the recent Congress denouncement of his abortive attempt to organise a political party which had the support of B.C. Chatterjee and a few other non-Congress Hindus of Bengal with whom he had been 'long associated in business life.'⁵⁵

Election Results

The presence of several small groups and discordant parties had become an established feature of Bengal politics since the introduction of 'dyarchy'. This was partially due to the long periods of absence of the Congress from legislative politics. Primarily because of the participation by the Congress, the election of 1937 drastically reduced the size and influence of those splinter groups. The table below shows the election results in so far as the strength of the parties was concerned.⁵⁶

Names of Parties	Legislative Assembly	Legislative Council		Total
		Direct election	Indirect election	
Congress	52	3	7	10
Hindu Nationalist	3	1	0	1
Hindu Sabha	2	1	0	1
Independent (Hindu)	41	5	7	12
Muslim League	39	7	4	11
Proja Samity	36	1	2	3
Tippera Krishak Samity	5	0	0	0
Independent (Muslim)	41	9	4	13
Europeans	25	3	3	6
Anglo-Indians	4	0	0	0
Indian Christians	2	0	0	0
Total	250	30	27	57

The figures given by Coupland and a score of other writers following him differ from the above.⁵⁷ This discrepancy is due to the fact

that many of the parties were hastily organised and many candidates were quickly adopted by those splinter groups after the candidates had already submitted their nominations.⁵⁸ Also many candidates did not make their party position clear since they thought that they had a better chance if they did not identify themselves with any one party. Even long after the election results were announced parties were not definite about their strength and were claiming inflated figures.⁵⁹

In the electoral contest Congress came out as the largest bloc followed closely by the League and the Samity.⁶⁰ The performance of the several Hindu parties and impromptu groups compared very unfavourably with the Congress which won most of the general non-reserved seats. Instances are not rare where less known Congress candidates defeated Hindu Sabha and Nationalist Party candidates with their credentials of eminent service as members of the 'dyarchy' council.⁶¹ Approximately 25 per cent of the total votes cast and 22 per cent of the total seats were secured by the Congress.⁶² Keeping in mind that the Congress did not set up candidates in Muslim seats, the election results could be construed as an indication of the 'great strength of the Congress appeal in the general constituencies and of the efficiency of their organisation.'⁶³ The two Hindu Sabha candidates were elected uncontested and their local influence rather than their party affiliation decided the mind of the electors. Both the seats were in the predominately Hindu areas of West Bengal where the Sabha's slogan of 'Hinduism in danger' could have little practical appeal to the Hindus.

In reality, however, the success of the Congress in the election was impressive only in so far as it could win most of the caste Hindu votes. Congress's performance in the Scheduled Caste reserved seats was very poor; it could claim only 7 seats out of 30 seats reserved for them.⁶⁴ Contrary to the expectation of the Congress that many Scheduled Caste members would join it, some 22 independent Scheduled Caste members of the lower house hurriedly formed the Scheduled Caste Party, clearly as a bargaining maneuver to enter into the ministry.⁶⁵ Although the Congress won 11 out of 12 general urban seats, it could win only 35 out of 66 general rural seats; most of the rest were captured by independent candidates with local influence. The Congress won all the 5 factory and colliery labour seats and 2 general women's seats but none of the 2 trade union labour, 1 tea garden labour, 5 landholders,

4 commerce and industry and 2 university seats.⁶⁶

It is, therefore, obvious that the primary base of Congress support was in the urban centers, the habitation of the Hindu middle class to whom the Congress platform was progressive yet not seriously threatening to the existing social order. Nevertheless, in the rural areas, because of its emphasis on the economic grievances of the exploited masses, the Congress received substantial support from all with the exception of the Scheduled Castes. Constitutional provision for the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes implied that their interests were distinct from the caste Hindus and, therefore, they looked askance at the Congress. The lack of confidence of the Scheduled Castes in the Congress further increased when in the indirect election to the council only one Scheduled Caste candidate was elected although on the basis of their number in the lower house three or four should have been elected.⁶⁷ Congress received substantial support from the industrial proletariat but the feudal aristocracy and the commercial interests remained outside the pale of its influence since they were suspicious of the progressive tenancy and labour policy in the Congress manifesto.

In the trial of strength in the Muslim constituencies, the League and the Samity won about a third each, with the rest going to independent candidates. The League candidates successfully returned from all the urban seats and seats reserved for Muslim urban women and the Muslim Chamber of Commerce. In supporting the League candidates in those urban centers, the Muslim middle class voters were influenced only in a limited way by the League's appeal to Islam. It was the prospect of gaining political control of the province and the boons likely to emanate from it, namely the elimination of the competition which they were facing every day in professional and business opportunities from the more advanced Hindu middle class, which decided their votes. It is generally believed that in the urban areas, especially in Calcutta, all the non-Bengali Muslims voted *en masse* in favour of the League.⁶⁸ To the non-Bengali Muslims, the League was the only party which could be trusted to oversee their interests since that party's goal was the protection of Muslim interest all over India and, unlike the Proja party, did not indulge in regional issues only.

In so far as the Muslim rural seats were concerned, the League

gained only 35 out of 111, the remainder being shared by the Samity and non-party candidates.⁶⁹ This poor election showing of the League in rural areas was rather significant; its religious appeal failed to produce much result in the hamlets of Eastern Bengal as also the militant communalism preached by Hindu Sabha had failed to electrify the Hindu community. Thus, in spite of the ceaseless propaganda on its behalf as the true Islamic party and its claim to be the only party to represent the Muslim interest in India, the League could not claim any position of superiority so far as the other parties were concerned.⁷⁰ The League's failure to unite the Muslims on communal lines was also proved in the indirect election to the council by members of the lower house when only 10 Muslims were elected as against 14 Hindus. On the basis of the communal ratios in the lower house and on the assumption that voting would be on communal lines, the Muslim community should have been able to return 14 members and the Hindus no more than 10.⁷¹ The results clearly indicate that voting in this case was determined on other than communal grounds. A section of the Muslims, however, took this opportunity for admonishing the Muslim members as betrayers of the community.⁷²

The electoral score for the Samity was also disappointing. Although it had a number of dedicated workers, most of whom were students, it lacked financial support and proper party organisation while its principal opponent, the League, had both.⁷³ In spite of the Samity's poor performance, it was mostly because of the 'whirlwind and intensive propaganda' carried on by it on the 'lines of its very radical economic programme' that the communal parties like the Muslim league and the Hindu Sabha were obliged to mellow their communal propaganda and to talk of thier readiness to work for the welfare of the peasants.⁷⁴ The Samity's success however limited, was interpreted by many nationalist elements in Bengal as the triumph of progressive forces against reactionary elements.⁷⁵ It raised their hopes high to find that in spite of the communal propaganda of the League and the Sabha, Hindus and Muslims did not form themselves in communal lines. The Congress became particularly jubilant to see their expectation of ultimate victory of 'progress' against 'reaction' being fulfilled.⁷⁶

One main lesson that emerged from the election results was the fact that none of the political parties could claim to be truly

representative of both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Both the Congress and the Samity professed to be non-communal but they failed to elect their candidates from both the Muslim and the Hindu seats.⁷⁷ Undoubtedly, the nature and composition of the electorate based on the principle of separate communal representation was much to be blamed but it also betrayed the inability of the parties to provide an umbrella to accommodate both the communities. As a result individuals who were normally above communalism, in order to meet the short run political exigencies created by the vote-catching communal propaganda of the League and the Sabha, were occasionally found to play the tune of communalism although in a very subdued pitch. But it was communalism all the same and was fraught with all its evil consequences.

There were several surprises in the election results. In some constituencies candidates of lesser standing and influence defeated their rivals who had been held long in public esteem as popular leaders and 'who might have been expected to hold their seats on their own merits.'⁷⁸ In some of those cases an explanation may be found in the fact that either the fanaticism of the illiterate voters was played upon or they were swayed by grossly exaggerated promises made by the successful candidates. Many of the local officers reported that votes were freely sold and in many cases appeals to the voters were made almost exclusively on religious grounds: 'a candidate with an ecclesiastical appearance and phraseology was overwhelmingly more popular than one who did not have these qualifications.'⁷⁹

The return of a large number of independent candidates, especially in rural areas, implies both the inability of the parties to build up their organisational units in large areas of the province and the incapability of the illiterate voters to appreciate the ideologies and programmes offered by the parties through their election manifestoes and campaign activities. In many remote villages parties did not function and it was, therefore, the individual popularity of a prospective candidate, with or without a party ticket, which influenced the voters rather than allegiance to parties. Even where parties operated, their programmes were not clearly projected and to the electors the lines of cleavages between parties were hazy. In fact, many of the keenest contests were conducted on personal issues. According to a report of a local officer 'the voting

was not so much on party or political consideration as on the merits of the individual candidates and the promises they held out.⁸⁰ The report made exception to constituencies where Congress candidates contested, for it was found that the Congress exercised remarkable influence on the Hindu voters.

How far the voters understood the larger issues, it is difficult to guess as it is also difficult to assess the extent to which the parties were able to educate the electorate in party principles. In marked contrast to the previous elections when political issues had little influence and personalities rather than parties played the dominant role in making electoral choice of the voters, in the election of 1937 the judgement of the voters was influenced more than ever by party affiliations. Political education had obviously made some progress.

No party was organised separately by the Europeans and Anglo-Indians and they also did not join the other parties in the province: all but one seat reserved for them was filled in uncontested by independent candidates.⁸¹ Most of the European candidates elected were competent persons 'with local knowledge of their areas who were prepared to take an active and informed interest by means of division of labour-in the activities of the provincial government over its whole field.'⁸² but their effort to preserve their distinct identity politically as a separate group was unfortunate. The Bengalis in course of time came to look upon them as a coterie of vested interests serving the evils of British imperialism and not the interests of the Province.

Occupational Status of the Elected Members

In the newly elected legislature in Bengal a fair number of members came with previous legislative experience. Even some Congress members had sat in the 'dyarchy' council at some time. The number of experienced members in the lower house was 36 and 8 in the upper house or approximately 14 per cent of the members of both houses could claim former experience in legislative politics. Of the 6 members nominated by the governor to the upper house, 2 were sitting members of the old council.⁸³

Although there was no rigidly defined aristocracy in the new legislature, there were a handful of members in both houses who had titles of dignity conferred by the government.⁸⁴ The number of titleholders

in the upper house was 17 and in the lower house was 26. Most of the titleholders were big landlords and an overwhelming majority of them were Muslims since during the non-cooperation movement many Hindus had renounced the British titles. None of the Congressmen in the legislature had any titles of dignity conferred by the government. The past political conservatism of the titleholders continued to orient their behaviour in the new legislature and as in the past, they generally opposed any progressive legislation affecting their interest. In the legislature they did not form a group of their own and belonged to several parties.

Most of the members returned to the legislature were men of good social status and economic means. In the traditional Bengali society social status was a criteria for holding public office. A good many of the members held university diplomas, were proficient in English and excelled in oratorical virtue.⁸⁵ While most members were familiar with local problems and issues only a few of them had taken interest in the larger issues of nationalism and problems concerning the province as a whole. A large number of them also had very little knowledge of parliamentary practice and procedures.⁸⁶

Members elected were men of good social status and represented fairly diversified occupational classes, the dominating class being the lawyers.⁸⁷ In both the houses more than half of the members belonged to the legal profession, about one fifth to the landowners, one fifth to the trading and commercial interest, and the rest belonged to teaching, medicine, and other callings. The average occupational status of the elected members of the 'dyarchy' council (1923, 1926 and 1929) was: legal profession 42 per cent, banking and commerce 22 per cent, landowners 28 per cent and other occupations 8 per cent.⁸⁸ It was rather significant that the number of members drawn from the landowning class and business interest decreased as the number of members from the professional middle classes increased. With the spread of education, the rapid growth of parliamentary institutions, and the extension of franchise, members of the professional middle class became the natural leaders of the illiterate peasantry.

The term 'landowner' did not bear a definite meaning in the land law of Bengal and they were classified in the census report of 1931 as 'non-cultivating proprietors taking rent in money or kind' under the

general category of 'cultivators.'⁸⁹ However, in reality they constituted a narrow socio-economic privileged class and enjoyed considerable political influence because of their economic power and social prestige. As a class of vested interest they obstructed any socio-economic measure aimed at improving the condition of the peasantry. Because of a stable income from the land, and the leisure it provided, the landowners could afford to take an interest in parliamentary politics, but their interest was primarily for its glamour and for protecting their own privileges.

Unlike other provinces, in Bengal, no exclusive party of landowners emerged on the public scene and the landowners supported one or other of the parties.⁹⁰ They were only loosely grouped together with the British Indian Association as a focus 'but they showed no signs of making a consolidated party.'⁹¹ One probable reason for the absence of any party of the landowners in Bengal was that in contrast to the other provinces, Bengal, where the impact of the 'west' was felt much earlier, had a strong middle class which served as an effective link between the two extreme flanks of society and thus prevented the formation of mutually exclusive parties. In the old council many attempts by the landholders to organise separate political groups had failed and led to the creation of anti-landlord sentiments. The class consciousness of the peasants of Bengal was a recognizable force and the landowning class was afraid of challenging it by organising itself into a rival camp. Instances were not lacking in the past of the adoption of violence by the *ryots* in support of their demands against the *zamindars*. As a tactical measure to avoid clashes with the peasantry the *zamindars* infiltrated various political parties. They tried to identify themselves as friends of the *ryots* in order to curb the tempo of anti-*zamindar* slogans. Both in the League and the Congress circles they exerted great influence and looked with disfavour on any measures of agrarian reforms.

The lawyers were the most articulate political class in Bengal.⁹² Many of them had interests in land, but with their independent and handsome income from the legal profession they could liberate themselves from the narrow class interest of the landowning group. In the pursuit of their profession, they were able to establish contact with the poor but litigating village folks in the country-side. With their

roots in the landowning class and links with the masses and their liberal political outlook acquired through training in British legal history and institutions, these jurists-politicos played a most vital role in politics and supplied the bulk of professional politicians. They occupied the top echelon of leadership of the parties and as expert tacticians dominated political scenes both within and outside the legislature, but they were extremely susceptible to communal politics once their professional interest was jeopardized. The Hindu lawyers were too zealous to maintain their clientele in Eastern Bengal from the encroachment of Muslim lawyers, as the emerging Muslim members of the bar increasingly attracted Muslim litigants often for sharing the same faith.⁹³ This professional jealousy, unfortunately spilled over into aspects of politics.

Negotiation for Ministerial Coalition

It was apparent from the election results that a coalition ministry was inevitable since no single party commanded a workable majority in the Legislative Assembly. The election manifesto of the Congress had left the question of office acceptance to be decided after the election with a reminder that it stood for the rejection of the constitution and for no cooperation in its working. This stand was later reiterated in the Faizpur session of the Congress held in December 1936 but added that immediately after the elections the various provincial Congress committees would take steps to consult their district and other local committees and to send their own recommendations on the subject.⁹⁴ After the elections were held there were 'indications in the press and elsewhere, of a strong desire on the part of many (Congressmen) who had taken part in the elections to accept office and initiate constructive work.'⁹⁵

The question of office acceptance was mooted at the All India Congress Committee meeting at Wardha held on March 18, 1937. It decided after prolonged deliberations to accept office only in those provinces where Congressmen commanded a majority provided they were able to obtain a public assurance from the governor concerned that he 'will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of ministers in regard to their constitutional activities.'⁹⁶ It was now left to no one's imagination that the Congress leaders in the

majority provinces were keen to take office but prior to that they were insisting on getting the public assurance from the governors mainly to justify their previous denunciation of the act.⁹⁷ The inevitable result of the Congress demands was a constitutional deadlock since the provincial governors refused to give such undertaking when approached by the Congress leaders.

The impasse was resolved by the viceroy in his statement of June 20, in which he conceded the Congress's demands in an indirect way.⁹⁸ On the assurance of the viceroy in July the Congress authorised its members to accept office in provinces where they commanded an absolute majority.⁹⁹ The sudden volte-face of the Congress from a rigid stand of total rejection of the act to office acceptance undoubtedly saved the constitutional machinery from disaster in the Congress majority provinces. It however left the Congressmen in other provinces in the lurch since the July decision had no provision for the Congressmen to cooperate with other groups where they were in the minority.

Later, on August 16, the Congress modified its stand by allowing the Congressmen forming a minority party in a provincial assembly to cooperate with other groups for general or specific purposes in connection with the parliamentary work in the legislature without sacrificing Congress principles or policy.¹⁰⁰ But it clearly laid down that cooperation with other parties should not accompany any commitment in the matter of the formation of a ministry.¹⁰¹ The Congress relaxed its restrictions further in April 1938. It allowed its party men to either into coalition with other progressive ministries provided the coalescing parties were agreeable to carry out the political and economic programme of the Congress.¹⁰² This move was apparently inspired by a desire to increase the influence of the Congress further. The Congress had formed ministries in six provinces already and was eager to extend its hegemony in other provinces as well as under its own terms, but it was too late in Bengal for a Muslim dominated government was already too firmly enthroned and the Congress policy was liable to be interpreted as a sinister move to divide the Muslim camp.

The Congress party in Bengal commanded the largest single majority party. Its leader, Sarat Bose, was invited by the governor to discuss its attitude towards the formation of a ministry. Sarat Bose

not only regretted his inability to define his party's attitude in the absence of a directive from the Congress 'High Command' but also indicated that he had to consult it before saying whether or not he could see the governor.¹⁰³ Although the invitation to Bose came before the Wardha decision of the Congress, he was undoubtedly acting under the pressure of the Congress 'High Command'. Elated by the good electoral fortune the 'High Command' was trying to prove that it was 'capable under provincial autonomy of influencing and even controlling circumstances in every province in which Congress was represented either in or out of office'.¹⁰⁴ The Congress attitude, of course, was a reaction to the British Government's endeavour to keep the Congress 'High Command' out of the provincial picture lest it make itself 'strong enough to lead a mass movement to overthrow the constitution and to make India completely independent'.¹⁰⁵

Indecision dominated the attitude of the Congress leaders in Bengal over the question of office acceptance. In the absence of any information it is difficult to say what recommendation was made to the national Congress on this issue, but it was widely rumoured that a large section was in favour of office acceptance. The governor of Bengal reported that B.C. Roy, who was more of a realist and inclined to constitutional methods, 'aspired to office if he saw a way to do so,' but apart from his fear of disciplinary action from the Congress he was 'caught up in the old dilemma of the Muslim bludgeon in front and the potential if not actual, revolvers in his back of the gangsters on whom Congress leaders in Bengal have relied so much in recent years'.¹⁰⁶ Sarat Bose was personally against office acceptance and had made that clear in a press interview.¹⁰⁷

The acceptance of office under the new constitution is entirely inconsistent with the rejection of the same constitution. I shall continue to work in the faith and hope that Bengal Congressmen will never sell their country for a handful of silver or ribbons to stick in their coats.

When the question of office acceptance was reopened after the election, he strongly felt that if the Congress decided to accept office in the provinces where they had a majority, they should be prepared to form a coalition elsewhere. Thus he did not contemplate Congress in Bengal being permanently in the position of opposition.¹⁰⁸ This kind of thinking was not up to the liking of the Congress 'High

Command' who in April 1937, as a precautionary measure against such a contingency, imposed restrictions on the Congressmen against any dealings or interviews with the ministers except with its express permission.¹⁰⁹

In spite of the taboo imposed by the Congress 'High Command' some secret negotiations were carried on between the Bengal provincial Congress and the Proja Samity. The decision of the national Congress was irksome to the Hindu leaders of Bengal. From a practical point of view, they thought that by cooperating with other parties they could have a better chance to control the provincial affairs from a vantage point by being part of the ministry. It was also too apparent to them that the only remedy against a Muslim dominated communal ministry in Bengal was a coalition between the Congress and the Samity. Moreover, by refusing to accept office, the Congress could force a constitutional crisis only in those provinces where they were in the majority but there was little scope for that strategy to yield any score in Bengal where the Congressmen were in a minority.

Soon after the election result was known, the Samity appealed to the Congress to join them in a coalition ministry.¹¹⁰ As a non-communal party with a progressive socio-economic programme, the Samity naturally felt closer to the Congress than to the League. Many of its leaders had close contact with the Hindus through their past association with the Congress. Fazlul Huq especially was held in high esteem in the Hindu circle for his personal profile of being a non-communal politician and also for having the good fortune of endearing himself to the much respected Hindu Bengali educator and jurist of the century, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924).¹¹¹

The initial negotiations between the Congress and the Samity progressed satisfactorily and a joint programme was drawn up incorporating the basic demands in the manifestoes issued by both the parties on the eve of the election,¹¹² but at the final stage the negotiations broke down because of disagreement on the method of implementation of the programme. The Samity insisted that abolition of Permanent Settlement and rural indebtedness, the two evils responsible for much of the miseries of the peasantry, should receive priority over the Congress demand for immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners and 'detenus'.¹¹³

The Samity argued that the Congress demand for release of the political prisoners and 'detenus' was sure to meet the disapproval of the provincial governor and the British bureaucracy and in a situation like that the ministry might have to resign and face a re-election. In the event of a re-election the Samity was bound to fare very badly in the countryside since the party would have lost its credibility with the peasantry for resigning on a purely political issue which did not affect their conditions in life.¹¹⁴ The Congress leaders failed to appreciate the Samity's viewpoint and argued that release of political prisoners and 'detenus' was more fundamental than any other programme.¹¹⁵ The basic issue, it seems, behind these arguments was the fact that while the Congress was more oriented towards the Hindu middle class, the Samity's primary concern was the welfare of the *ryots*. Most of the political prisoners and 'detenus' came from the Hindu middle class families and it was the Hindu middle class who dominated the Congress in Bengal.

On the refusal of the Congress to accept the demand of the Samity, the Samity made some conciliatory proposals. It offered to agree on the Congress demand provided the latter was willing to give an undertaking that the ministry would not resign in case the governor prevented the implementation of the programme of unconditional release of political prisoners and 'detenus.'¹¹⁶ The Samity was afraid that if the Congress resigned from the ministry, the Samity would be forced to enter into coalition with other groups on completely unfavourable terms. The Samity could not afford to think of going into opposition or boycotting the legislature because it was on the fulfillment of the promises given to the voters that their survival depended and there was no scope to implement their socio-economic programme without being a part of the provincial government. Later events in the Congress governed provinces established the validity of the Samity's concern of a possible resignation by the Congress. Congress ministries in the United Provinces and Bihar threatened resignations on February 15, 1938 when the governors would not agree to the release of political prisoners convicted of crimes of violence.¹¹⁷

It has been suggested by Biswas that the primary factor for the failure of the negotiations was the personal rivalry in the provincial Congress.¹¹⁸ According to him, Fazlul Huq was adamant to include

Nalini Ranjan Sarkar in the ministry. Sarkar, a close associate of B.C. Roy, was, like Roy, anxious for office and was regarded 'as a danger in opposition,'¹¹⁹ especially for his proved ability in political cliques. But Sarat Bose, who had long-standing personal rivalry with Sarkar and was determined to eliminate Sarkar's influence from the political scene of Bengal, vehemently opposed his inclusion in the ministry and this ultimately ruined the possibility of the alliance between the Congress and the Samity. However credible the story may seem to be, it is difficult to understand why Huq would act so unreasonably since the Bose group was the dominant group in the provincial Congress.

With the breakdown of the negotiations Bengal politics took a new turn. After being refused by the Congress, the Samity was forced into the arms of the League and became increasingly League minded. More significantly it provided an opportunity for the central leadership of the League to impose its control and discipline in Bengal which eliminated the possibility of local Muslim initiative for a practical adjustment with the Hindus of the province. A Samity-Congress coalition could have isolated the League in Bengal and would have left very little scope for the League to flourish on communal propaganda in Bengal. By staying away from the ministry the Congress practically forced the ministry to be formed on communal lines.

A ministry participated in by the Congress and the Proja Samity on the basis of an economic programme would have been considerably free from communal virus, and a foundation for Hindu-Muslim cooperation could have been laid. Thus the short sightedness of the Congressmen in Bengal and the authoritarianism of the national Congress were responsible more than any other factor for the mischief of communal strifes that were to take place in the province. One of the most fundamental problems confronting any political party operating in such a vast and diversified country like India was to find a correct balance between the central and provincial parts of the mechanism. The Congress 'High Command' failed to realise this and instead of allowing enough flexibility, imposed its rigorous discipline on the provincial units. This attitude protected the unity of the party but at the cost of the healthy development of parliamentary tradition in the provinces.

The Samity-League alliance came as no surprise. The League took advantage of a situation which the Congress inadvertently refused.

The post-electoral strategy of the League, to redeem its electoral defeat, was to find ways to install itself in power. It openly offered to cooperate with any group or party in the legislature if the basic principles of cooperation were determined by mutual agreement.¹²⁰ It was rumoured that the League even offered to enter into an alliance with the Congress. It was perhaps a tactical move to put pressure on the Samity to forestall the prospect of a Proja-Congress coalition which would mean a great setback to the League's fate in Bengal. The League's offer was spurned by the Congress: its argument was that any collaboration with the League meant the acceptance of the League's exclusive claim to represent the Muslims and a tacit approval of the principle of communal representation.¹²¹

In spite of ideological differences and the conflict of personalities in the past, the League was, however, more keen in forging an alliance with the Krishak Samity. The lessons of elections were clear to the League leaders; their claim to represent the Muslim interest could hardly be substantiated in Bengal or elsewhere. In spite of Jinnah's vaunted claim of spectacular League victory,¹²² the fact was that in Bengal the League claimed only one third of the Muslim seats. The League was also conscious of its own communal character and its lack of mass support in the countryside. What better way could there be to strengthen the League organisation in Bengal than by joining hands with the Samity. A coalition with the non-communal Proja Samity could not only provide the League with an opportunity to share the popularity of the Samity but also an ammunition to counteract the Congress propaganda against its communalistic politics.

The League-Proja Samity entente was no doubt accelerated by a fresh upsurge of a sentiment for Muslim unity. In the words of the governor: 'if there is one factor that has so far had a stronger influence than might have been imagined it is the strength of feeling among Muslims generally that somehow or other their leaders must hold together.'¹²³ The stimulus for such a sentiment came from the uncertainty of the Congress's attitude regarding acceptance of office and its intransigence to share power with other groups. An idea gained currency among the Muslims of Calcutta that the Congress was trying to divide the Muslim camp in order to deny them their legitimate share in the government of the province. A Calcutta Muslim daily

gave wide publicity to a story that 'in a secret meeting of several influential Congressmen, Hindu Sabha leaders, Hindu landowners and liberals a shadow cabinet for Bengal was formed. Out of seven ministers, the chief ministership and four other ministerships were allotted to the Hindus and only two to the Muslims.'¹²⁴ This and similar other propaganda in the press did not fail in strengthening the Muslim urge for unity, especially among the students who felt aggrieved over the controversy which developed in connection with the Calcutta University foundation day ceremony held on January 30.¹²⁵ At a conference of the Bengal Muslim Students Association held the next day at the Calcutta Muslim Institute a resolution was passed urging the Muslim leaders 'to come to an immediate understanding and form one solid bloc in the Bengal legislature so that the Muslims may be assured of an effective majority in the future cabinet.'¹²⁶ The conference also warned those Muslim leaders who would break Muslim unity with dire consequences. Similar resolutions were also adopted in hurriedly organised meetings of the Muslim Voters Union, the Muslim Bengal Youngman's League, the Calcutta Khilafat Committee and various other Muslim civic groups of Calcutta.

In the midst of such emotional anguish among the Muslims of Calcutta, no practical politician dared to face the consequence of being declared as antagonistic to Muslim unity and to the much aspired hope of a Muslim political hegemony in Bengal. Fazlul Huq proclaimed the readiness of his party to cooperate with other Muslim groups 'for the common good of the country and the community' and also to accept the verdict of the majority of the Muslims in all matters.¹²⁷ This was soon followed by the joint announcement of an agreement between the Proja Samity and the League for cooperation 'for the purpose of working the constitution.'¹²⁸ However, this essentially political alliance was received with much jubilation by a section of Calcutta Muslims as 'triumph of the Grand Passion for the solidarity of Islam.'¹²⁹ The Proja Samity also came to be identified with the camp for Islamic solidarity. The practical effect of this sentiment for Muslim unity was soon seen in a bye-election in Calcutta when a defeated League candidate, Sir Nazimuddin, obtained an overwhelming majority against his rival who was supported by the Congress.¹³⁰

The coalition involved some modification of the 'more extreme' por-

tions of the Samity's original programme as announced in its election manifesto. In order to accommodate the conservative leadership of the League, the Samity immediately after the announcement of the Proja-League agreement for cooperation, toned down its programme on the controversial issues such as the abolition of Permanent Settlement, introduction of free and compulsory primary education, repeal of repressive laws and the release of political prisoners and 'detenus'.¹³¹ In the final agreement between the two parties the repeal of repressive laws and the release of political prisoners and 'detenus' was qualified as to be 'consistent with public safety'; primary education instead of being compulsory and entirely without taxation was to be 'without taxation of the poor who are unable to bear the burden'—a rather ambiguous phrase—and instead of outright abolition of Permanent Settlement, a committee of enquiry was to be appointed to look into the question and make recommendations.¹³² Thus the first contingency of the alliance was compromises on the basic socio-economic programme of the Samity which was its main plank and distinguished it from the League. The alliance pleased most Muslims, but the toning down of the programme of the Samity and Fazlul Huq's cooperation with the League provoked bitter comment from extreme Hindu sections who had hoped that Huq would play into their hands.

In the newly formed Proja-League alliance, Fazlul Huq emerged as the leader. The rural base of the Samity had given the party a sense of pride in its strength so that it could assert: 'we will make government in Bengal impossible if we are ignored.'¹³³ But what made Huq to be selected to the position of leadership of the Proja-League coalition was his personal election triumph. He had increased his prestige and influence considerably by scoring a thundering personal victory defeating Sir Nazimuddin, one of the principal leaders of the League and a sitting member of the governor's executive council.¹³⁴

Huq's victory had a special significance as the contest between him and Nazimuddin became the prestige issue between the Samity and the League. After the failure of pre-election negotiations between the two parties in August 1936, a challenge was thrown by the secretary of the Proja Samity that Fazlul Huq would contest Nazimuddin in any constituency chosen by the latter.¹³⁵ The League accepted the challenge and Nazimuddin sought election from the Patuakhali Muslim

constituency.¹³⁶ Nazimuddin was confident of winning since Patuakhali was part of his own *zamindari*.¹³⁷ He even advised that Huq make a discreditable withdrawal.¹³⁸ Among the Muslims the defeat of Nazimuddin by Huq was most striking as it proved the powerful appeal to the masses of Huq's emotionalism and his 'socialist policy' as regards agrarian affairs but more important, it was 'a blow to the confidence of the Muslim League.'¹³⁹ Its moral effect upon the 'independents' was decisive for it was made clear that if there was to be a Muslim combination, Fazlul Huq must be its leader.¹⁴⁰

The League-Proja coalition was joined by 22 members of the Scheduled Caste Party, 14 caste Hindus and 25 Europeans.¹⁴¹ Thus all the parliamentary groups in the legislature excepting the Congress and some independents extended support to the coalition. The Europeans lent their cooperation to the coalition following their perviously announced policy of supporting any group forming the ministry 'so long as it does not outrage their ideas or interests.'¹⁴² They did not demand any office since they were discouraged by the governor who in his wisdom felt that any bid for a seat in the ministry by the Europeans was likely to be misunderstood by others as a veiled attempt to perpetuate British influence.¹⁴³ The group of caste Hindus came mostly from landowning class and belonged to the Nationalist Party led by J.N. Basu, a well-known Calcutta attorney of 'liberal' political outlook.¹⁴⁴ Neither the Scheduled Caste Party nor the Nationalist Party joined the coalition on the basis of a political programme; their primary objective was to gain 'a satisfactory share of the spoils.'¹⁴⁵ However, their public explanation for joining the coalition was the safeguarding of Hindu interest which was being jeopardized by the Congress's refusal to accept office. To them it was hypocritical to participate in the election but refuse to work the constitution. Their arguments were apparently convincing to many Hindu middle class who felt frustrated to see the all India aspect of the Congress organisation predominate at the cost of the Hindu interest of the province. The political platform of the Samity, which was progressive and contained nothing objectional from the Hindu point of view, restrained many Hindus from stigmatizing their cooperating colleagues.

The redeeming feature of the alignment of the parties in the legislature was that the alignment was not drawn wholly on communal

lines. In the coalition there were 36 Hindus; similarly the opposition contained a number of independents, and a few pro-Congress Muslims. Both the coalition and the other side presented a Hindu-Muslim spectrum. During the discussions on controversial communal issues, it was a common sight to see the members excel in communal rhetorics but this seldom affected their personal relationship.¹⁴⁶

The first ministry was installed on April 1. It consisted of, excluding the chief minister, five Hindus and five Muslims.¹⁴⁷ The communal ratio in the ministry was widely publicised by the ministry as symbolic of a new spirit of Hindu-Muslim Cooperation. Considering the small numerical contribution that the cooperating Hindus made towards the coalition's majority, their share of five was no doubt the price for their much needed cooperation especially since the Congress went into the opposition. Obviously without an adequate representation to the Hindus the ministry could not secure the confidence of both the communities which was essential for the maintenance of law and order and good government in the province.

The Portrait of a Leader

In the new council of ministers, Fazlul Huq, as the leader of the Coalition Party, became the Chief Minister.¹⁴⁸ Vigorous and resourceful, to many of his compatriots he was the symbol of political competence and honest leadership. To others he was 'the most uncertain quantity in Muslim politics, completely devoid of principle and trusted by no body, he nevertheless retains a hold on the affections of the Muslim masses.'¹⁴⁹ He was the only one capable of providing leadership to a divergent group such as was the coalition and inspire confidence in the government both among the Hindus and the Muslims. Huq remained in office for a long time until March 27, 1943, the most eventful period in the history of the province. He is one of the most important personalities of the period. As leader of the coalition and the cabinet he played a significant role in influencing the course of events and, therefore, it is considered necessary to make a brief reference about him here.

Fazlul Huq was born in 1874 in a landowning Muslim family in Barisal in Eastern Bengal. His father practised law in the town. He went to Calcutta for his education and graduated with honours in

mathematics and law form the Presidency College, the premier institution of the province. After teaching in a college in his home town for a short period he enrolled himself as a *vakil* (attorney) in the Calcutta High Court under the 'articleship' of Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee. In 1905 the young Fazlul Huq became involved in the political controversy on the issue of the partition of Bengal. Like many of his faith, he keenly supported the partition.¹⁵⁰ Soon his talent and organising ability were recognized by Sir Salimullah, the Nawab of Dacca, who was planning to organise a Muslim political association. The Nawab entrusted Fazlul Huq with responsibility of conducting negotiations with the leading Muslims of India concerning his plan.¹⁵¹ When the All India Muslim League was formed in 1906 in Dacca, Fazlul Huq was made, according to his biographers, its joint secretary.¹⁵² Shortly afterwards he was appointed as a deputy magistrate by the Government of Bengal as a nominee of the Nawab of Dacca. He resigned his promising job in 1912 due 'to difference with higher authorities.'¹⁵³ He once again picked up the career of legal practice and politics and was elected unopposed to the Bengal Legislative Council from the Dacca Muslim seat in 1913.¹⁵⁴ In the same year he was elected secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and joint secretary of the All India Muslim League.

Fazlul Huq's entry into politics turned a new corner in Bengal Muslim politics. Up to this time Muslim leaders usually came from big landowning families whose influence was limited locally in their feudal holdings. Their main focus was on communal politics. They survived on the patronage of the government which they received in exchange for their public profession of loyalty to the British *Raj*. Huq discarded the conventional policy of loyalism and asserted himself on his own merit. If he had received patronage in the past it was due to his own ability. He had acquired considerable influence in Calcutta but retained contacts with the *mufassil* through his active interest in the grievances of the peasantry.¹⁵⁵

After the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911, when the senior Muslim statesmen tried to contain their anguish against Britain and looked for other favours to compensate for the loss of the province, Fazlul Huq took the bold stand of openly attacking the government for its failure to heed the Muslim demands. He declared:¹⁵⁶

To me it seems the Government has arrived at a parting of the ways, and has got to decide, once for all, its future policy regarding questions affecting the Muhammadan community.....in spite of their aversion to agitation, Muhammadans are drifting, owing to sheer force of circumstances, into the arena of political warfare. We feel that we have got to move with the times or else we are doomed. Let not the officials think that the feelings of the entire community can be soothed simply by the bestowal of titles and decorations on our leaders, or by providing for a transitory stay of the officials at Dacca with all the paraphernalia of Government. We require something more than a mere concession to our sentiments, something tangible which can be reasonably set off against our loss by the annulment of partition.

These were strong words coming from a spokesman of the 'loyal Muslims' and were hard for the British to relish. However, his speech, which he delivered extempore, did not contain, in contrast to speeches of other Muslim politicians, any anti-Hindu rhetorics and this was very important. His keen concern for the Muslim interests did not affect his relationship with the Hindus. To them he 'was the very model of a modern politician.'¹⁵⁷ As a student in Calcutta and later in his professional life as a college instructor, attorney and bureaucrat he had come into close contact with the Hindus. They had come to respect him for his unique record of academic accomplishments, skill in the legal profession, interest in the peasantry and for his commitment to the progressive Hindu view of self-government as the ultimate goal of Indian nationalism. By temperament and training he was thoroughly a Bengali, found his identity in the Bengali heritage and was not obsessed by a minority complex which had pushed many Muslims close to the alien ruler—all of these were deeply appreciated by the Hindus.¹⁵⁸ It was also pleasing to the Hindus that, unlike other Muslim politicians of Bengal, he did not accept as his mentors, the North Indian Muslim leaders of the Aligarh school who had been advising the Muslims to stay away from the Hindus. In his evidence to the Royal Commission on the Public Services in India he said "I consider it repugnant to our sense of self respect that we should consent to remain for all time as a dead weight on other advancing communities constantly hampering in their progress."¹⁵⁹

By his new political approach, Fazlul Huq was able to attract the younger Muslims who had begun to feel the futility of remaining aloof from the Hindus.¹⁶⁰ In the succession struggle that followed the death

of Salimullah in January 1915,¹⁶¹ Fazlul Huq gained control of the provincial Muslim League and became its president.¹⁶² Responding to the appeals of the Congressmen from Bengal for a Hindu-Muslim alliance against Britain to secure political concessions, Fazlul Huq and his men offered their community a new political strategy of a Hindu-Muslim united front in the national struggle for constitutional advances.¹⁶³ On this basis after a series of negotiations, the League and the Congress agreed on a joint scheme of reform known as the Lucknow Pact of 1916.¹⁶⁴ This pact, which was made possible largely due to the initiative of Huq, considerably enhanced his prestige in the progressive sections of both communities. In 1918 he was elected simultaneously as the president of the All India Muslim League and the general secretary of the All India National Congress, a unique distinction shared only by a few. He was also appointed a member of the Congress committee to inquire into the Amritsar tragedy of 1919.¹⁶⁵ Huq now relentlessly used both the platforms for communal harmony. At the annual session of the League in December 1918 in the aftermath of a communal violence in Calcutta led by non-Bengali Muslims¹⁶⁶ he chastised the Muslims:¹⁶⁷

There are some Mussalmans who think that intolerance of non-Muslims is a point of bravery, and that a contrary feeling betokens a cowardice. I have even come across Muslims who took a particular pleasure in assuming a militant attitude towards non-Muslims, as if devotion to Islam demands that we shall always be on a war path irrespective of consequences. All this is not merely morally reprehensible, but politically a grievous blunder. We are daily drifting towards a position when we shall have to tackle one of the most obstinate and powerful bureaucracies known in history.....Shall we be wise and strengthen our arms by an alliance with our brethren, or shall we be foolish and weaken whatever strength we possess by internecine quarrel and strife.

Huq's efforts at Hindu-Muslim unity were misunderstood in his own province by his conservative co-religionists for compromising Muslim interests in Bengal. A Calcutta Urdu daily wrote: 'Those who apprehend that the Moslems will suffer political death if they do not unite with the Hindus are greatly mistaken.'¹⁶⁸ Another wrote contemptuously about Huq: 'He has a strong desire to gain a reputation among all communities.....and is ready, without the least hesitation,

to sacrifice Muslim communal interests in order to win fame and position among the Hindus.¹⁶⁹ Huq, however, remained adamant in his view and maintained that the quota allocated to the Muslims by the Lucknow pact was adequate although he felt that 'if the Muhammadans are more advanced, gradually and when the time for review comes, they will have more seats.'¹⁷⁰ He also continued to believe that the pact was a compromise measure with the Hindus to put forward a demand for political advance of the country.¹⁷¹

While public criticism for neglecting the Muslim interest in Bengal affected his reputation within his own community in the province, he soon found himself at odds with the Congress. The occasion for the split came in December 1920 when the Congress decided to launch a non-cooperation movement. Huq strongly felt that the decision for boycotting English educational institutions would be injurious to the Muslim community which already lagged behind the Hindus in education and professional advancement.¹⁷² He argued further that although 'dyarchy' did not provide any real power to the people, nonetheless there was much to gain in the way of experience in participating in the institutions of self-government.¹⁷³ As a politician he had little faith in bellicose patriotism and preferred the course of constitutional struggle. Deterioration of Huq's relationship with the Congress also involved personal prejudices¹⁷⁴ and the rise of communalism in the Congress ranks after the death of C.R. Das.

Huq was elected in 1920 to the Bengal 'dyarchy' council and in 1924 he became the education minister for a brief period of eight months. The Swarajist faction of the Congress, who entered the council in 1924 to disrupt it from within, rejected the motion for minister's salaries. To discredit Huq, the Swarajists circulated a rumour that Huq had offered money to purchase votes.¹⁷⁵ The charge, which was never substantiated, was undoubtedly irritable to Huq but he was now disillusioned by the obstructionist strategy of the Swarajists which was negatory to the constitutional struggle for self-government and raised the question of the suitability in representative institutions. He wrote to the Government of India on July 5, 1924 :¹⁷⁶

Representative institutions have been thrust upon India, although there can be no doubt that representative institutions, as they are known in the west are utterly unsuited to Indian conditions.....You can no more expect representative institutions to flourish in the proper form in India than you can expect hot-house flowers to blossom in the icy cold of the North.

Huq also watched with concern the wave of communal politics, the formation of parties in the council on communal lines and especially the Hindu *bhadrolok's* permanent hostility to the government and to all proposals of socioeconomic reforms concerning the peasantry. He, therefore, leaned towards the Muslims for political support. The growth of Hindu militancy led by the Mahasabha drew him closer to his community. In his presidential speech at the Bengal Muslim Conference in Faridpur in 1925 he warned that advance towards *swaraj* would mean that more powers would be monopolised by the Hindus and advised the Muslims to organise themselves against the militant attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha.¹⁷⁷ To protect the interests of the Muslims of Bengal Huq repeatedly pleaded for the retention of separate electorate¹⁷⁸ and for a 'statutory majority' for the Muslims in the Bengal legislature since they were 'poor illiterate, disorganised and unable to appreciate the value of a vote or the necessity of combining together for the purpose of sending representatives to the legislature to represent their views.'¹⁷⁹ As a remedial measure to eliminate the evil effect of the communal electorate he recommended the immediate introduction of provincial autonomy as 'it will give the various communities an opportunity of coming together for common action and.....will generate in the minds of those who are working for the common goal, that much needed goodwill which will dissipate the atmosphere of communalism which at the present moment seems to prevail over India.'¹⁸⁰

At the same time whenever opportunity came he equally urged the protection of Hindu interests in Bengal,¹⁸¹ and criticised the North Indian Muslims for making too many demands on the Hindus in the form of Jinnah's 'fourteen points' as the condition for any communal settlement.¹⁸² Similarly, although he strongly defended the separate electorate, he vehemently opposed communal politics and the formation of parties on a communal basis.¹⁸³ In practical politics even after he had fallen from the Congress rank, he did not lose his rapport with the Hindus; he maintained only a symbolic relationship with the League and remained active in organising the Krishak Proja Samity. In 1935 Huq was elected the first Muslim mayor of Calcutta with the overwhelming support of the Hindus.¹⁸⁴ The Hindus enthusiastically proclaimed on the occasion, 'Hindu Muslim unity was a reality and

not a myth.¹⁸⁵

It seems that a basic point which Huq missed was that the institution of separate electorate was not conducive to a parliamentary democratic system and could encourage communalism and factionalism. Although it is difficult to say whether Huq believed in the principle of special constitutional safeguards for the Muslims as a matter of conviction or whether he simply subscribed to it in order to maintain understanding with his own community which he had nearly lost in the aftermath of the Lucknow pact. Perhaps he was caught in the dilemma of conflicting allegiances between secular nationalism, Muslim religious nationalism and Bengali regionalism. In conducting the affairs of the province as its chief minister, Huq was influenced by the frequent flickers of these three elements which created many problems, but his humane nature, broad outlook, flexibility in views, commitments to the goals of Indian nationalism, sympathy for the Muslim cause, keen concern for the interest of the province and sincere desire to spare no effort for the upliftment of the deprived classes of the society earned for him tolerance from the commonalty of both the communities.

REFERENCES

1. *Government of India Act, 1935*, 5th schedule, 14 e.
2. The highest turnout for the lower house was in the North West Frontier Province with 72.8 per cent and for the upper house in Assam with 94.4 per cent. See *Return Showing Results of Election*, p. 5.
3. Calcutta had a literacy ratio of 470 per thousand, *Census of India, 1931*, vol. VI., p. 73. The average literacy ratio for the whole of Bengal was 110 persons per thousand. *Ibid.*, vol. V, Part II, p. 320.
4. *The Statesman*, Jan. 21, 1937.
5. *Star of India*, Jan. 18, 1937.
6. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 120.
7. *Star of India*, Jan. 23, 1938.
8. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 120.
9. In the election of 1929 in one contested European constituency only 5.1 per cent of the electors exercised their votes. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1928-29*, p. ix.

10. Indian Franchise Committee vol. I, p. 31. Both the Indian Statutory Commission and the Indian Franchise Committee expressed satisfaction at the interest shown in those previous elections. *Ibid.*, p. 32, and Indian Statutory Commission, vol. I, p. 197. However, the Government of Bengal took the opposite point of view: 'As yet the electors do not take much interest in the election.' Government of India, *Views of Local Governments on the Recommendations of the Indian Statutory Commission* (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1930), p. 187. The latter view was obviously taken to discourage further extension of franchise.

11. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 131.

12. *Return Showing Results of Elections*, p. 14.

13. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 125.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, The percentage of women voters who exercised their rights in the North West Frontier Province was 71.4 although 99.84 per cent of the population of that province were Muslims and their women strictly observed *purdah*.

16. *Views of Local Governments*, p. 187.

17. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 123.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *The Bengal Conduct of Election Rules, Rule 4 (7)*.

20. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 122.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Star of India*, Jan. 18, 1937.

24. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. VIII, p. 148.

25. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1935-36*, p. xi.

26. One local officer reported 'in most cases appeals to voters were made almost exclusively on so-called religious grounds.' *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 138.

27. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1935-6*, p.x.

28. *The Statesman*, Jan. 14, 1937.

29. *Provincial Reports; Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec. 3, 1936 and Feb. 8, 1937.

30. Great Britain, India Office Library and Records, *Zetland Collection*, From the private secretary to the governor of Bengal to the private secretary to the viceroy, Feb. 24, 1937.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Forward*, editorial, Jan. 10, 1937.

33. *Zetland Collection*, Feb. 24, 1937.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *The Statesman*, Jan. 14, 1937.

36. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 254.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. Indian National Congress, *Report of the General Secretary, Apr.-Dec. 1936*,

(Allahabad: Swaraj Bhawan, 1936), p. 18.

40. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XLIX, Dec. 1, 1936, p. 382. The United Muslim Party was generally referred to as the ministerial party since it was supported by many ex-ministers.

41. Government of India, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. VIII, No. 8, Oct. 8, 1936.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Star of India*, Aug. 10, 1936.

45. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 113.

46. *Public and Judicial Files*, No. 4135 of 1936. Govt. of Bengal to the Govt. of India, Home Dept. D.O. letter No. 9691 ARD dated Oct. 20, 1936.

47. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XLIX, Dec. 1, 1936, p. 329.

48. *Star of India*, Jan. 22, 1938.

49. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 236.

50. *Star of India*, Jan. 23, 1938.

51. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 165.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

53. *Public and Judicial Files*, No. 4135 of 1936.

54. Government of India, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. VIII, No. 8, Oct. 8, 1936, p. 2687.

55. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec. 3, 1936.

56. Columns 1 and 2 are calculated from *Return Showing Results of Elections*, and column 3 from *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 136. For the election result also see Government of Bengal, *Calcutta Gazette*, Feb. 3, 4, and Mar. 1, 1937.

57. Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 27.

58. An example would be the Tippera Krishak Samity on which very little information is available. Although a few candidates were returned under the name of the party and Coupland (*Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 27) recognized them as a pro-Congress group, the governor of Bengal made no mention of them. After the election they joined the Proja Samity.

59. A. M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 121 and *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Feb. 8, 1937.

60. See appendix 1 for a statement showing the total number of votes obtained by successful candidates of several parties in contested constituencies in the Legislative Assembly.

61. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 137.

62. The Congress won 711 of the total of 1585 seats in all the provinces; it secured absolute majorities in 5 provinces—Madras, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa; it was the single largest party in 4 provinces—Bombay, Bengal, Assam and the North West Frontier. *Return Showing Results of Election*.

63. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Feb. 8, 1937.

64. See *Return Showing Results of Election*.

65. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.

66. See *Return Showing Results of Election*.

67. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 136.

68. In the absence of any census estimate it is difficult to indicate the actual size of the non-Bengali population of the Province, but a figure of approximately 900,000 may be suggested by taking roughly half of the 1931 census figure of 1,891,377 persons who spoke Hindustani, the other half being non-Muslims. *Census of India*, 1931, vol. V, Part 1, p. 354.

69. During his election campaign in Bengal, Jinnah had particularly warned the Muslims against voting in favour of independent candidates as they would not be responsible to any party for their future conduct and as such might turn into irresponsible representatives, *Star of India*, Jan. 4 and 9, 1937.

70. The League won only 109 seats out of a total of 482 seats reserved for the Muslims in all the 11 provinces of India, securing 4.8 per cent of the total Muslim votes. It failed to win a majority in any of the 4 Muslim majority provinces, namely Bengal, the Punjab, Sind and North West Frontier Province.

71. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 136.

72. *Star of India*, Mar. 3 and 11, 1937.

73. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 114.

74. *IAR*, vol. II, 1936, p. 284

75. Kabir, *Muslim Politics*, p. 32.

76. *AICC Newsletter*, No. 7, Sept. 10, 1937.

77. Congress secured 26 seats out of the 58 it contested for of the 482 separate Muslim seats in the 11 provinces or 5.4 per cent of the total Muslim seats.

78. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Feb. 8, 1937. For example N.K. Basu, 'the most prominent man of the opposition' in the old council was defeated by a comparatively unknown candidate.

79. *Report of the Reforms Office*, p. 138.

80. *Ibid*.

81. See *Return Showing Results of Election*.

82. *Provincial Reports: Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Jan. 6, 1937.

83. Of the 114 elected members of the old Bengal Council elected in 1929, 41 or 29.3 per cent were re-elected; 33 or 23.6 per cent to the assembly and 8 or 5.7 per cent to the council. The Hindu Muslim ratio of the experienced members was about the same.

84. Titles like Raja, Maharaja, Khan Bahadur, Khan Sahib, Rai Bahadur, Rai Sahib, or Kt., C.B.E., K.C.I.E., and C.I.E. were periodically conferred on the Indians as a reward for loyalty and service to the British Empire. For a list of title holders see Government of Bengal, *Civil List* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press, 1937).

85. According to Chapt. III, Sect. 85 of the *Govt. of India Act*, 1935 all proceedings in the provincial legislatures were to be conducted in English provided that 'persons unacquainted or not sufficiently acquainted' with English may use another

language.

86. See Government of Bengal, Bengal Legislative Assembly, *Report of the Working of the Legislative Assembly, Apr. 1937 to July 1939* (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1937), p. 28 and Government of Bengal, Bengal Legislative Council, *Triennial Report on the Working of the Bengal Legislative Council, Apr. 1937 to 1940* (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1940), p. 9.

87. In the absence of any official or non-official record on the biographical data of the members it is difficult to provide detailed and accurate statistics about the professional status of the members. The estimate here, therefore, is at its best only an approximation based on various scattered sources. It should also be recognized that many members came under more than one category. For instance, a lawyer could also be a landowner.

88. See Indian Statutory Commission, vol. V, p. 149.

89. *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, Part I pp. 268-9. Many landholders had also interest in business and commerce.

90. *IAR* vol. II 1937 p. 25. Landowners elsewhere in India organised themselves into political parties namely, the Agricultural Party of the United Provinces, the Unionist Party in the Punjab, the United Party in Sind and the Justice and People's Party in Madras. Ashraf, 'Congress and the Elections' pp. 140-49.

91. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow Dec. 3, 1936. For the British India Association see B. Majumdar, *Indian Political Associations* pp. 33-40, 73-89.

92. Their total number in 1931 was 17, 825. *Census of India 1931*, vol. V, Part II, p. 76.

93. The Muslims were late in joining the legal profession as in any other profession which required English education because of the unequal development of the two communities due to the peculiar nature of early British administration which favored the Hindus more than the Muslims.

94. *IAR*, vol. II, 1936, p. 205.

95. *Zetland Collection*, Linlithgow to Zetland, Mar. 3, 1937.

96. *AICC Newsletter*, No. 14, Mar. 25, 1937. Sections 50-52 of Chapt. III of the act of 1935 had provisions for the governor to act 'in his discretion' and to exercise his individual judgment' in fulfilment of his special responsibilities.

97. Great Britain, India Office Library and Records, *Private Telegrams Between the Secretary of State of India and the Viceroy*, Linlithgow to Zetland, Mar. 1937.

98. For his statement see *IAR*, vol. I, 1937, pp. 264-70. Also see John Glendon, *The Viceroy at Bay* (London : Collins, 1971), p. 63.

99. See the resolution of the Working Committee, July 7, 1937 in the *AICC Newsletter*, July 15, 1937. Also *IAR*, vol. II, 1937, p. 18.

100. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 220.

101. The Congress directions against coalition ministry were not strictly followed ; a Congress led coalition ministry was formed in North West Frontier Province in Sept. 1937 and another in Assam in March 1938. *Ibid*.

102. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 220.
103. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.
104. Private Telegrams, Linlithgow to Zetland, Mar. 4, 1937.
105. *Zetland Collection*, Linlithgow to Zetland, Mar. 3, 1937.
106. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec. 3, 1936 and Feb. 8, 1937.
107. *Modern Review*, vol. LX. No. 4, Oct. 1936, p. 40.
108. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.
109. *IAR*, vol. I, 1937, p. 185.
110. B.M. Chaudhuri, *Muslim Politics in India* (Calcutta : Orient Book Co., 1946), pp. 51-52.
111. Biswas, *Yukta Banlara*, p. 16. For biographical details of Ashutosh Mookerjee see N.K. Sinha, *Ashutosh Mookerjee, A Biographical Study* (Calcutta : A. Mookerjee Centenary Committee, 1966) and A. Devi, *Manishi Ashutosh* (Calcutta : New Print, 1964).
112. Details about the Samity—Congress negotiations are not available since those were done secretly.
113. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, pp. 123-24 and K. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 32. Abul Mansur Ahmed was a close associate of Fazlul Huq and was an eye-witness to these negotiations.
114. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 124.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
117. Sitaramayya, *Congress*, vol. II, p. 58.
118. Biswas, *Yukta Banlara*, p. 32. The author worked as a journalist during the thirties and claims personal knowledge in Bengal politics of the period.
119. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Feb. 8, 1937.
120. *Star of India*, Mar. 3, 1937.
121. See *Ibid.*, Mar. 3, 15, 1937.
122. Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf. 1964), vol. I, p. 26.
123. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.
124. *Star of India*, Jan. 19, 1937.
125. The ceremony included saluting the university flag with its crest bearing the replica of a lotus and the Hindu inscription *Sri*, and singing a Hindu patriotic song called *Bande Materam*. Both the song and the crest represented Hindu religious and national symbolism and was therefore anathema to the Muslim.
126. *Star of India*, Feb. 5, 1937.
127. *Ibid.*, Feb. 3, and *IAR*, vol. II, 1937, p. 4.
128. *Star of India*, Feb. 15, 1937.
129. *Ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1937.
130. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.
131. *Star of India*, Feb. 17, 1937.

132. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.
133. Fazlul Huq's reply to the address of felicitation at the Calcutta Town Hall, Jan. 31, 1937. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 254.
134. Total votes polled by Huq were 13,743 against 6,308 polled by Nazimuddin, *Return Showing Results of Election*, p. 47.
135. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Oct. 6, 1936. In throwing the challenge, R. Ahmad, the secretary of the Proja Samity, acted on his own without the consent of Huq or the party. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 113.
136. *Star of India*, Oct. 7, 1936.
137. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha ...*, p. 113.
138. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Jan. 6, 1937.
139. *Ibid.*, Feb. 8.
140. *Ibid.*, Mar. 9.
141. *Ibid.*, The figures given by Gopal are slightly different. Gopal, *Indian Muslims*, p. 254.
142. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.
143. *Ibid.*
144. The party's original strength of three in the lower house was increased by a few independents joining it.
145. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Mar. 9, 1937.
146. Biswas, *Yukta Banlara*, p. 122.
147. For a list of members of the first council of ministers see Government of Bengal. *Assembly Proceedings Official Report, Bengal Legislative Assembly* (Hereinafter referred to as *PBLA*) (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1937) vol. L, April 7, 1937, p. 3.
148. The terms 'council of ministers' and 'cabinet' were interchangeably used in government records and public speech although the term 'council of ministers' was the only one used in the constitution. Also, since there was no mention of a 'chief minister' in the constitution, the term 'prime minister' or 'premier' was quite often used to refer to the same office. See *Govt. of India Act, 1935*, chapt. III, sect. 50.
149. *Provincial Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec. 3, 1937.
150. Broomfield, 'The Forgotten Majority,' pp. 196-224.
151. B. D. Habibullah, *Sere-Bamla* (Barisal : Pakistan Book House, 1963), p. 14 ; Khaleque, *Eka Satabdi*, p. 45 ; and A.S.M. Abdur Rab, *A.K. Fazlul Huq* (Lahore : Ferozsons Ltd., 1967), p. 11.
152. However, Matiur Rahman in his *From Constitution to Confrontation* does not list Fazul Huq as a joint secretary of the Muslim League and makes little reference to Huq's contribution to the foundation of the party.
153. *The Indian Year Book* (Bombay: Bennett, Coleman and Co., 1942-43), vol. XXIX, p. 1022.
154. From 1913 to 1956 Huq was elected in succession as a member of the legislature. He died in 1962.

155. Habibullah, *Sere Bamla*, pp. 28-29. In his election speeches in 1913 'he declared that he represented the peasants, labourers and other low-caste people and all through his life he would fight for their uplift and welfare.' Rab, *Fazlul Huq*, p. 28.
156. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XLV, Apr. 4, 1913, pp. 595-96.
157. Broomfield, 'Forgotten Majority,' p. 203.
158. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 161.
159. Great Britain, Parliament, East India, Royal Commission on the Public Service in India, vol. III, *Appendix to the Report of the Commissioners ; Minutes of Evidence Relating to the Indian and Provincial Civil Services* (London : HMSO, 1914).
160. Lal Bahadur, *Muslim League*, p. 87.
161. Mary Carmichael, *Lord Carmichael of Skirling, A Memoir* (London : Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), p. 204.
162. *Muslim Year Book of India and Who's Who* (Bombay : Bombay Newspaper Co., 1949), p. 55.
163. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict*, pp. 113-14.
164. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
165. Ramesh Majumdar (Ed.), *History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol. XI : *Struggle for Freedom* (Bombay ; Bharatiya Bidya Bhavan, 1963), p. 311. Other members of the committee were Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das and Abbas Tyabji.
166. Broomfield, 'Forgotten Majority,' p. 208.
167. Sir Verney Lovett, *A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement* (London : Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968). p. 184.
168. *Risalat*, Apr. 17, 1917 quoted in Broomfield, *Elite Conflict*, p. 115.
169. *Moslem Hitaishai*, Oct. 31, 1919 quoted in Broomfield, *Elite Conflict*, p. 125.
170. *Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee*, Part II, 1925, Appendix 6, Huq's oral evidence, pp. 250-51.
171. Indian Round Table Conference, *Proceedings, During the Second Session*, 7th Sept. to 1st Dec. 1931, p. 159.
172. *The Pakistan Observer*, Apr. 27, 1963 and Rab, *Fazlul Huq*, p. 54.
173. *The Pakistan Observer*, Oct. 27, 1967.
174. See Huq's letter to Sarat Bose, Feb. 22, 1921. Rab, *Fazlul Huq*, pp. 56-58.
175. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XV, Aug. 26, 1924, p. 67 and Earl of Lytton, *Pundits and Elephants* (London : Peter Davies, 1942), p. 54.
176. *Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee, 1925, Views of Local Governments, dated 1924.* p. 151.
177. Government of India, *India in 1925-26* (Calcutta : Govt. of India Central Publication Branch, 1926), p. 13.
178. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. III, p. 171.
179. Huq's speech at the first plenary meeting, Nov. 28, 1931. Indian Round Table Conference, *Proceedings During the Second Session*, pp. 156-57.
180. *Ibid.*, pp. 162-63.

181. Bholā Chatterji, *Aspects of Bengal Politics in the Early Nineteen-thirties* (Calcutta : World Press, 1969), p. 63.

182. *Advance*, Oct. 19, 1932. The 'fourteen points' originated as Jinnah's amendment to the Nehru Report and contained demands for special safeguards for Muslim interests. See Sayeed, *Pakistan*, pp. 70-73.

183. Indian Round Table Conference, *Proceedings, During the Second Session*, p. 161.

184. *Star of India*, May 1, 1935.

185. See the felicitation address of the councillors. Corporation of Calcutta, *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, June 1935.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Problems of the Coalition

Introduction

The Coalition Party which formed the first ministry in Bengal with Fazlul Huq as the Chief Minister was a conglomeration of divergent parties, groups and individuals. Under the umbrella of a ministerial coalition an alliance was forged for the purpose of gaining political control of the province. The Coalition Party was essentially a parliamentary party functioning within the legislature and no machinery was developed to associate the masses with it. The coalition did not develop into a composite and homogeneous body. The various units who joined it functioned as separate groups and made no serious efforts to promote solidarity within the Coalition Party. They attached priorities to their own interests and programmes and jealously tried to promote them. Also, various individuals formed new groups within the coalition as a bargaining maneuver. With such circumstances the Coalition Party was not able to create either a sense of unity among components or a common ground to work on.

The hurriedly organised coalition had no party apparatus to enforce discipline among its members which led to frequent intrigues. This organisational weakness of the coalition was taken advantage of by the opposition who often encouraged disgruntled sections to defect from the camp of the coalition so that an alternative ministry could be formed. Consequently, the ministry, with its power based on the shaky wings of the Coalition Party, was under constant strain from one group or another. The problem of maintaining a majority in the legislature demanded much of the attention of the ministers and forced them to make frequent compromises on important issues at the cost of the credibility of the coalition. This chapter will deal with the various problems which the coalition had to face in maintaining its

political strength and the resulting effect on the political development of the province.

Communal Ratio in the Cabinet and the Allocation of Portfolios

On the inauguration of the autonomous government in the province, Fazlul Huq jubilantly announced that the coalition ministry was a 'very happy family.'¹ Perhaps his exultation was only an ironic endeavour to strike a note of unity in a team replete with factionalism. The first task of the Coalition Party was the selection of ministers and in this process it encountered the first problem.

Muslims constituted the overwhelming majority in the Coalition Party. In view of their numerical superiority in the province and on the grounds of the very small numerical contribution that the cooperating Hindus could make towards the majority of the ministerial alliance, the Muslim League originally demanded double the number of Muslims than Hindus in the cabinet.² A clear Muslim hegemony in the cabinet was thought by the League to be a prelude to the realisation of their hope of establishing complete political control over the province.³

On the other hand, the Hindus, to prevent a total Muslim domination of the government of the province and to satisfy individual aspirations, insisted on equal representation in the cabinet. Their demand for parity was also a means of gaining appreciation from their community which looked down upon the cooperating Hindus as merely office seekers and betrayers of the cause of the community.⁴ A Calcutta Hindu daily reminded Fazlul Huq of his commitment to the golden principle of Hindu-Muslim unity and cautioned him that a cabinet with Muslim majority would cause deep resentment among the Hindu community and could make the task of government extremely difficult.⁵

This difficulty was finally resolved after the provincial governor had intervened and the cabinet that was installed contained five Hindus and five Muslims, besides the chief minister who was a Muslim. The Muslim members of the Coalition Party were impressed upon that if the sister community were not to start with legitimate grievances at the outset—grievances that would make it most difficult for cooperating Hindus of position and ability to accept office—they should

be willing to be generous to the Hindus.⁶ Huq also urged that the Hindu share in the cabinet was not to be decided on the basis of counting their heads but on the role of the community in the province.⁷ The share of five ministers must have been satisfactory to the Hindus for this was far in excess of their actual support to the party.⁸ Nevertheless, a Hindu newspaper lamented that a Muslim *Raj* had been established in Bengal.⁹

The communal ratio in the cabinet fell far short of the expectation of many Muslims. It put Fazlul Huq in difficulty since, as the leader of the Coalition Party, he was held responsible for arranging the communal ratio in the cabinet. Occasionally demands were made upon him to increase the number of Muslim ministers. At a crowded conference of Muslim youths in Calcutta under the auspices of several Muslim student organisations a demand was made for the inclusion of another four Muslim ministers 'in order to give the government a definitely Muslim colour and to inaugurate schemes for the establishment of Muslim domination in Bengal.'¹⁰

Fazlul Huq was the chief minister but in the selection of his cabinet he did not have an effective voice. Ministers were chosen to accommodate different interest groups and not on individual merit. Consequently the cabinet contained some who were 'not conspicuous for ability and public spiritedness'¹¹ A case in point was Nawab Musharraf Hossain, a rich and 'not too scrupulous' businessman from North Bengal.¹² He was a member of the League, had been a minister for a short time under the 'dyarchy' constitution but had been much in the background in recent years. With his ambitions rekindled he 'bestirred himself' to form a North Bengal group within the Coalition Party for the obvious reason of advancing his claim to the ministry. The declared objective of the group was to mitigate the grievances of Northern Bengal which was less developed than West or East Bengal.¹³ The group secured the signatures of 42 elected members on the strength of which the Nawab was included in the cabinet¹⁴ but he 'was completely futile and his Muslim colleagues treated him as a joke.'¹⁵ Worse still, to prove his worth to his Muslim supporters, he turned into an uncompromising communalist. Similarly, the powerful organisation of the Muslim theologians of Bengal, the Jamait-al-Ulema, strongly pleaded for one of its members, Tamizuddin Khan.¹⁶ Being

unsuccessful, Tamizuddin organised a faction of his own, and left the coalition at a difficult time but came back as a minister.

In another case of a different nature, the governor refused to give assent to the appointment in the cabinet of Shamsuddin Ahmad who was the secretary of the Proja Samity and was nominated by it to the cabinet. Shamsuddin had led the left wing of the Proja Samity and had an outstanding political record for upholding the cause of the *ryots*. He was also strongly supported by the radical students in Calcutta.¹⁷ The justification that was offered by Sir Anderson to Fazlul Huq in support of his action was that Shamsuddin was involved, according to the secret reports of the intelligence department, in anti-state activities and that he had been sentenced in the past to prison for leading political agitation.¹⁸ However, in his confidential despatch, the governor wrote that he disapproved of Shamsuddin's appointment because of his radical views on agrarian problems.¹⁹

It seems, therefore, that the governor prevented Shamsuddin's entry into the cabinet to forestall the Proja Samity's radical economic programme some of which was appropriatory in nature.²⁰ It is particularly significant that the governor did not allow even a replacement for Shamsuddin from the Proja Samity. According to a contemporary observer, Fazlul Huq believed that the governor did not want to see Shamsuddin in the cabinet because he was bent upon reducing the representation of the Proja Samity in the cabinet as a means to curb the influence in it of Huq and his party.²¹

Although the provincial governor had the constitutional right to exercise his prerogative in the selection of a minister, Fazlul Huq nevertheless became the target of attack by his own party for surrendering to the whim of the chief executive. It was a known fact that the Proja Samity had won the highest number of electoral votes in the election but they were allotted only two seats in the cabinet. Thus, from the very beginning, Huq's relation to the left wing of the Samity became strained and his position became untenable within the cabinet for, besides himself, there was only one other minister from his party.

There was a considerable squabble among the Hindu and Muslim ministers over the allocation of portfolios or departments of the government in their charge. Sir Nazimuddin, a Muslim, was given the charge of the home department which gave him control over the law

and order machinery of the province. This was derided by the Hindus. In the past, Nazimuddin had acquired the reputation of being communal largely because of his connection with the Muslim Communal press in Calcutta and also because of the communal overtones with which in 1930 he rallied Muslim opinion in favour of a scheme for expansion of primary education among the Muslim masses.²² The Hindus clamoured that once in control of the home department, Naziuddin, with his past communal record, would let loose an era of Hindu repression.

The Hindus also regretted the loss of the important department of local self-government to another Muslim, Nausher Ali. This department supervised the activities of local self-governing institutions such as municipality, district board and union board.²³ Officials of these institutions were partly elected by the local people and partly nominated by the department. The Hindus were afraid that a Muslim minister would use the system of nomination for political patronage of the Muslims. In the past, as chairman of the district board of Jessore Nausher Ali had antagonised the Hindus by nominating men of his own community to the exclusion of Hindus in the board.²⁴

Similarly, the Muslims resented the allocation of the important departments of finance and revenue to the Hindus. They were afraid that the Hindu ministers controlling those two important department of the government would create obstruction to all measures to improve the economic conditions of the Muslims. The left wing of the Proja Samity especially entertained doubt as to whether the conservative revenue minister with his vast interests in land would go along with their programme of land reforms.

Muslims also felt disappointed to see another Hindu, Mukunda Behary Mallick, the leader of the Scheduled Caste group in the Coalition Party, put in charge of the two departments of cooperative credit and rural indebtedness.²⁶ These two important departments had to be given to Mallick to fulfil the demand of the Scheduled Castes for an important portfolio, especially since the other Scheduled Caste minister, Prasanna Deb Raikut, was given the relatively unimportant departments of forest and excise.²⁷ In Mallick's portfolio the Muslim saw passing into non-Muslim hands what they regarded as a control of a widespread and influential organisation.²⁸ A Muslim daily reported

that great resentment was felt in the Muslim political circle at the manner in which portfolios were distributed. It lamented; 'grave injustice has been done to the Muslims only to placate the Hindus—Muslim Bengal was amazed at the concession granted to the Hindus who are pledged to wreck the constitution.'²⁹

These signs of disaffection in the coalition had their effect on the efficiency of the cabinet. Instead of pushing forward any comprehensive programme for the whole province, ministers spent their energies 'into ill considered petty commitments...on the task of pleasing sectional interests among their followers.'³⁰ At the cabinet meetings 'discussions at many stages showed complete lack of proportion, precious time being wasted over some petty items.'³¹ To please factional interests ministers sometimes even took administrative actions which were against the public interest. For example, to appease their followers, they occasionally recommended the suspension in certain areas of public dues such as land revenue and irrigation 'cess'.³²

The First Defection from the Coalition

The initial difficulties of the coalition in the selection of ministers and distribution of portfolios foreshadowed the future course of events. A party so divided with its members lacking in mutual trust could hardly remain united. The left wing of the Proja Samity never reconciled to the formation of the League-Proja alliance. They entertained grave doubts about the possibility of true understanding between the non-communal Proja Samity and the communally oriented Muslim League. Following the formation of the League-Proja coalition a joint programme was drawn up which toned down many of the radical socio-economic programmes of the Samity as announced in its election manifesto.³³ This was resented by the left wing of the Samity but they still extended their support to Fazlul Huq who, in their view, was the only one in the cabinet to be trusted to look after the interests of the peasants.³⁴

Under pressure from the left wing members, the Samity's executive committee adopted a resolution authorising its president, Fazlul Huq, to give effect to a series of recommendations which included the abolition of the *zamindari* system, introduction of compulsory free primary education, repeal of all repressive laws, release of all political

prisoners and 'detenus' and fixing of one thousand rupees as the salary of the ministers.³⁵ In addition an advisory board, with three representatives each from the Samity and the League, was constituted to supervise the activities of the ministry.³⁶ The board became defunct in its first meeting following a disagreement on the question of abolition of the *zamindari*.³⁷ As long as the coalition was to be dominated by vested interests all efforts at agrarian reform was bound to be hazardous.

The first sign of conflict within the Coalition Party was visible at the all Bengal Proja Conference held in Bogra in June of 1937 under the auspices of the Proja Samity. Soon after the key note speech was delivered by Fazlul Huq, a group of radical members left the conference in protest against Huq's failure to adopt any measure to implement the recommendations of the Samity, particularly on reforms of the land tenure system and on the introduction of free compulsory primary education.³⁸ The left wing of the Samity was stirred further when, a month later, at a conference of the landholders of Bengal, Sir Bijoy, the revenue minister of the Bengal Government, glorified the *zamindari* system and advocated its perpetuation.³⁹ In doing so Sir Bijoy was not alone as most of the assembled *zamindars*, Hindu and Muslim, subscribed to his opinion irrespective of their political association.⁴⁰ Sir Bijoy's expression at the conference was his private view but nevertheless it panicked the extremist elements of the Proja Samity for it was the direct responsibility of Sir Bijoy, as minister in charge of revenue, to initiate and implement any scheme of reform concerning land laws.

It is important here to note the reaction of the Congress to the symptoms of the growing conflict within the coalition. In its passion to bring an end to the ministry which it could not control, the Congress was too eager to promote disaffection in the camp of the coalition. The Congress looked at the radicals of the Proja Samity as their potential allies in sabotaging the ministry. The fact that Shamsuddin, the leader of the Proja radicals, had personal grievances against Huq for his yielding to the pressure of the governor in denying Shamsuddin a seat in the cabinet could also be exploited by the Congress. Many of the Proja members had belonged to the Congress but had to seek election under the Proja ticket because the Congress decided

not to contest any Muslim seats in Bengal. Ideologically both the Proja Samity and the Congress were secular political parties and their agrarian programmes were similar. To fraternize with the Proja radicals, whose main emphasis was on peasant politics, the Congress was prepared to go on indefinitely 'whetting the appetite' of the cultivators. To encourage the left wing of the Samity, it immediately announced that its future plan of action within the legislature would be to support any scheme for the abolition of the *zamindari* system.⁴¹ In making this announcement, the Congress party in Bengal conveniently ignored the fact that at the land-holder's conference many of its members strongly supported the interest of the landlords.⁴²

On the eve of the budget session of the legislature scheduled to meet on July 29, Calcutta was beset with rumours about dissension in the Muslim camp. To counteract these rumours, organised appeals were made under the direction of the League for Muslim unity and threats of physical violence were issued against the unity breakers. Consequent to these pressures, the Proja Samity representatives made a pledge in a meeting of the Muslim legislators that as long as the ministry would do everything to implement the recommendations of the Samity, they would support the ministry.⁴³ This pledge could not avert a split in the Proja Samity primarily because the ministry showed no sign of acting upon the recommendations of that party.

To the dismay of the Coalition Party, in the first 'division' that was called in the Legislative Assembly on a Congress sponsored adjournment motion to discuss the situation created by a hunger strike by some political prisoners,⁴⁴ eight members of the Proja Samity voted with the Congress.⁴⁵ Again the left wing of the Samity led by Shamsuddin Ahmed voted against the government bill on the salary of the ministers.⁴⁶ In their opinion the monthly salary suggested by the bill—Rs. 3600 for the chief minister and Rs. 3000 for other ministers—was too high especially since in the Congress governed provinces salaries of ministers were fixed at Rs. 500. Speaking on behalf of the Proja Samity, Kazi Emdadul Huq severely admonished Fazlul Huq for flouting the promise he often made of a lower salary for ministers.⁴⁷

The ministry had no difficulty in getting the salary bill passed by the assembly. Nevertheless, it was embarrassing for the Coalition Party

to see a section of its members voting against a measure it had introduced. While the bill was discussed at the party meeting, a section of the Proja Samity had vehemently opposed a high salary for the ministers,⁴⁹ but it was expected, as a matter of ordinary parliamentary practice, that once a decision was arrived at by the majority members of the party, all the members of the party would support it in the legislature. To check the recurrence of a similar situation the Coalition Party under the direction of the League, which detested the Proja Samity radicals, took a decision prohibiting dissension against the party in the legislature by the party members under penalty of expulsion.⁴⁹

The new rule of discipline was intended to drive out the radicals from the coalition. Within days a group of 21 left wingers of the Proja Samity led by Shamsuddin Ahmed, the secretary of the party and the deputy leader in the assembly, withdrew from the coalition and announced their intention of 'voting independently and opposing the ministry on selected issues.'⁵⁰ The cause of their secession, as publicized by them, was the 'breach of election pledge' by Fazlul Huq: that ever since he became the chief minister he had taken no step to introduce compulsory free primary education, release the 'detenus' and political prisoners and to economise administration by reducing the salary of ministers.⁵¹ Some time later a spokesman of the group stated that they left the coalition because the programme adopted by the Coalition Party was not radical enough.⁵²

To weaken the coalition further, Shamsuddin also attempted to wreck the Muslim League. At the annual meeting of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, Shamsuddin and a few disgruntled members of the League with the help of 'hated hooligans' disrupted the proceedings of the meeting and elected an executive committee composed of the partisans of the group.⁵³ This attempt at a division in the League proved abortive; the proceedings of the meeting were declared void by the main body of the League who elected its own executive committee which was duly recognized by the All India Muslim League.⁵⁴ The Muslim press in Calcutta put the blame on the Congress for inciting Shamsuddin.⁵⁵

After seceding from the Coalition Party, Shamsuddin and his group insisted on calling themselves the 'real' or 'genuine' Proja Samity.⁵⁶ Within the legislature they collaborated with the Congress in

opposing the ministry and outside they launched an intensive anti-Huq campaign through innumerable meetings in the *mufassil* convened under the name of the Proja Samity.⁵⁷ In conducting these activities the left wing of the Proja Samity received the active support of the Congress. At the annual general meeting of the Bengal Krishak Proja Samity held in Rangpur in October 1937 a vote of no confidence sponsored by Shamsuddin's group was carried against Fazlul Huq for his failure to fulfil electoral promises. Activities such as these by the seceders from the Samity using the name of the Samity created confusion among the followers of the party in the *mufassil* and weakened the party. The keenness with which the seceders tried to assert themselves in competition and opposition to the Muslims supporting the coalition had the effect of causing disunity among the Muslims and this was a welcome phenomenon to the Congress.

Members of the Samity who remained loyal to Fazlul Huq expelled Shamsuddin and his group from the Samity and stigmatised the 'rebels' as betrayers of the cause of Islam.⁵⁸ They argued that the Samity was a minority in the cabinet and that Fazlul Huq, therefore, had to bend to the majority opinion which was in favour of 'adequate' salaries to keep the ministers economically independent.⁵⁹ The League also took the opportunity of the division in the Proja Samity: it reinvigorated its propaganda of being the only savior of Islam in Bengal and cudgelled the Congress for its intrigue to disrupt Muslim unity.⁶⁰ It was easy for the League to gain an upperhand on the demand made by Shamsuddin's group for the release of political prisoners and 'detenus' since none of the prisoners and 'detenus' were Muslims. All these contributed to communal bitterness.

The defection of Shamsuddin's group was a great relief to the conservative right wing of the coalition, especially the Muslim League. A large number of leaders of the League were drawn from the class of landed gentry and were primarily interested in the preservation of the *status quo* in order to protect their class interest. In most cases their championing the cause of the peasantry was no more than lip service. From the very beginning of the ministerial alliance, the Muslim League detested the radical members of the Proja Samity who were too critical of the landlord elements in the cabinet and advocated sweeping changes in the land laws. The League leaders were afraid that such

changes would lead to their own liquidation. During a debate in the Legislative Assembly on proposals of reforms concerning the land tenure system, a prominent spokesman of the League, Abdur Rahman Siddique, strongly opposed any change. On behalf of the League he declared that so far as the interests of the peasants were concerned the League 'does not yield to any other organisation in the country,' but if the system of land tenure had to be altered it must be done in a manner satisfactory to all sections of the society and there should be no division of society on an economic basis. He was shocked to see that the radicals of the Proja Samity were willing to 'sign away' the interests of the landlords.⁶¹

The League disliked the inclination of the chief minister to give way to the pressures of the radical elements. So long as those radicals would remain within the fold of the coalition, Fazlul Huq would certainly continue to give them a sympathetic ear, and in this the conservatives sensed the danger that their class interest might be compromised. According to the judgement of the conservatives, the exodus of the radicals would put the chief minister on their side of the fence and make him realise that it was not possible to please everybody by attempting to sit on top of the fence. Moreover, so long as the coalition could retain a workable majority without those radicals, there was the possible advantage of curbing the irresponsible nature of the Congress opposition since the Congress had to be responsive to the view point of their new found friends. On the strength of the Proja Samity defectors, the Congress might feel encouraged in course of time to build up an alternative coalition, which in effect would soften their feeling of exasperation and shift them to a strategy of constructive opposition rather than 'merely seeking to inflame feelings and create obstructions.'⁶²

The League Gains the Upper Hand

Following the secession of the left wing of the Proja Samity from the Coalition Party, the Muslim League became the dominant group in the coalition. Fazlul Huq watched with dismay the dwindling size of his own party and the ceaseless propaganda against him personally by his former colleagues. He realised that in order to continue his leadership in the coalition he must depend heavily on the League.

and in order to rid himself from it he made some efforts in the autumn of 1937 to form an alliance with the Congress or a section of it on some reasonable terms.⁶³ But the Congress showed no interest.⁶⁴ Once again rebuffed by the Congress, Huq found himself forced to rely on the support of the League which he could gain only by formally subscribing to the creed of the League. He opted for this course of action rather than resignation on the consideration that an alternative ministry under the direct control of the League would mean total alienation of the Hindus from the administration, thereby causing a disaster for the province.⁶⁵

At the annual session of the All India Muslim League held in Lucknow on October 15, Fazlul Huq, amidst thunderous applause, embraced Jinnah, signed the League pledge and announced that he would advise all members of the Coalition Party to join the League.⁶⁶ Along with Huq, Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, the Chief Minister of Punjab, and Sir Muhammad Saadullah, the Chief Minister of Assam, declared their allegiance to League and urged their followers to join the League. In the course of his speech Fazlul Huq made a strong plea for Muslim unity under the banner of Islam and under assured his audience that if the Muslims were ill treated in the Congress governed provinces, the Bengal ministry would retaliate. He also advised the Muslims that if they wanted the welfare of their community they should keep themselves at arms length from the Congress for 'none could be more selfish, deceptive, hypocritical and scheming than a Congressman.'⁶⁷

Fazlul Huq's outburst against the Congress reflected his frustrations caused by the persistent refusal of the Congress to form a political alliance with his party and the ceaseless effort by the Congress to overthrow the ministry. His emphasis on Islam and the treat of retaliation against the Hindus in Bengal was promoted by the necessity of conforming to the creed of the League which was thoroughly communal. Jinnah had made it clear in his presidential speech at Lucknow that the League's appeal to the Muslim masses was to be 'Islam in danger.'

Deplorable as they were, Huq's utterances in Lucknow only created a negligible reaction among the Hindus in Bengal who knew that Huq was not the kind of person to carry his threats into practice.⁶⁸

Generally the Hindus felt that their interests would receive much better protection with Fazlul Huq than with any other Muslim.⁶⁹ They also did not fail to realise that Huq's speech was the effect of an unrestrained campaign against him carried on by the Congress and the Calcutta Hindu press. As soon as Fazlul Huq returned to Bengal, he assured the Hindus that 'as long as he was in power they had nothing to be afraid of.'⁷⁰ At the Bengal Muslim Conference held in Berhampore under the auspices of the League, Fazlul Huq exhorted the Muslims;⁷¹

Power has come into hands of the Muslims because they constitute the single biggest group in the Assembly. But when power is in your hand do not be selfish. You have to look to the Hindu interest also and you have got to be impartial.

Huq's speech was in marked contrast to that of Jinnah, who also addressed the conference. Jinnah appealed to the Muslims not to join any party or organisation except the League and warned that if the Muslims lose the battle with the Hindus they 'will be crushed and wiped out of their existence.' He concluded: 'You may talk as much as you like about your religion, culture and language. Political power is a power that will safeguard our religion, culture and language. That is what we are fighting for.'⁷² Jinnah had no share in the responsibility of administration in the province and, therefore, could indulge in communal rhetorics in exciting the Muslims against the Hindus in the name of Islam as a means to gain swift popularity for the League.

Fazlul Huq's decision to join the League was a momentous event in Bengal's checkered history. His open championing of the cause of the League added a new vitality to the League by giving it a representative character in Bengal.⁷³ Fazlul Huq had a tremendous personal influence among the Muslim masses of Eastern Bengal.⁷⁴ By joining the League he brought the support of the masses to that organisation. Until then a vast majority of the first category League leaders belonged to the feudal class.⁷⁵ They generally kept their distance from the masses and lacked the dynamism and pugnacity of true leaders of the masses. Fazlul Huq also helped in popularising the League outside of Bengal and to that end made extensive tours throughout India.⁷⁶ His personal popularity in the League circle became high and he was elected president of the Bengal provincial League, a member of the

Council of the All India Muslim League and a member of its Working Committee.

In Lucknow Fazlul Huq was able to resist the pressure of the League to disband the Proja Samity. He reasoned that the League was a political association and as such it should look after the political interest of the Muslims, but the Samity had an economic programme and its membership contained some Hindus and, therefore, it should continue to oversee the economic interests of the masses of Bengal.⁷⁷ After joining the League, Huq did not sever his connection with the Samity and continued to be its president. Justifying his dual allegiance he maintained that in Bengal there was the need for both the parties; he would not give up the leadership of the Proja Samity since that would mean a Congress takeover of that party, similarly he would not leave the control of the League to the Muslim feudal class.⁷⁸ However, in real politics the line of action adopted by Huq precipitated the ruin of the Proja Samity. The premier had come to power on the strength of the Samity but from that fateful day in Lucknow he took very little interest in the organisational activities of the Samity.⁷⁹

The League also went to work insidiously to undermine the profile of the Samity. To establish its claim as the only representative party of the Muslims of India, the League took every opportunity in projecting itself to the public view and pushed the Samity into the background. The protagonists of the League started a careful propaganda that the real problem of the Muslims in Bengal was political and not economic and, therefore, they should join the League to make it the largest in the legislature.⁸⁰ They consternated the Muslim masses by referring to the efforts of the Congress to contact the Muslim masses as 'an attempt to seduce Muslims from allegiance to a Muslim political body.'⁸¹ To popularise the party the Samity decided to observe 'Proja day', but the League undercut the importance of the occasion by declaring that there was practically no difference between the League and the Samity so far as the interests of the *ryots* were concerned, thereby implying that the Samity was really redundant.⁸² To counteract the activities of the left wing of the Samity, the League found it convenient to brand them as a pro-Congress group trying to sabotage Muslim unity.⁸³ Efforts were also accelerated to open branches of the League in the *mufassil* as the only means to 'political salvation' of the

Muslims in Bengal.⁸⁴ The League leaders felt that as the League would grow in strength so would the strength of the Proja Samity gradually dwindle because membership in the former would mean much more than membership in the latter.

Without the effective leadership of Fazlul Huq, the Proja Samity's future was foredoomed. Huq's holding the highest position of the Samity and the League in Bengal naturally created a problem of identity for the Samity members. As Huq took more interest in League affairs, the main wing of the Proja Samity, which supported him, became, for all practical purposes, an auxiliary of the League; similarly the left wing ultimately became a branch of the Congress.⁸⁵ The increasing the League's influence in the Samity depleted its Hindu membership and support. In the course of time, the bi-communal character of the Samity, which was its uniqueness, was obliterated. This brought about the decline of the political influence of a party which had a tremendous potential of deterring the intensification of communal politics in Bengal.

The Second Defection: Proja Samity's Calamity and the League's Opportunity

On March 15, 1938 a group of thirteen members of the Legislative Assembly belonging to the Proja Samity broke away from the Coalition Party. They called themselves the Independent Proja Samity and augmented the ranks of the opposition. The group was led by Tamizuddin Khan who bore ill will against Fazlul Huq for not supporting his candidacy for the ministry. This ground furnished for their defection was that 'the selection of the ministers have been unfortunate and the ministry was not homogenous but heterogenous and therefore reactionary.'⁸⁶ Matters had come to a head on March 11 when Tamizuddin's group voted with the opposition against a cabinet proposal to allocate funds to set up a land revenue commission to study the land tenure system and make recommendations. Their objection was that the proposal did not include an announcement of 'terms of reference' and personnel of the commission.⁸⁷ Fortunately, there were many Congress absentees and the ministry won by a comfortable majority of 41 votes.

The justification given by the defectors was only a pretext. There

was no scope for a homogenous ministry in Bengal since no single party commanded a majority in the legislature. Not unlike the previous occasion, this defection was also inspired by the Congress. Sarat Bose, the chief of the Congress Party in Bengal had been in secret negotiations with Tamizuddin's group for some time.⁸⁸ A follower of Tamizuddin disclosed that there was a 'secret pact' between Tamizuddin and Sarat Bose and that attempts had been made to unite Tamizuddin's group with the earlier Proja Samity defectors but that this had failed due to a conflict over leadership.⁸⁹ During the same time there was a rumour of another secret negotiation between the Congress and the League but the story is not altogether clear.⁹⁰

The defection of Tamizuddin's group, who were reported to be in contact with Sarat Bose, was a relief to the League members of the cabinet. Eager to consolidate its position in the Coalition Party, the League was bent on purging the coalition of all members of doubtful loyalty. The voting record of March 11 which showed a total strength of only thirteen for Tamizuddin was certainly pleasing to the League members for it did not seriously jeopardize the parliamentary majority of the coalition. But the coalition was immediately beset with another adversity. To pull down the ministry Sarat Bose was also carrying on negotiations with the Scheduled Caste members of the coalition. When Gandhi visited Calcutta in March, Sarat Bose was able to induce Gandhi to advise the Scheduled Caste members to desert the coalition and join the Congress.⁹¹ Withdrawal of support by the Scheduled Castes would not only impede the strength of the coalition but would put the Hindu ministers in an unsatisfactory situation. The Hindu finance minister, N.R. Sarkar, tried to counter this move for secession but to no avail and on March 18 fifteen Scheduled Caste members of the Coalition Party formally announced their separation from that party and set up an independent group in liason with the Congress.⁹² Following this defection the Congress called a 'snap division' on the budget, as a result of which it scored 96 against the Coalition's 112—the narrowest margin so far reached.⁹³

These fresh defections led to a renewed call for Muslim solidarity and a vilification campaign against the Congress which was blamed for instigating the defectors. The Congress, a predominantly Hindu body, with all its activities against the Coalition Party, was interpreted

by the League stalwarts as Hindu opposition against the Muslim hegemony in the province. With the steady withering of the strength of the coalition, such propaganda was considered to be of tremendous value to arrest further defections from the Coalition Party.

A huge public meeting was organised by the League in Calcutta and resolutions were adopted condemning the seceders for 'threatening Muslim interests' and challenging them to seek re-election.⁹⁴ This was followed by a series of rowdy street demonstrations organised by the League to express confidence in the existing ministry which 'alone could look after the interests of the Muslims of Bengal.'⁹⁵ To consolidate the Muslims under its leadership, the League observed March 27 as the 'Huq Day' throughout the province in collaboration with the Calcutta Khilafat Committee and the Bengal Jamiat-al-Ulema.⁹⁶ The day turned into an occasion of anti-Congress and anti-Hindu propaganda. On the day the Muslim youths were also summoned to form a Muslim National Guard to provide protection to their community against the physical outrages by the Hindus.

The main event of 'Huq Day' was a mass rally at the Calcutta Muhammad Ali Park. A *fatwa* was read on behalf of Pir Abu Bakr, the president of Jamiat-al-Ulema, severely denouncing the Muslim seceders for conspiring with the Congress against the Muslim ministry of Bengal and pronounced that the seceders were in danger of losing their *iman* (faith).⁹⁷ The fanatical Mulla Jan Muhammad of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee threatened that for maintaining Muslim solidarity 'no sacrifice was too great.'⁹⁸ Maulana Raghbir Ahsan, secretary of the Khilafat Committee branded the defectors as modern Kharijites⁹⁹ for deserting the *swab-azam* (the right path) and recommended that they should not be given any quarter in the Muslim society. Another speaker, Abdul Jabbar Wahedi urged all Muslims of Bengal to discard all parties and unite on the platform of the League the only platform of the *Kalimat-al-Islam* (the word of Islam). A resolution was also adopted in the rally which called on the premier 'to scrap' the two Scheduled Caste ministers since a number of the Scheduled Caste members withdrew their support from the coalition.¹⁰⁰

The new wave of defections further increased the need for Fazlul Huq to depend on the League. The opposing tendencies between the progressive and conservative forces had come to a clear issue on the

occasion of the selection of the chief whip for the Coalition Party.¹⁰¹ To the abhorrence of the former, the latter was able to prevail on the occasion; Khawaja Shahabuddin (a borthor of Sir Nazimuddin), a staunch Muslim Leaguer and a firm believer in the doctrine of a compact party with decisive leadership was selected to be the man in charge of party discipline.

It is believed that during Gandhi's visit to Calcutta in March, some moves were made for an alliance between Fazlul Huq and the Congress.¹⁰² Those moves, however, bore no fruit and made Fazlul Huq even more inclined towards the League. Apparently to obviate any chance of whispers growing in the League bloc, he issued a press statement that if he had accepted the Congress's offer, he would have signed the death warrant of Islam.¹⁰³ For further under scoring his credibility with the League, he joined the League rhapsody in using the League platform to castigate the Congress. At a reception in Asansol Huq said, in his characteristic eloquence.¹⁰⁴

The need for an All India Muslim organisation was never so urgent and great than at present. Unless the Muslims organise and stand united in the whole of India their national existence in this country cannot be safe and secure.....The Congress is even outdoing the 'Satan' himself in Bengal in creating division amongst the Muslim ranks and setting brother against brother. But if the Muslims of India unite and organise under the All India Muslim League they can easily frustrate all the machinations of their enemies and can be a source of strength and stability to both India and Islam.

Again speaking in Urdu before the special session of the All India Muslim League in Calcutta, Huq reminded the Muslim of the command of Allah that they should hold together and should not create dissensions among themselves.¹⁰⁵ He harangued his audience to 'fight the battle of Islam' to the bitter end and give 'as glorious account of themselves as did their forebears who conquered India from the Hindus.'¹⁰⁶ Further he urged the Muslims to marshal their scattered forces under the banner of the League, 'the one and only representative organisation of the Muslims.' When a critic drew his attention to his obligation to the Proja Samity, he reported:¹⁰⁷

I won my elections not because I was a Proja candidate but because the overwhelming majority of the voters in my constituency had a personal attachment for me. It was a piece of personal triumph on my part and not due to any strength attached to any party label.

Thus what started as an attempt by the Congress to win some members of the coalition to its side, ended by still further enhancing Muslim solidarity and communal sentiments unity both inside and outside the legislature increased in direct proportion to the Congress's attacks on the ministry. As the Huq ministry gradually passed into a League ministry, the Proja Samity became a non-entity. The League's indulgence in communal rhetorics embittered communal relationships and increased the difficulties of the Hindu ministers in continuing their relationship with the Coalition Party.

Defection of Muslim Minister

A dramatic political development took place on June 22, 1938. On that day the Council of Ministers tendered their resignation and within hours the governor invited the leader of the Coalition Party, Fazlul Huq, to reconstitute the ministry. The newly commissioned Council of Ministers consisted of all the previous ministers with the exception of Nausher Ali, who held the portfolio of public health and local self-government and was the deputy leader of the Proja Samity Assembly Party.

Speculation about an impending conflict within the ministry was current for some time. A few days before June 22, Nausher Ali made it public that he had a major disagreement with his colleagues and had decided to withdraw his support from the coalition.¹⁰⁸ But he did not resign from the ministry although the ministers were collectively responsible to the legislature.¹⁰⁹ When he was asked by the Coalition Party to resign, Nausher Ali did not comply and stated that it was his intention to force the entire ministry to resign so that a stable ministry might be formed which would reflect the opinion of the province.¹¹⁰

Nausher Ali represented to the governor that the ministry had lost the confidence of the people of the province and the legislature that he commanded the majority and was therefore not prepared to resign.¹¹¹ He also claimed that since the legislature was in recess it was not possible for him to demonstrate the support he expected from its members. The resultant impasse was resolved when the governor, acting under the instruction of the viceroy advised his entire cabinet to resign.¹¹² This also made it incumbent on the recalcitrant minister to

resign.

While announcing his decision to withdraw support from the coalition, Nausher Ali made it public that he came into conflict with his colleagues in the cabinet for advocating radical reforms in the tenancy system.¹¹³ To follow up his allegations against his former colleagues he released unilaterally a series of private correspondance between himself and the chief minister.¹¹⁴ The principal dictum of Nausher Ali in this correspondance was that the conservative elements in the cabinet in collaboration with vested interests were engaged in a mean conspiracy against the peasants of Bengal. He was particularly bitter against the Leaguers:¹¹⁵

I cannot conceal my belief that most of the prominent Leaguers in Bengal are reactionary aristocrats who are solely subservient to British Imperialism and Bengal Landlordism and their sole object is, in the name of Islam and the Muslims to keep the poor in their hand, and to exploit the masses for their self-aggrandisement. Is not the cry of Islam in danger intended to keep separate the people with common interests so that British Imperialism and Bengal Landlordism may flourish at the expense of the country at large ?

An interesting fact revealed in the correspondance was that Nausher Ali, probably with the knowledge of Huq, carried on secret talks with Sarat Bose for forming a new coalition between the left wing of the Proja Samity and the Congress.¹¹⁶ Nausher Ali belonged to the left wing of the Proja Samity. Subsequent to the defections of the two left factions of the Proja Samity and Fazlul Huq's increasing reliance on the League, Nausher Ali became the leader of the remnants of the left elements of the Proja Samity in the coalition. As a strong protagonist of progressive legislations in the interest of the *ryots* he found himself isolated in the cabinet by his League colleagues.¹¹⁷ To stabilize his position he tried to bring back the Proja Samity defectors to the coalition. All such efforts, however, were foiled by the League leaders who were determined to subjugate the coalition.¹¹⁸

Loathing the antagonism of his league colleagues he perceived the futility of remaining in office and decided to throw his lot in with the Congress with whom he had been associated in the past. The earlier Proja Samity defectors undoubtedly raised his hopes about the prospect of a new coalition. After leaving the cabinet, he urged the Muslims to join the Congress and advocated the formation of a Congress

ministry in Bengal.¹¹⁹ He also became an exponent of Hindu-Muslim political co-operation as a prerequisite for the economic emancipation of the masses. In this new mission he found very little response from the Muslim community.¹²⁰ The Congress in Bengal came to be looked upon by the Muslims generally as a Hindu organisation and a political appeal based on purely economic issues was not adequate to create enthusiasm.

The Congress found it expedient to encourage Nausher Ali's pro-ness to ride roughshod on his League colleagues on the issue of tenancy reform. The memory of the Congress was still fresh about its debacle in 1928 when its cause was damaged heavily in the eyes of the Muslim peasants for siding with the landlord's interests in the old Bengal council.¹²¹ This failing of the Congress almost a decade earlier had enhanced the electioneering value, from the point of view of anti-Congress elements, of general demands for drastic curtailment of landlord's privileges. Congress itself in the election as a part of its mass appeal had to include proposals for land reforms in its programme, although there were many in the Congress camp who actually had the interests of the Hindu landlords at heart. Therefore, it seems that the Congress, by encouraging the defection of a radical minister on the grounds that the agrarian policy of his colleagues was not progressive enough, wanted to seize the opportunity to rehabilitate itself among the Muslim masses. In case the Congress succeeded in bringing the downfall of the ministry, it could still hope to appease the landlord elements by relying on the resultant confusion to postpone the day of actual reform.

The defection of Nausher Ali completed the exodus of the progressive elements from the Coalition Party. Both the Coalition Party and the cabinet henceforth came under the total control of the League. The Samity had bargained with the League from a position of strength in the aftermath of the election but in the course of a year and a half, it was in shambles. Those members of the Samity who remained loyal to the coalition acquiesced to the dictation of League leaders in shifting emphasis from economic issues to communal issues. The progressives of the Samity by their ceaseless insistence for socio-economic reform to improve the status of the peasants had actually forced the conservative League members to

Legislative Assembly because only two members of the Proja Samity had left the coalition with him.¹²² The strength of the coalition was, however, seriously threatened a few weeks later when the Congress, through Gandhi's initiative, succeeded in securing the withdrawal of nine Scheduled Caste members from it.¹²³ This happened at a difficult time when the ministry was still trying to consolidate its rank following the defection of Nausher Ali.

With the rank of the opposition thus swelled, the Congress planned for a showdown in the Legislative Assembly by serving no confidence motions on each minister. Agitation committees sponsored by the Congress were formed in the districts to demand the resignation of the ministry.¹²⁴ On July 29 a demonstration organised jointly by the Congress and the Trade Union Congress was staged to coincide with the opening of the autumn session of the legislature which had been in recess since April 8. The Congress also started an assiduous whispering campaign among the supporters of the ministry and even tried to entice the Anglo-Indians and Europeans to support the no-confidence motions.¹²⁵ There were also reports of underhand monetary promises by the Congress to the members of the Coalition Party.¹²⁶

In Calcutta tension mounted as the day for the discussion of the motion approached. Peace was threatened when the supporters of the ministry organised rival demonstrations and paraded in the streets carrying *lathis* or bamboo sticks.¹²⁷ At a well attended Muslim mass rally in the Maidan, the main public mall of the city, a bleak resolution inciting violence was adopted;¹²⁸

Further this meeting warns the responsible leaders of the Bengal Congress that the result of such a senseless policy will be open conflict and clash between hostile parties and consequent riot and bloodshed the whole responsibility for which will rest on the Bengal Congress leaders which is leading violent forces towards a warpath.

On the night before the debate on the motions two Proja Samity opposition leaders were assaulted by Muslim hooligans and were rescued only by the timely intervention of Fazlul Huq.¹²⁹ As a result many members of the opposition stayed overnight in the assembly with the permission of the speaker since they were afraid of being prevented by the mob outside from attending the session. On August 8, the day fixed for the voting on the motion, the precincts of the assembly were filled

by a crowd of unprecedented strength estimated at about 250,000 consisting almost entirely of Muslims collected from the adjoining industrial areas.¹³⁰ In response to a call of the city branch of the League, the Muslim shopkeepers observed complete *hartal* on the day.¹³¹ To strengthen its appeal, the League issued leaflets saying that the downfall of the ministry would lead to the cessation of prayers in the mosque.¹³² The Muslim press in Calcutta also made scurrilous attacks on the Muslims opposing the ministry.

In that event the ministry was saved by a narrow margin; amid unruly scenes the first motion was rejected by 130 votes to 111, the second and third without a division and the rest were dropped.¹³³ Immediately after the results of the first motion was known, ministers rushed outside to announce their victory to the waiting crowd and were cheered tumultuously.¹³⁴ The ministers won the day but unfortunately this was not the last occasion that the League adopted the political weapon of street violence and mass mobilisation to coerce the legislators. Here after these extra parliamentary tactics were freely used to counter all Congress moves against the ministry and especially to muzzle those Muslims who refrained from linking up with the League, thereby severely restraining their activities.¹³⁵

The ministry escaped defeat in the test of strength in the legislature by the solid backing of the 25 European members. Consequently it became dependent on this European support. This was embarrassing to the ministry since nationalism could so easily provoke racial antipathy. Even after the defeat of the no confidence motion an opposition member glibly remarked that the ministry could not really claim to have confidence of the people of Bengal.¹³⁶ Another attacked the European group: 'I will ask my European friends to consider whether they would perpetually take upon themselves the onus of deciding for all time the policy and personnel of the government, that is to rule over the destinies of this province.'¹³⁷

With the position of the ministry so precarious, the Coalition Party opened negotiations with the left wing of the Proja Samity. In this the initiative was taken by Fazlul Huq who found his position threatened by the increase of the League's influence in the coalition. His League colleagues did not favour the idea of the left wingers coming back to the coalition but had ultimately reconciled because they

were afraid 'that their days must be somewhat numbered unless they can win over a certain number of the opposition.'¹³⁸ After a protracted negotiation, Shamsuddin and Tamizuddin with their followers joined the coalition and were sworn in as ministers on November 17, 1938.¹³⁹ This attempt to strengthen Huq's position in the coalition proved abortive. As a spokesman for the radical group, Shamsuddin found his position untenable in the cabinet due to the opposition of his conservative colleagues.¹⁴⁰ In obedience to the wishes of his followers he resigned from the cabinet on February 27, 1939 and once again joined the opposition as the leader of the hard core left wingers of the Samity. However, attraction of office proved strong for Tamizuddin and to ensure his position he joined the League.¹⁴¹ This put the Proja Samity in complete disarray and the League's position became unassailable in the coalition.¹⁴² From now on Fazlul Huq's hold on office depended entirely on the League's good will which led to the increase of communal ill-feeling in the cabinet. By the end of 1939 Fazlul Huq's Hindu finance minister resigned on the charge of communalism against his Muslim colleagues.

The Dilemma of a Hindu Minister

Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, the able finance minister, was a long time follower of the Congress. Because of personal differences with Sarat Bose, he left the Congress before the election and joined the Nationalist Party. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly from a special constituency of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce of which he was the president. Sometime after entering the coalition he also joined the Proja Samity and was elected its deputy leader.¹⁴³ Sarkar did not have any personal following in the legislature but he was still chosen as a minister because the Muslim dominated coalition hoped through him to appease at least a section of the caste Hindu community. Sarkar was a caste Hindu and had close personal relationship with B.C. Roy who headed the right wing faction of the Congress against Sarat Bose's left wing.

From the very beginning Sarkar felt uneasy in the company of his new associates. He had joined the cabinet against the mandate of the Congress, the most powerful Hindu political party of the province. His chances of future political success, so long as he stayed out of the

Congress, were very bleak indeed. Worse still, to mar his credibility among the Hindu community, the Congress in Bengal, which was then under the control of Sarat Bose, unleashed a malicious propaganda against him by branding him as the betrayer of national interest.¹⁴⁴ To exonerate himself from such a serious allegation and to uphold his image among the Hindus, Sarkar offered an apology that his faith and devotion to the Congress still remained unshaken, and he joined the ministry only to protect the Hindu interests.¹⁴⁵ At a meeting of a Calcutta Hindu civic group, the *Milanee*, Sarkar declared in a conciliatory gesture to the Congress that as a minister it would be his constant endeavour to implement the constructive economic programme of the Congress.¹⁴⁶ He went even further when in his first budget speech he eulogised Gandhi and Congress and concluded his speech¹⁴⁷ by shouting the favourite Congress slogan, *Bande Mataram* (Hail to Mother India)¹⁴⁸ which was very much unpalatable to the Muslims.

It is true that there were striking similarities in the economic programme of the Congress and the Coalition Party, but it was irritating to many Muslims to see Sarkar shower praises on the Congress which was committed to wreck the constitution. It was through the fabric of that constitution that the Muslims assumed for the first time the political control of the province. As a member of the coalition, Sarkar was expected to champion its cause but instead he was promoting the Congress cause. Muslim members of the coalition thus began to resent Sarkar's presence in the cabinet.

Sarkar's relationship with his Muslim colleagues was further affected as the latter pressed hard for a series of administrative measures which were to benefit the Muslims but which were detrimental to the Hindu interest.¹⁴⁹

Being a Hindu, Sarkar could not remain a silent spectator when Hindu interest was threatened especially if he was to justify his claim of being a custodian of that interest in the Muslim dominated ministry. Therefore, Sarkar took it to be his duty to create obstruction against any such measure. In doing so he received the support of his Hindu colleagues who equally felt the necessity of safeguarding the Hindu cause if they were to keep their community favourably disposed towards them while collaborating with the Muslims in sharing political power. At various stages of the discussions for reforms on the

electoral system of the Calcutta Corporation and the activities of the village moneylenders, the Hindu ministers threatened to resign.

The Muslim groups in the coalition, especially the League, despised Sarkar's obstructions to their pro-Muslim policy but for a good reason they refrained from taking any drastic action against him. It was widely circulated that the Bose Brothers were planning for an alternative ministry by forging an alliance between the left wing of the Congress and the Proja Samity with the exclusion of the League. As a preliminary step they aspired to obtain the resignation of Sarkar from the cabinet. It was hoped that Sarkar's leaving the cabinet would bring down the Huq ministry and would put the Congress in Bengal in a strong bargaining position for forming a new coalition with the Congress holding the decisive power.¹⁵¹ In 1938 Subhas Bose, the arch rival of Sarkar, was elected the president of the Indian National Congress, which led to the consolidation of the position of the left wing in the affairs of Bengal.¹⁵² Subhas Bose was eager to avail himself of this opportunity to eliminate the influence of Sarkar from Bengal politics and urged Gandhi to persuade Sarkar to leave the cabinet.¹⁵³ He also suggested to the governor to overthrow the Huq ministry so that a new one could be formed.¹⁵⁴

The League was fearful that it would have a great setback if the Bose Brothers attained any success in their scheme. As a subterfuge, the League considered it advantageous to use Sarkar. Sarkar had sensed the insecurity of his position in the coalition and was desperately looking for a powerful Hindu organisation upon which he could rely for practical and consistent support for a realistic policy of cooperation with the Muslims. After much thought 'he pinned his hope for this purpose on the Congress which he regarded as the only possible Hindu organisation in the province.'¹⁵⁵ As a first step to gain control over the Congress he wanted to have an alliance with its right wing. To achieve this he sought the assistance of Gandhi, with whom both he and B.C. Roy had a long standing good relationship.

At the end Sarkar was able to outmaneuver the Bose Brothers. He used his personal influence on Gandhi in preventing the formation of a coalition based on the plan of the Bose Brothers which was so different from the one he was toying with. After careful deliberation Gandhi decided against the participation by the Congress (either group)

in any ministerial alliance in Bengal and advised Sarkar not to resign.¹⁵⁶ Gandhi must have perceived that how unstable were the sands of Congress politics in Bengal and what a poor foundation it would be to have a coalition based on intrigue. Gandhi perhaps advised Sarkar to remain in office, for through him he hoped to maintain a toe hold in the government of the province. However, Subhas Bose persisted in his endeavour to bring down the Huq ministry and appealed to the viceroy to have British officials dissolve the ministry in Bengal.¹⁵⁷ Gandhi's decision was interpreted by Subhas Bose as influenced by non-Bengali business interests who were afraid that Hindu-Muslim unity in Bengal would adversely affect their economic domination of Bengal.¹⁵⁸ It is significant that there was a striking similarity between the grievance of Bose against Gandhi and the grievance of a section of Bengali Muslims against Jinnah for his partisan spirit towards the non-Bengali Muslim business community in Calcutta.

In deference to Gandhi's wish, Sarkar remained in office and did not abandon his hope of at least a segment of the Congress joining the Muslim coalition.¹⁵⁹ He even publicly offered to mediate between the Congress and the Coalition Party. However, his association with the coalition was not destined to last long. The final break took place when a communal controversy was renewed following the outbreak of the Second World War. On September 3, 1939 Great Britain declared war on Germany. On the same day, Lord Linlithgow, the viceroy of India, proclaimed that India was also at war and urged for the co-operation of the Indians in Britain's war efforts.¹⁶⁰ In response to the viceroy's appeal the Bengal cabinet unanimously expressed its desire for active cooperation with the British government in the prosecution of the war.¹⁶¹ Sarkar, like his other Hindu colleagues, showed no sign of wavering and proposed in a cabinet meeting that any criticism of the ministry for supporting war efforts should be silenced.¹⁶² On December 13, 1939 the chief minister tabled a resolution on the war in the Legislative Assembly.¹⁶³ The resolution assured full cooperation in the successful prosecution of the war and demanded that any future constitution 'should provide sufficient and effective safeguards for the recognised minorities and interests should be based upon their full consent and approval.' In winding up the debate on the resolution Fazlul Huq declared that 'if a constitution is framed which does not

meet with the approval of the Muslims and other minorities...there will be open revolt and revolution.'¹⁶⁴

Although the final draft of the resolution was approved by Sarkar,¹⁶⁵ yet to the surprise of his colleagues, during the debate on the resolution in the assembly he supported only that portion of the resolution which dealt with war non-cooperation and opposed the last part.¹⁶⁶ He argued that if it was a question of only adequately safeguarding the rights of the Muslims to their satisfaction, he would have supported it but to the extent the resolution sought to invest the Muslims with the power to veto all proposals for political advancement, it became fundamentally opposed to the principle of democracy and he could not therefore acquiesce to it. In his view, while no effort should be spared to resolve the differences between the two major communities, 'but should an amicable settlement prove impossible, it is the largest common measure of agreement with sufficient protection for minority rights, that should determine the character of our future constitution.'¹⁶⁷

When a 'division' was called on the resolution, Sarkar abstained from voting.¹⁶⁸ Consequently the Coalition Party, at the behest of the League, passed a vote of no confidence against Sarkar for breach of party discipline and issued a homily to the Muslims that any real upliftment of their condition cannot be achieved through political cooperation with the Hindus and therefore they should unite and close up their ranks.¹⁶⁹ Sarkar resigned from the cabinet and in a statement on his resignation, he castigated his Muslim colleagues for yielding to the communal outcry of the League and claimed that the principal consideration for his going out of office was the increase in the communal outlook of the Muslim members of the coalition.¹⁷⁰

At the time of the drafting of the resolution the cabinet decided to stress 'war cooperation' in a form that would command itself to all parties except the Congress and for that reason wanted to avoid any reference to 'contentious constitutional issues'.¹⁷¹ It was very obvious that in view of the running feud between the Hindus and the Muslims on constitutional issues, unanimity of opinion could not be obtained on any proposal on the matter. But it was Sarkar who first raised the constitutional issue.¹⁷² While persuading Sarkar to remain in office, Gandhi had agreed that Sarkar could come out 'on a real issue being

raised and the decision being taken by the Ministry against the interests of the country.¹⁷³

On October 22, 1939 the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress adopted its policy of definite non-cooperation with Britain's war efforts and called upon the Congress ministers to tender their resignations as a protest against Britain's unilateral action of declaring India a belligerent country without the consent of the people.¹⁷⁴ The resolution was passed with the full consent of Gandhi although earlier he was in favour of giving full and unconditional support from India to Great Britain.¹⁷⁵ This finally set at rest Sarkar's lingering hope for an alternative ministry in Bengal. In the meanwhile, in May, Subhas Bose had resigned from the presidency of the National Congress due to difficulties with Gandhi. The resignation of Subhas Bose was a blow to the left wing of the Congress in Bengal which presented Sarkar with an opportunity to gain influence in the Congress circle in Bengal.¹⁷⁶

In these circumstances together with his shaky position in the coalition, Sarkar thought it inopportune to continue in office. Given the realisation that he must break with the coalition, he wanted to go out on a good wicket. By making it known that he was driven out by a communally minded party on an issue of principle which was vital to national interest, he aspired to build up his prestige among the Hindu community.¹⁷⁷

Sarkar's resignation was the first occasion that a Hindu defected from the Coalition Party on a communal grievance. In the past it was mostly the left wing Muslims often enticed by the Congress, who revolted against the coalition on issues which were distinct from communalism. Even the Scheduled Caste members who withdrew their support from the coalition made no communal grievance. Sarkar's leaving the Muslim dominated coalition on a communal charge put the remaining Hindus in the coalition in difficulty. Hindu public opinion in general became critical of the collaborating Hindus for their continued association with a ministry which was completely devoid of sympathy for the Hindu interest.¹⁷⁸ The extent of the Hindu disaffection was such that the Coalition Party could not find a suitable Hindu to be recruited in the cabinet. Consequently a severe strain was put on the good will of the Hindus towards the ministry which came to be

identified with Muslim interest more than ever before. This trend of events also adversely affected the cause of the left wing Muslims in the opposition who were working towards the goal of eliminating communal emphasis in the political life of the province by allocating priority to the economic interests of the masses.

Conclusion

The hurriedly organised ministerial coalition which took charge of the administration of the province did not develop into a cohesive group. From the very beginning the Coalition Party was beset with problems of satisfying factional interests. Ministers were chosen to accommodate various groups and pressures and not on individual merit. The two major components of the coalition, the League and the Samity did not forget their old rivalry; especially, the progressive elements of the Samity did not reconcile themselves to the Proja Samity-League alliance. Their initial disillusion caused by the League's opposition to their radical policy ultimately turned into hostility and the League recriminated against them. The handful of Hindus who joined the coalition suffered from a sense of insecurity since their co-religionists looked askance at them as opportunists.

The Congress remaining in the opposition took full advantage of this dismal state of the coalition. It did not lose any opportunity to encourage defections by promising an alternative coalition. Such activities of the Congress subverted the growth of the spirit of unity in the coalition and resulted in mutual suspicion and jealousy. There was so much lack of confidence among the ministers that they suggested to the governor in a cabinet meeting that he should recognize a convention that if the existing ministry were defeated, none of the ministers should come back in any new ministry that might be formed as its immediate successor.¹⁷⁹ The object of this was clearly to establish a mutual assurance against the possibility to any individual minister negotiating to his advantage with an outside group.

The problem of maintaining the political strength of the coalition in the face of the persistent efforts of the Congress to sabotage it resulted in the steady drawing together of the Muslims. The line of cleavage which ran between the conservatives and the progressive forces took a new direction and was drawn between the Hindus and

the Muslims. Repeated defections of the left wing of the Proja Samity and sections of the Hindus led to the League's domination of the coalition. With the exception of Fazlul Huq none of the Muslim Leaguers commanded any great personal influence on the Muslim masses. As a means to achieve a degree of control over the Muslim masses, they pressed hard for a communal policy which alienated their Hindu colleagues. With the gradual withdrawal of Hindu support, the coalition's dependence on the European group increased and this weakened its claim to be the true representative government of the province.

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5. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, editorial, Mar. 9, 1937.
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7. *Star of India*, Mar. 25, 1937.
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10. *Star of India*, July 26, 1937. The conference was organised by the All Bengal Muslim Student's Association, All Bengal Muslim Student Federation, All Bengal Muslim Younger's League and the All Bengal Arabic Student's Federation.
11. Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam*, p. 123.
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13. *Star of India*, Mar. 11, 1937.
14. *Ibid.*, Mar. 6, 1937.
15. Great Britain, India Office Library and Records, *Correspondence between the Viceroy and the Governor of Bengal* (Hereinafter referred to as *Correspondence*). Confidential note by the governor on the ministers, June 29, 1938.. The note contained the following observation on another Muslim minister, the Nawab of Dacca : 'Desperately keen to do well in his department but, owing to lack of brains he finds it extremely difficult to differentiate between good schemes and bad.'
16. *Star of India*, Mar. 10, 1937.
17. *Ibid.*, Mar. 11, 12, 1937.

18. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...* p. 130.
19. Great Britain, India Office Library and Records, *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Apr. 7, 1937.
20. Most of the nominees of other groups were arch conservatives, and ultimately of the eleven ministers sworn in, eight were big landlords.
21. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...* p. 131. The strength of the parties in the cabinet as it was finally constituted were as follows : League 4, Proja 2, Nationalist 3, Scheduled Caste Party 2.
22. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, July 23, 1937.
23. For an account of the growth and development of these institutions, see Hugh Tinker, *The Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan and Burma* (London : The Athlone Press, 1945), and W. Egerston, (Ed.), *Collier: Bengal Local Self-Government Hand book* (Calcutta : Thacker, Spink and Co., 1910)..
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25. Both Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Sir Bijoy Prasad Sing Roy, who were given the portfolios of finance and revenue respectively, belonged to the conservative Nationalist Party.
26. These departments were considered to be very important as they financed and controlled all the government sponsored rural cooperative credit societies and debt concillation boards. A minister in charge of these departments could possibly influence the villagers to the benefit or prejudice of a political party.
27. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Apr. 7, 1937.
28. *Ibid.*
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31. *Ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1938.
32. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Sept. 7, 1937.
33. See above, p. 77.
34. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...* p. 136.
35. *Star of India*, Feb. 17, 1937. The exchange rate of Indian Rs. to the dollar in 1937 was approximately one to 37 cents.
36. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha* . p. 136.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Star of India*, June 21, 1937.
39. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1937.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, July 24, 1937.
42. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1937.
43. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1937.
44. Some 200 Bengali political prisoners serving prison terms in the Andaman Islands resorted to a hunger strike to force the government to fulfil their grievances. which were both political and local in nature.
45. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 1, Aug. 4, 1937, pp. 188. Of the 75 members who voted

in favour of the motion, 18 were Muslims 8 Proja Samity, 2 labour representatives and 8 independents.

46. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 2, Aug. 10, 1937, p. 102. Section 53(1) of the *Government of India Act*, 1935 provided that the salaries of the ministers would be fixed by the legislature.

47. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 2, Aug. 10, 1937, pp. 91-92. During the election campaign on various occasions Fazlul Huq had pledged that under no circumstances should the salaries of ministers be fixed at more than Rs. 1000.

48. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 2, Aug. 10, 1937, p. 107.

49. *Star of India*, Aug. 16, 1937.

50. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Aug. 23, 1937.

51. *Star of India*, Aug. 20, 1937.

52. *Forward*, Sept. 27, 1937.

53. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 3, Aug. 24, 1937 and *Star of India*, Aug. 23, 1937. A former minister, Nawab Faruqui, was made the president and Jalaluddin Hashemy, a follower of Shamsuddin was made the secretary.

54. Maulana Akram Khan and Syed Badruddoza were elected president and secretary respectively, *Star of India*, Aug. 23, 1937.

55. *Star of India*, Aug. 23, 1937. I

56. *Ibid.*, Aug. 20, 1937.

57. Great Britain, India Office Library and Records, *Confidential Review of Events in Bengal*, second half of September 1937. These fortnightly reports prepared by the Home Department of the Government of Bengal are on file with the *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Sept. 7. 1937.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*, *Star of India*, Aug. 10, Sept. 1, 1937.

60. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 2, Aug. 10, 1937, p. 89.

61. Government of Bengal, Calcutta, Commissioner of Police, *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the year 1937* (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1939).

62. *PBLA*, vol. LII, No. 4, Mar. 11, 1938, p. 189.

63. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Sept. 7, 1937.

64. Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 28, and *Star of India*, Oct. 15, 1937.

65. No details of Huq's negotiation with the Congress in Bengal is available but it seems that the Congress High Command insisted on dissolving the Proja Samity and its merger with the Congress as a precondition to any ministerial alliance. This was not acceptable to Fazlul Huq. In an analogous case in the United Provinces, the League offered to join the Congress led ministry but the Congress laid down that the League could be admitted to the ministry on the condition that it cease to function as a separate group and that it dissolve the Muslim League Parliamentary Board. Lal Bahadur, *Muslim League*, p. 238.

66. This writer is grateful to the eminent Indian socialist leader and contemporary politician, Jay Prakash Narayan for providing this information. Interview with Jay Prakash Narayan, Washington D.C., June, 1971.

67. *Star of India*, Oct. 16, 1937 ; On this occasion Fazlul Huq was acclaimed as *Sher-i-Bangla* or the Tiger of Bengal.

68. *Star of India*, Oct. 16, 1937.

69. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Nov. 7, 1937.

70. The kind of confidence Huq enjoyed from the Hindus could be glimpsed from the following remark of a Hindu, Roy Charan Roy : 'Fazlul Huq was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim but a *Devta* (dem god) of Bengal and the people of Bengal would get salvation only under a Huq ministry. *Star of India*, Aug. 13, 1938.

71. *Star of India*, Oct. 27, 1937.

72. *Ibid.*, Oct. 25, 1937.

73. *Ibid.*, *IAR*, vol. II, 1937, p. 418.

74. Most authors attach great importance to Fazlul Huq's reentry into the League in popularising it in Bengal. See Waheed-uz-Zaman, *Towards Pakistan* (Lahore : Publishers United, 1964), p. 94 ; Sayeed, *Pakistan*, p. 87 ; Lal Bahadur, *Muslim League*, p. 258 and Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 183.

75. The British commissioner of Chittagong division who accompanied Fazlul Huq in a tour was amazed by 'the blind and pathetic devotion of the Muslim masses to Fazlul Huq wherever he went.' *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Feb. 17, 1939.

76. Sayeed, *Pakistan*, p. 207.

77. Khaliq, *Eka Satabdi*, p. 258.

78. *Star of India*, Oct. 16, 1937.

79. A. M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*p. 164.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

81. *Star of India*, Dec. 29, 1937.

82. *Ibid.*, The mass contact programme of the Congress was adopted in 1936. The poor election showing of the Congress so far as the Muslims were concerned had led to increased efforts to contact the Muslim masses.

83. *Star of India*, May 26, 1938.

84. *Ibid.*, Dec. 16, 1938.

85. *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1938.

86. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, May 5, 1938.

87. A. M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*p. 164.

88. *Star of India*, Apr. 1, 1938.

89. *PBLA*, vol. LII, No. 4, Mar. 11, 1938, p. 191.

90. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Mar. 20, 1938.

91. *Star of India*, Apr. 17, 1938.

92. See Gordon, 'Bengal's Gandhi,' p. 99.

93. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Mar. 20, 1938.

94. *Ibid.*

95. *PBLA*, vol. LII, No. 5, Mar. 22, 1938, p. 231.

96. *Star of India*, Mar. 17, 1938. Not too long before the League had won two by-elections 'under unpromising conditions.' *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Mar. 20, 1938.

97. *Star of India*, Mar. 21, 1938. The demonstrators paraded shouting the familiar war cry, *Allah-o-Akbar and Muslīm League Zindabad* (long live).

98. Both the Khilafat Committee and the Jamiat-a-Ulema opposed Fazlul Huq and the Proja Samity during the election.

99. *Star of India*, Mar. 28, 1938.

100. *Ibid.*

101. The Khajjites or 'seceders' were one of the earliest sects in Islam who secede from the Sunni majority. They championed the puritanical virtues of Islam and were denounced as extremists by the Sunni orthodoxy. See H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism* (London : Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 119-20.

102. *Star of India*, Mar. 28, 1938.

103. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Feb. 7, 1938.

104. Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 28.

105. *Ibid.*, and Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims*, p. 275.

106. *Star of India*, Apr. 9, 1938.

107. *Ibid.*, Apr. 18, 1938.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*, July 2, 1938.

110. *Ibid.*, July 2, 1938.

111. *Ibid.*, June 18, 1938.

112. In the *Instruments of Instructions*, section B VIIII, the governor was called upon to select his ministers who collectively commanded the confidence of the legislature.

113. *Star of India*, June 18, 1938. He narrated that when a tenancy bill was discussed in the cabinet, while he wanted to do away with *salami* or illegal exactions by the landlords on the *ryots* during the time of transfer of land, his conservative colleagues wanted its retention. This fact was corroborated by various reports of the governor.

114. Full texts of this correspondance were published in *Star of India*, June 25, 1938.

115. Nausher Ali to Fazlul Huq, June 14, 1938.

116. Nausher Ali to Fazlul Huq, May 22, 1938. The governor in a despatch reported that Nausher Ali had disclosed his plan of reshuffling the cabinet in coalition with the Congress to the exclusion of the Muslim League, but the chief minister had rejected the idea as it was 'likely to bring him into great discredit with the Muslims all over India. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Apr. 5, 1938.

117. Nausher Ali's League colleagues also strongly disapproved his 'determined opposition' to the reenactment of the Bengal Security Act of 1932 which was to lapse in Dec. 1938. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Jan. 3, 1938. The act was a temporary measure to suppress the terrorist activities in Bengal. This aspect of the conflict between Nausher Ali and his colleagues was apparently never made public.

118. Nausher Ali to Fazlul Huq, June 14, 1938. The governor noticed 'great

apprehension by the Muslim Leaguers in the cabinet' whenever discussions were held for a reconciliation with the defections. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Feb. 7, 1938'

119. *Star of India*, July 16, 1938.

120. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of July, 1938.

121. See above, p. 121.

122. *Star of India*, Aug. 3, 1938. Abdul Hakim (Khulna) and Waliur Rahman (Jessore).

123. Coupland's statement that 24 Scheduled Caste members left the coalition during this time was apparently calculated by adding those who had defected earlier. Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 28.

124. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of July, 1938.

125. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Aug. 6, 1938.

126. *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No. Aug. 8, 1938, p. 37.

127. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of July 1938. As many as 25 associations of wide variety mostly representing the non-Bengali Muslim workers of Calcutta and flanked by the remaining Scheduled Caste Hindu supporters of the remaining Scheduled Caste Hindu supporters of the coalition participated in these demonstrations. *Star of India*, Aug. 1, 1938.

128. *Star of India*, Aug. 1, 1937.

129. *Star of India*, Aug. 8, 1938 and *AICC Newsletter*, Aug. 16, 1938.

130. *Report on the Police Administration of Calcutta*, 1938, p. 11. Three suburb jute mills were closed down and their entire Muslim labour force was brought to the city in vehicles arranged by the League, *Star of India*, Aug. 8, 1938.

131. *Star of India*, Aug. 8, 1938.

132. *AICC Newsletter*, Aug. 16, 1938. Another leaflet issued by the Calcutta Khilafat Committee in Urdu said that if the ministry was defeated the reading of the Quran and the Hadith would be prohibited and cow sacrifices would be stopped. *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No. 2, Aug. 8, 1938, p. 84.

133. *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No. 2, Aug. 8, 1938, pp. 17, 124, 118-19.

134. *Star of India*, Aug. 8, 1938.

135. For example a meeting to a group of progressive Muslims in Calcutta Town Hall to support joint electorate was disrupted by the hooligans of the League led by Jan Muhammad, joint secretary of the city branch. *Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1939.

136. *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No. 2, Aug. 8, 1938, p. 72.

137. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

138. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Nov. 4, 1938.

139. An account of these negotiations can be found in the correspondances released to the press between Fazlul Huq and Humayun Kabir, convenor of the opposition negotiations committee. *Star of India*, Nov. 4, 1938. Also see the report of the ministerial party sub-committee on Shamsuddin's resignation, *Star of India*, Feb. 20, 1939.

140. A.M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 168 and *Bengal Weekly*, Feb. 27, 1939.

141. A. M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha...*, p. 168.

142. The last annual session of the Samity was held in Tangail in 1939 and after that only the parliamentary group met occasionally. *Ibid.*
143. *Star of India*, Apr. 11, 1938.
144. *Star of India*, Apr. 22, 1937.
145. Sarkar's letter to the secretary, Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, *Ibid.*, May 22, 1937.
146. Singh Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, pp. 255-56.
147. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 1, July 1937, pp. 36-61.
148. This slogan was the title of a song composed by the eminent Hindu author Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-1894), in his novel *Anandamatha*. It is interesting to note that in spite of the zealous display of Hindu darings in his writings, the average educated Bengali Muslim revered Bankim for his unique contributions to Bengali language and literature. For an English translation of *Anandamatha* see Basanta Kumar Roy, *Dawn over India* (New York : Adair Company, 1941).
149. Three such measures which led to serious conflict between Sarkar and the Muslim ministers were (1) separate electorate for the Muslims and Scheduled Castes in Calcutta Corporation, (2) a higher communal ratio for the Muslims for recruitment in government services, (3) control of the activities of the village moneylenders, most of whom were Hindus. For details see below, pp. 384-387, 391-412.
150. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Feb. 22, 1938, Dec. 19, 1938, Mar. 20, 1938, Apr. 9, 1939.
151. Gordon, 'Bengal's Gandhi', p. 98.
152. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of March, 1938.
153. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Dec. 19, 1938.
154. *Ibid.*, Jan. 6, 1939.
155. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, July 20, 1939.
156. Gordon, 'Bengal's Gandhi,' p. 98.
157. *Ibid.* p. 9.
158. *Ibid.*, p. 98. In the opinion of a follower of Bose, Gandhi knowingly acted in the interest of Marwari or Gujrati business classes because he was against both Bose and Bengal. *Ibid.*
159. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Jan. 6, 1939.
160. Marquess of Linlithgow, *Speeches and Statements* (New Delhi: Government of India, Bureau of Public Information, 1945), p. 199.
161. *Correspondance*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Telegram No. 127. Sept. 3, 1939.
162. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Oct. 6, 1939.
163. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 3, Dec. 13, 1939.
164. *Ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1939, p. 251.
165. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 23, 1939.
166. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 3, Dec. 18, 1939, pp. 227-29.
167. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
168. The resolution was carried by 142 in favour and 82 against. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 3, Dec. 18, 1939, p. 262.

169. *Star of India*, Dec.19, 1939.
170. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 3, Dec. 20, 1939, p. 390.
171. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Nov. 17, 1939.
172. *Ibid.*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 23, 1939.
173. Gordon, 'Bengal's Gandhi', p. 97.
174. *IAR*, vol. II, 1939, pp. 236-37. Between Oct. 27 and Nov. 15 the Congress ministers went out of office in all the eight provinces.
175. Glendevon, *The Viceroy at Bay*, pp. 128, 142, 145, 154.
176. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of May, 1939.
177. He was congratulated by the Bose group for his 'stern and unbending attitude.' *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 3, Dec. 20, 1939, p. 393.
178. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of Jan., 1940.
179. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Mar. 8, 1938.

The Europeans in Bengal Politics

Introduction

During the post election negotiation for ministerial alliance the twenty five European representatives in the Legislative Assembly lent their support in full strength to the Coalition Party. Following their established practice, they did not join any party within the coalition and functioned as a distinct interest group known as the European group.¹ Because the overwhelming majority of the Europeans in Bengal were traders, their elected representatives were to be inevitably spokesmen of their business interest. As a highly articulate interest group acting together in total harmony on all issues, the twenty five Europeans held the delicate balance of power in the legislature and, therefore, exerted influence and control far in excess of their numerical strength in the province.²

The Europeans enjoyed a monopolistic control in jute³ trade and industry in Bengal.⁴ Taking advantage of this monopoly the Europeans were in a position to determine the price of the jute crop which was detrimental to the interest of the jute growers. As businessmen increasing the margin of profit, they sought to buy raw jute at a minimum price and sell the jute manufactures at a high price. This seriously affected the interest of the primary producers of jute, the peasants, most of whom were Muslims, for nearly four fifth of the total acreage under cultivation was in the districts of East Bengal.⁵

Although the cultivation of jute was restricted to only ten per cent of the total net cropped area, it nevertheless exerted a tremendous influence on the economic life of the province. The reason for this pre-eminence of jute, popularly called the 'golden fiber', in the agricultural economy of Bengal was the fact that it was 'by far the most important money crop of the province.'⁶ In an agricultural system predomi-

nantly based on subsistence farming, the overwhelming importance of a 'money crop' can be easily understood. For, apart from the fact that such a crop alone could enable the *ryots* to repay their monetary obligations, it provided the only source of purchasing power in their hands, which they could spend on consumption of non agricultural commodities and services. There is another aspect of the importance of jute. According to a recent author, the unexpected rise in the price of jute between the first world war and the depression of the thirties enabled the peasant families to educate their children which led to the emergence of a class of politically conscious educated youth prepared to fight for their rights against the vested interests.⁷

Because the value of jute was practically the barometer of national wealth, the ministry owed it to the *ryots* to obtain the best value for the fiber. The Proja Samity, a major component of the Coalition Party was also committed through its election programme to secure better prices for agricultural products. But the control the European group exercised on the ministry in exchange for its much-needed support to maintain a workable majority for the coalition, considerably curbed the freedom of the ministry in obtaining a better price for the jute growers. Similarly, in the frequent conflict between labour and capital in the jute industry, the largest in the province, the ministry often bailed out the European capitalists.⁸ This led to the discontentment of the jute mill labourers who constituted the most volatile political force in the metropolis of Calcutta. The ministry's yielding to the pressures of the European group also antagonised the local non-European business community who envied the preferential treatment accorded to the European traders. Thus in meeting the obligation of the political alliance with the European group, the Coalition Party, especially the Proja Samity and its leader Fazlul Huq, failed to measure up to the expectation of the masses, expectation which was fired high by their electoral promises. This damaged their credibility and made them vulnerable to the onslaught of the opposition.

This section will discuss the activities of the European members of the legislature and their impact on the province. For the purpose of putting the narrative in proper perspective, a reference will be made at the beginning of this chapter to the role of the Europeans in the province prior to the introduction of the constitution of 1935.

Prelude to the European Posture

The prosperous European community in Bengal consisted of roughly twenty one thousand, most of whom were businessmen and resided in Calcutta and its suburbs.⁹ In contrast to the other two metropolises of India—Bombay and Madras the control of a large part of Calcutta business was in the hands of the Europeans.¹⁰ More than two centuries earlier the European traders had established themselves in the province as adjuncts of Britain's colonial empire. In the economic development of the province the Europeans had a major contribution: 'There can be few cases in history where so small a body of men had brought about changes so widespread and so fundamental.'¹¹ The vast network of railway which transformed the conditions of commerce were designed and executed by the European enterprise. It was also the European organisation and leadership which promoted the industrial development of the province.¹²

In spite of their small number, the European community was able to exert a strong pressure on the administration of the province through private influence on the British bureaucracy and through the intercession of their powerful associations.¹³ In case of any impediments, their displeasure found expression in the columns of the various European controlled newspapers of Calcutta.¹⁴ The community had also a powerful lobby in London and its opinion was normally sought by officials on matters of importance both at 'home' and in India.¹⁵

The Europeans, with few exceptions, were no more than sojourners who, after spending their working years, looked forward to 'retiring to that other country which is the real home.'¹⁶ While in India they remained as members of an exclusive group and seldom had any social contact with the 'natives'. An average European in India treated the Indians, especially the educated classes, 'with an habitual contumely more exasperating than savage persecution.'¹⁷ The parliamentary enquiry commission on India in 1918 recognized the existence of 'social grievance' of the Indians against the Europeans and wished it were 'diminished'.¹⁸ Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, paying a state visit to Calcutta in the Christmas of 1936, was 'distressed' by the attitude of racial discrimination by the European community and wondered 'how there was any good will towards the British at all.'¹⁹ This attitude of independence and civic orthodoxy of the Europeans was

naturally resented by the Bengalis and provided the psychological basis for an anti-European sentiment in the province.

The apathy of the Europeans was equally pronounced in the political scene. They were indifferent to the political grievances of the Indians and periodically issued admonitions on the British government for adopting a soft line attitude towards the Indian nationalists.²⁰ In 1917, when matters concerning constitutional reforms were widely discussed, the Europeans, disregarding Indian sensitivity, announced their total disapproval for delegating any authority to the Indians.²¹ Any change in the governmental set up which would curb the power of the British officials was a threat to their position. Moreover, like any other commercial people, the Europeans were 'frankly uninterested in politics' and had 'taken insufficient part both in municipal business and the business of government.'²²

The European opposition to constitutional reforms ultimately turned into a bitter feud between the Europeans and the Congress which was primarily composed of the Hindu middle class. It was this Hindu middle class which had hitherto been most vocal in demanding self-rule and criticizing the special privileges enjoyed by the European commercial community. If parliamentary institutions were to be introduced in the province, the Hindu middle class, being the most advanced and organised group, would undoubtedly establish their hegemony in Bengal and the Europeans shuddered at such a prospect. In a memorandum submitted to the Reforms Enquiry Committee of 1924 they made no secret of their feelings:²³

We find the electorate largely uneducated, so far practically devoid of political sense, and intensely liable to be swayed by irresponsible agitation. The results has been to concentrate political power in the hands of a small body of men who avowedly put forward on constructive policy and do not represent the views of the majority. Such a system is in our opinion the very negation of representative government.

Relations between the Europeans and the Hindu middle class had been strained ever since the Hindus launched the *swadeshi* movement in 1905. The boycott of British manufactured goods and British schools and the preaching of the cult of violence by the radical Hindu youths spread a commotion among all Europeans in Bengal. The Europeans were so perturbed that in 1912 they reconstituted the European

Defence Association²⁴ with a view to organise their community as a political force and to 'combat the pernicious influence of Indians in the government of the Empire.'²⁵

Their animosity was intensified during the course of their working in the 'dyarchy' council established in 1921. In the council the sixteen European representatives formed a separate group and supported the government on all issues.²⁶ Often during the debates in the council Hindu members were highly critical of the special privileges enjoyed by the European traders and demanded Indianisation of government services and abolition of the differential treatment of the Indians.²⁷ This posture of the Hindus enraged the Europeans who also grudged the usual attempt of the Hindus to reduce the grants for European education.²⁸

The non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements of the twenties and early thirties and the periodic recurrence of terrorist movements further embittered the relation between the Europeans and the Hindus.²⁹ In 1931 the European Association suggested to the Government of India that all persons responsible for financing those movements 'should be treated in the same fashion as enemy subjects interned during the war.'³⁰ The 'strongly urged' upon the government to take 'prompt vigorous and even ruthless' action against the revolutionary movement so that the Congress was denied time for the 'full mobilisation of its undoubtedly powerful forces.'³¹ On July 30, 1931 the European Association strongly censured the Calcutta Corporation for adopting a resolution 'recording their sense of grief' in appreciation of a young terrorist for killing a British officer of the imperial police service.³²

The reopening of talks for constitutional progress in India in 1930 drove the last wedge between the Europeans and the Hindu middle class. At the Round Table Conference in London (1930-32) the Hindu representatives nervously watched the European representatives supported by the Anglo-Indians plead for special safeguards for their commercial interests in India if power was to be transferred in any substantial degree to the Indians.³³ What appeared to be a dangerous political plot to liquidate Hindu influence was the agreement reached between the Europeans, the Muslims and other minority communities which guaranteed the Europeans against any economic discrimination in a

future self-governing India in exchange for their support for a separate electorate for the minorities.³⁴

In spite of Hindu opposition the principle of separate electorate for the minorities was accepted by the British Government.³⁵ Also in the white paper issued by the British Government on India's political future the fear of the European traders of commercial discrimination in a self-governing India was recognized.³⁶ Encouraged by this sympathetic gesture of His Majesty's Government, the Europeans sent a number of memorandums urging special provision in the future constitution against 'commercial discrimination as between subjects and residents of the different parts of the British Empire.'³⁷ Also in India they pleaded for special protection from 'future commercial discrimination of boycott, threat or coercion and expropriation.'³⁸

In this controversy the Europeans ultimately triumphed. In the constitution of 1935, not only were provisions made for separate representation of the minorities including the Europeans but a clause was also added against any future commercial discrimination in India.³⁹ This was appreciated by the Europeans who made a pledge to support and uphold the constitution,⁴⁰ but the Hindus felt totally frustrated. They interpreted the protective clause as a British Government inspired plot to perpetuate commercial exploitation of India by British traders.⁴¹ The Hindu fear of a legislative collaboration between the Muslims and the Europeans for keeping them at bay suddenly appeared to be dangerously real. It was hard for the Hindus to accept the new political reality and therefore they readily availed themselves of any opportunity to discredit their European adversaries.

In contrast to the deep rooted hostility between the Europeans and the Hindus, the relationship between the Muslims and the Europeans with few exceptions (e.g. Fazlul Huq) was cordial and, especially in legislative politics they collaborated with each other.⁴² Unlike the Hindus, the general trend in Muslim politics was dominated by a profession of loyalty to the British Raj and a search for official patronage. When the advanced Hindu community started political agitation for self-government, the Muslims stayed away from it and pressed instead for special safeguards, such as separate electorate and preferential recruitment to government jobs, on the plea that they could not compete with the Hindus. This Muslim demand for special protection from

Hindu domination brought them close to the Europeans who were also anxious to secure proper safeguards especially of their economic interests in case the control of the British administration was to be relaxed in favour of the Indians. The Muslims, like the Europeans, welcomed the constitution of 1935 ; they had long considered separate electorate to be the only panacea against Hindu subjugation and the constitution had granted it. Unlike the Hindus, both the Muslims and the Europeans were ready to work the constitution.

It was, therefore, natural that the Europeans would extend their support to the Muslims, but their enthusiasm to support the coalition was somewhat dampened on the selection of Fazlul Huq as the Chief Minister. They were apprehensive of the appropriatory provisions in the electoral programme of the Proja Samity. Moreover, Huq was never a favourite of the Europeans. He was one of the very few Bengali Muslims who did not have any contact with them and, like the Hindus, often criticized them in public.⁴³ In 1924, when Fazlul Huq was a minister for a short time, he complained of the interference of the Europeans in matters of jute price and labour disputes.⁴⁴ In the Calcutta municipal elections in 1935 the Europeans opposed Fazlul Huq's candidacy to the office of mayor and when he was elected the first Muslim Mayor of Calcutta, the Europeans made no secret of their disapproval of him.⁴⁵

According to a contemporary observer the Europeans preferred the British educated Muslim aristocrat from Dacca, Sir Nazimuddin, over Fazlul Huq.⁴⁶ However, in the end, they chose 'to swallow their contempt for Fazlul Huq rather than make a stable government impossible so long as it does not outrage their ideas and interests.'⁴⁷ The odds were many against them if they opted to follow any other course of action. By not rallying under the Coalition Party they would only contribute to the strengthening of the Congress, a party which was determined to wreck the constitution and 'to overthrow the existing social and economic order and to end the British connection.'⁴⁸ Thus, with such an irresolute support for Huq, the Europeans did not consider it impolitic to put pressure on him even though it was damaging to Huq's popularity.

The Price of Political Support

One of the principal articles in the platform of the Proja Samity was the promise to the cultivators for a better price for jute. Anticipating the opposition of the European group to any positive measure in that direction, Fazlul Huq wanted to take cautious steps. In the first budget presented to the legislature only a general reference was made on the need for improvement of prices of agricultural commodities.⁴⁹ This gave the opposition an issue to clamour against the ministry. They demanded a 'fair minimum price for raw jute', bitterly complained about the high dividends earned by the share-holders of the jute mills and held the mill owners guilty of conspiracy in keeping the prices of raw jute 'very low.'⁵⁰

The European group snapped back that any scheme to introduce a minimum price for jute was 'outside the realm of practical politics' and as such would be opposed by them.⁵¹ With such an attitude of the European members, Fazlul Huq comprehended the difficulties and dejectedly stated the ministry's helplessness.⁵² In order to shelve the question of jute price the ministry announced the appointment of a jute enquiry committee in July 1938 for the purpose of making recommendations about improvements and the fixing of prices of jute. The announcement temporarily appeased the critics of the ministry and aroused the high hopes of the cultivators. But the course of events took a new turn which belied all expectations.

As noted earlier, on August 8, 1938 a no confidence motion on the ministry was averted by a narrow margin with the help of the European group who voted solidly with the Coalition Party.⁵³ In rescuing the ministry, the leader of the European group stated that they voted with the Coalition Party in pursuance of their policy of supporting 'the government so long as they were working on constitutional lines.'⁵⁴ Another ostensible reason offered by them was that by supporting the existing ministry they were preventing a Congress take over of the provincial administration. A spokesman of the group said on a later occasion that the European community would give full support to the Coalition Party so long as there was no infringement on their commercial interests and the Europeans felt that their commercial interests were more secure in the hands of the League-led coalition ministry than in one led by the Congress.⁵⁵ However, it soon transpired that the

Europeans, by supporting the ministry in the legislature, had secured a promise from the ministry to help the European jute manufacturers who were facing a temporary set back.

The Legislative Assembly was prorogued on August 25, and on Sept. 10, the governor on the advice of the ministry issued an ordinance restricting the working hours of the mills from 56 to 45 hours per week in order to cut down production.⁵⁶ The harvest of the jute crop in 1938 fell far short of the demand due to devastating monsoon floods and consequently there was an upward trend in the prices of the jute crop.⁵⁷ This naturally perturbed the European manufacturers of jute who were already facing a depression in the prices of their products because of a huge accumulation of stock.⁵⁸ As an expedient to meet the situation, the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA), which had been the corporate body of all the European jute mills since 1884, decided to restrict the production of the mills. Reduction in production was a two pronged policy ; to get rid of the current slump in jute products and to put pressure on the primary producer to part with his crop at a lower price due to a decline in its demand.⁵⁹ During the harvesting season of the crop between the months of July and August, the economic condition of the peasant was usually at its worst. In view of the fact that the average peasant had very little economic power to hold his crop in anticipation of a future rise in price, the buyer could virtually set any price for the crop.

Although the IJMA decided for a restricted production of jute mills, it was reluctant to take any unilateral action. The three Indian owned jute mills which went into operation in the early thirties declined to cooperate with the IJMA.⁶⁰ The Indian controlled mills had no surplus stock and due to a short supply of jute crop they expected a rise in the prices of jute products and therefore wanted to increase production.⁶¹ To force the Indian managed mills to fall in line with the IJMA's proposal various pressures were applied but to no avail.⁶² Further, with the introduction of provincial autonomy, there was considerable labour unrest in the jute mills and the IJMA was afraid that reduction of working hours would undoubtedly lead to labour troubles.⁶³ Beset with these difficulties the IJMA solicited the intervention of the ministry to assist the industry to tide over the 'crisis'⁶⁴. The ministry initially resisted such pressures⁶⁵ but the opportunity for the Europeans

to coerce the ministry to act in their favour appeared when the ministry faced the no confidence motion.

The immediate result of the introduction of the ordinance was a large scale retrenchment of jute mill operatives.⁶⁶ This was a signal for fresh labour troubles. All the influential labour unions unanimously condemned the measure and decided that the jute mill workers should go on strike.⁶⁷ On October 30, a demonstration was organised by the mill workers against the ordinance and this was followed by a general strike on December 5.⁶⁸ As a counter measure the ministry organised some Muslim labour unions to endorse the ordinance.⁶⁹ To cloud the issue the government issued a press release stating that the strikes were instigated by communalist labour leaders.⁷⁰

The ordinance also brought disaster for the peasants. Fearing that the price of the jute crop would go down they started to sell their stock at a very low price.⁷¹ This pressure to sell at a low price⁷² was accentuated by a damaged summer paddy crop and the gradual freezing of the rural credit facilities available to the cultivators because of talks about restriction of the activities of village money lenders. As a public posture the ministry distributed 'pamphlets' advising the cultivators to 'hang on to their stocks as long as possible.'⁷³ In practical terms, however, the advice was meaningless since the possibility of the pamphlets reaching the illiterate cultivators was very little and the poverty stricken cultivators could not be expected to 'hang on' to their stocks.⁷⁴ Thus, 'the unfortunate jute growers were absolutely ignored and practically bled to supply the raw materials for the industry.'⁷⁵

The opposition seized the opportunity of maligning the ministry for taking a measure which served the interest of the European group but which caused tremendous suffering to the labourers and the peasants.⁷⁶ They submitted a petition to the governor requesting an immediate session of the legislature 'obviously to have a fling at the ministry.'⁷⁷ The Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industry which was a forum of the local businessmen and a subsidiary of the Congress also voiced their protest against the ministry for serving the vested interest of the European group.⁷⁸ The nationalist press in Calcutta commented that the ordinance was the *quid pro quo* to the Europeans for their support in the legislature.⁷⁹ One of them, the *Hindusthan Standard*, as an evidence brought out a statement of the finance

minister, which he had made in early August when rumours for reduction of working hours were heard, to the effect that even if the mills succeeded by control of production in realising a better export price for jute goods, it would not necessarily mean that the agriculturist would get a better price for his jute crop and that unless the agriculturists could be organised, it was not likely that they would share in any improvement that might take place in the price of jute goods.⁸⁰

With the public opinion so aroused, the IJMA denied its role in issuing the ordinance and accused the Congress and the communist agents for leading the agitation against the ordinance.⁸¹ Similarly the European group in the legislature issued repeated rejoinders that it had nothing to do with the ordinance.⁸² The ministry also denied its complicity with the European mercantile interests. The labour minister H.S. Suhrawardy who acted as the liason between the ministry and the Europeans announced that the ordinance was issued with the sole object of benefitting the labour since the mill owners with surplus stock and falling prices of jute goods and the high prices for raw jute were contemplating closing down some mills.⁸³ Another spokesman for the ministry, N.R. Sarkar, asserted that the ordinance was a means to ensure better prices to jute growers—'where the grower's interests were interlocked with those of the manufacturers one cannot possibly avoid benefitting manufacturers also in the process of helping the growers.'⁸⁴ He stated further that the political bias against the Europeans in the minds of the lay public was being exploited by the critics of the ministry. All these explanations were meant to obscure the real issue. Once, hard pressed by the opposition, the labour minister revealed in the floor of the Legislative Assembly that the ordinance was promulgated to help the European traders.⁸⁵

The Legislative Assembly was reconvened on February 15, 1939 and on the same day an adjournment motion was made by a labour member to discuss the jute ordinance. Sensing the impending trouble, the speaker, on the advice of the ministry, disallowed the motion, although he had given his consent to the motion earlier on the ground that the house should have an opportunity of discussing the matter under statutory right.⁸⁶ On February 19, the ministry quietly withdrew the ordinance. In the meanwhile the IFMA, equipped with executive sanction, was able to reach a 'voluntary agreement' with Indian

owned mills to restrict their production.⁸⁷

Dropping the ordinance was a ruse to deny the privilege to the opposition to a discussion of it, which most certainly would have been embarrassing and injurious to the prestige of the ministry. Nevertheless, when an opportunity presented itself during the budget session, the opposition snarled at the 'voluntary agreement' between the IJMA and the three Indian owned mills,⁸⁸ as 'the enactment of an unholy alliance like the one just before Plassey, not for the transference of political power, but, this time for the exploitation of Bengal economically'—has not Bengal turned into the 'grazing ground for all adventurers !'⁸⁹ Another Congress member suggested the establishment of jute mills by the Bengalis. The weight of his argument was based on the allegation that in the jute mills and other firms owned by the 'Bhatias', 'Marwaris' and 'Biharis'⁹⁰ the Bengalis were discriminated against.⁹¹ In compliance with the rules of procedure, when on April 5, the ordinance was 'laid on the table' in the assembly, in spite of the wishes of the opposition, members were again denied the opportunity of a debate on the pretext that the ordinance had already lapsed.⁹² Pressed by the opposition, the ministry promised to set aside a day for discussing the ordinance,⁹³ but the promise was not fulfilled. The cabinet was afraid to give any leverage to the opposition in exposing the weakness of the ministry in so far as it helped the European business in exchange for the legislative support of the European members.

A Bitter Harvest

The defection of a group of left wing of the Proja Samity in February 1939 and the activities of the Bose Brothers to overthrow the ministry⁹⁴ relegated the Coalition Party to lean more heavily on the European group. In July 1939 with the approaching jute harvesting season the IJMA, with the concurrence of the ministry further reduced the working hours of the mills from 45 to 40 and sealed 27½ per cent of the looms.⁹⁵ These were undertaken in spite of the fact that price of jute manufactures went up more than double over the previous year and the possibility for further rise was very certain, due to the increasing shadow of war in Europe.⁹⁶ The decision to cut down production was intended, as in the previous year, to depress the prices

of jute fiber which was again in short supply due to natural calamities. It was, however, showing signs of better prices in anticipation of the increase in world demand.⁹⁷

When the decision of the IJMA was implemented, some 35,000 labourers lost their jobs⁹⁸ and the price of raw jute began to fall.⁹⁹ Consequently there was a sudden eruption of labour and agrarian unrest. The cabinet reacted by assuring the *ryot* through a communiqué of the eventual rise in jute prices,¹⁰⁰ and dismissed the labour troubles as fomented by unscrupulous agitators who wanted to embitter relations between the employer and his labour.¹⁰¹ In this attitude of indifference of the ministry, the opposition groups led by the Congress found 'a convenient peg on which to hang their agitation against the ministry' and planned to launch a concerted labour-agrarian-terrorist agitation against it.¹⁰²

To meet the threat of wide spread political agitation, the cabinet announced its 'definite intention' to fix a minimum price which the *ryot* should be able to obtain for the raw jute.¹⁰³ This was for the first time that such a categorical assurance was given by the cabinet. Ministers had come to realise that on a good price of jute depended not only the prosperity of the cultivators but also of the *zamindars* and of the government itself who had a great deal of money to realise in the form of rents and agricultural loans respectively.¹⁰⁴

As a preliminary step to fix a minimum price for jute, there was to be compulsory restriction of jute cultivation so that supply did not exceed demand.¹⁰⁵ Regulation of the supply of the crop to boost its price was apparently good policy. A jute enquiry committee appointed by the pre-autonomy government in 1932 had found that the supply of raw jute was such that it could not adjust itself to the demand at a price calculated to bring normal profit to the *ryots* and as a remedial measure the committee suggested a scheme for crop restriction.¹⁰⁶ However, the present decision to regulate the crop was hastily announced without giving any consideration to the financial and administrative aspects.¹⁰⁷ In order to ensure success of such a scheme a comprehensive survey and registration of land under jute cultivation was required and arrangements had to be made with the neighbouring jute growing provinces of Assam and Bihar for similar restriction. It was also necessary to make proper assessment of the

nature of the demand for the crop by the mills. One of the cabinet members confided to the governor that the cabinet was aware of the problem and was not really determined to implement the scheme and that the announcement was made only to salvage the ministry from declining popularity.¹⁰⁸

The European millowners vigorously renounced the very concept of fixing a minimum price for jute in the *mufassil* as both 'impractical and 'highly dangerous to the industry' and also opposed the plan for compulsory restriction of the crop.¹⁰⁹ In the meantime a serious conflict developed between the Hindu finance minister N.R. Sarkar and his Muslim colleagues. Faced with this internal crisis the ministry was afraid to alienate the Europeans. In a bid to maintain the much valued alliance with the European group, the ministry surrendered to the wishes of the European group in taking an administrative measure which was to benefit the industry and shelved the jute regulation scheme at least for a year. In the process the ministry lost its rapport with the *ryots*.

An ordinance was proclaimed by the ministry on August 21, 1939 fixing a minimum price for raw jute in the Calcutta market.¹¹⁰ The communique issuing the ordinance emphasized that the measure was taken in the interest of the cultivators who were facing difficulties due to uncertainties in market prices of jute. The fact was that in spite of the curtailment of the working hours of the mills and an agreement among the mills not to purchase the crop at a higher price than a maximum agreed to,¹¹¹ the price of the fiber had shown a sudden tendency to rise in August. This was partially due to a low outturn of the crop but primarily due to bulk purchases by the speculators in anticipation of a general increase in the demand of the crop in Europe due to the escalation of hostilities.¹¹²

Fixing of a minimum price for raw jute in the Calcutta market forced down the price of the crop in the *mufassil* below the remunerative level.¹¹³ Obviously, as a Congress member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) said, the government took the measure in the name of the peasantry but the measure was really designed to serve the interest of the mill owners. If the interest of the peasantry was truly in the mind of the ministry, then a minimum price should have been fixed in the *mufassil* market where the primary producers sold their

crop.¹¹⁴ The speaker also disallowed a full scale debate on the ordinance in the assembly even though a motion disapproving the ordinance was admitted by him.¹¹⁵ The mill owners made a brisk purchase when the price went down as a result of the ordinance and later made a phenomenal profit.¹¹⁶

According to the previously announced scheme to regulate the production of jute crop with a view to stabilizing and improving its price, the ministry introduced a bill on November 27, 1939 for a compulsory regulation of jute cultivation beginning the next sowing season.¹¹⁷ In the meanwhile a survey of land under jute cultivation had been in progress since September. The Congress party in the assembly welcomed the bill 'in principle' and expressed satisfaction 'that the interests that are usually found to control and guide the cabinet are not in a position to influence their decision in bringing forward a legislation of this character.'¹¹⁸ Evidently they were unaware of the fact that the European group did not approve the scheme for regulation. With the outbreak of war, the men in the jute industry expected an increase in world demand for their product. They were afraid that reduction in the outturn of the jute crop would result in a corresponding increase in the price of the crop thereby decreasing the margin of profit of the mill owners which depended on the difference between the price they paid for raw jute and the price they received for their finished product.

To the bewilderment of the opposition, the bill was temporarily withdrawn by the ministry on December 19 without any convincing explanation.¹¹⁹ The day before, the finance minister, N.R. Sarkar, had definitely fallen out of the rank of the Coalition Party by voting against the war resolution.¹²⁰ Fearing that the defection of Sarkar on communal grounds might lead to a general withdrawal of support of all the Hindus from the Coalition Party, the ministry rushed to placate the European group. This was not lost sight of by the nationalist press who interpreted the decision of the ministry in not proceeding with the bill as a means to please the European mill owners.¹²¹ Later it was publicly confirmed by a member of the Coalition Party that the bill was shelved due to the threat of the European group to whom any scheme of restriction of jute crop 'meant restriction of the exploitation of the cultivators.'¹²² It was also believed by many that the

ministry promised to withdraw the bill to obtain the support of the European group for the war resolution which called for immediate declaration of dominion status for India and which was opposed by the European group.¹²³

The jute regulation bill which was dropped in December was again reintroduced on February 26, 1940.¹²⁴ An ordinance was also proclaimed on February 10 to resume the work of surveying jute land so that the crop could be regulated in the 1940 sowing season. Once again the European group strongly opposed the bill. By the time the new year was ushered in, the sudden boom in the jute industry due to the outbreak of war was definitely over and a depression had set in.¹²⁵ Not only were the expected heavy orders not forthcoming but also the British Government announced its decision to defer taking up deliveries of the sandbags ordered during the previous year.¹²⁶ With the rise in the price of jute manufactures, there was the threat of substitutes, for it was the cheapness of the commodity that had given it practically the world monopoly. Falling off in demand, together with threatened overproduction¹²⁷ shipping difficulties due to the spread of hostilities and the possibility of losing the American market which was expected to be the largest for Indian exports, were the factors which contributed to the downward trend in the prices of jute products.¹²⁸

The 'sagging tendency' in the jute industry vastly increased the political difficulties of the ministry with regard to the restriction of the crop. With its prestige tumbling in the eyes of the cultivators, the ministry could not risk the chance of having an unrestricted crop in the next season and take no step to safeguard a fair price for the crop. If this took place they would be certainly accused of having stood aside and done nothing to protect the cultivators. The ministers were 'also obsessed, perhaps justifiably, with the idea that if the mills once got the opportunity of accumulating six or nine months stock of raw jute, they would have the raiyat, at their mercy and have government at a great disadvantage in any attempt it may make to hold the balance.'¹²⁹

In the way matters had turned out, the ministers had politically no alternative but to try again to introduce compulsory restriction if they wanted to resuscitate their declining reputation in the country-side.

The governor felt that it was important that the European group among whom the mill owners were strongly represented, should recognize the difficulty of the ministers and should not take undue alarm at the proposed measure for regulation.¹³⁰ He even privately suggested to the European group that they should realise the dilemma of the ministry and urged the ministers on 'the necessity of getting the Europeans to see their difficulty.'¹³¹

The attempt to arrive at a consensus on the issue of jute between the European group and the ministry proved to be difficult. When the bill was presented in the lower house the European group vehemently opposed it and in an effort to kill the bill, they recommended that the bill be referred to a select committee.¹³² As a compromise formula, the ministry introduced an amendment to the bill which allocated four seats instead of two, as originally proposed, to the Europeans in the jute advisory board to be constituted under a provision of the bill with eleven members.¹³³ The board was to advise the government as to what would be the extent of reduction or expansion of a particular year's crop. The amendment failed to mollify the Europeans. However, the opposition called the attempted revision 'preposterous' and 'abject surrender on behalf of the ministers to the European interest.'¹³⁴

The imminent breach between the European group and the ministry was finally averted by the attitude of the opposition to the bill. The opposition highly commended the ministry for its effort to ensure a better price for jute to the cultivators and urged that the government should take a simultaneous measure to regulate the market so that the IJMA might not use their power of monopoly to force down the price in spite of a regulation in the supply of jute.¹³⁵ In giving their support to the bill they recommended that restriction should not be imposed for the next sowing season.¹³⁶ Their unanimous view was that the record of jute land prepared in 1939 was inaccurate as the survey was undertaken when there was no crop in the land and, therefore, a fresh survey should be done before implementing a restriction scheme. They also reasoned that due to the war, demands for jute would undoubtedly increase in spite of the temporary fall and that the peasants would benefit from it.

More important, the opposition aimed at making some political

gains. Talks about restriction resulted in some dissatisfaction among the illiterate peasantry to whom the rationale for restriction could hardly be meaningful.¹³⁷ The opposition expected to exploit the resentment of the cultivators to their advantage. With their legislative record of forcing the ministry to withdraw the restriction scheme for the 1940 crop, they hoped to portray themselves as the genuine friends of the cultivators.¹³⁸ In case prices fell due to over production and unpredictable international factors, the opposition speculated, the result grievances of the *ryots* could still be fanned into an agrarian agitation against the ministry.¹³⁹ The ministry was certainly aware of the motive of the opposition but expected to counter any such propaganda by saying that at least they tried to help the *ryots*.

The ministry quickly accepted the recommendation of the opposition and dropped the clause from the jute regulation bill containing provision for restriction of the 1940 crop as a 'hot potato'.¹⁴⁰ It was hoped that the action would not only appease the opposition but would at least for the time being reconcile the European group, and yet the Coalition Party could not be accused for acting in the interest of the European group. As a public explanation, the cabinet conceded to the opposition's argument that the record of jute lands prepared in 1939 was defective even though it reflected on the efficiency of the government.¹⁴¹ In declaring the decision of the Coalition Party, the minister in charge of agriculture administered a mild warning to the European group :

If my friends representing the mill owners interests do not consider the situation in the light of the circumstances that now prevail in the country and if they go on their old way of making large profits while the cultivators get almost nothing for their crop, I think it will be the mill owners who will be the greatest sufferers in the long run.

The statement pleased the opposition but was irksome to the European group. It was for the first time that the ministry was being openly critical of the European group. Its implication was not lost on the European group who now became more jealous to protect the interest of European business.¹⁴²

The action of the ministry was hailed with loud cheers by the opposition. A spokesman of the Congress called it a victory for his party : 'We take legitimate pride that we have forced the government

in adopting a measure which is ours.¹⁴³ The only discordant note from the opposition benches was uttered by a labour member who alleged that the ministry took the decision to placate the European group, 'the real boss of the house.'¹⁴⁴ Neither the European group nor the Coalition Party had any comment to make on this observation.

The government's decision not to restrict the production of jute crop in the 1940 season proved catastrophic. The announcement by the government that the crop would be regulated in the 1941 season on the basis of a fresh survey to be undertaken during the sowing season of 1940 when the crop would be in the ground,¹⁴⁵ and the general expectation of a rise in demand and better prices due to war induced the *ryots* to greatly increase their sowing of jute in the 1940 season. Consequently the cultivation of the fiber reached a record high in 1940.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately when the crop was marketed by *ryot* its price reached the point of lowest slump.¹⁴⁷ Yet, other factors added to the miseries of the peasants. Prolonged drought from October severely damaged the winter paddy crop, the principle food crop in Bengal.¹⁴⁸ There was also an all around rise in the prices of daily necessities of life owing to the failure of food crops and partly due to the war situation, but there was no appreciable rise in the wages of the agricultural labour.¹⁴⁹ Although the prices of some agricultural products increased, it was of no benefit to the *ryots* as they were forced to sell their entire stock before the rise took place.¹⁵⁰

A Futile Attempt

To the Coalition Party the problem of a fair price of jute to the cultivators was one which had to be solved satisfactorily. With the legislature constituted upon a predominantly agrarian vote no government in Bengal could afford to remain indifferent to the problem. In the opinion of the governor it was unfortunate politically that the leader of the European group, W.A.M. Walker, should be essentially a businessman representing the majority of the jute manufacturing and selling interests besides being controller of jute purchases for the Government of India. As a result such political genius as the European community might have possessed got very little scope for adaptability under the new constitution.¹⁵¹ By their failure to appreciate

the political difficulties of the ministers, the Europeans forced the Coalition Party to look for new support. Restive under the feeling that the European group carried too much weight on party division and frustrated by the repeated interference by the group in the vital problem of jute prices the Coalition Party sought the alliance of Subhas Bose.¹⁵² This move proved calamitous to the *ryots* and filled the coffers of another group of vested interest.

The idea for a collaboration between the Forward Bloc and the Coalition was originally conceived by Jinnah but the negotiation was carried on by the 'Calcutta trio', the three up country Muslim businessmen, Ispahani, Siddique and Nooruddin, whose commercial interests were recently in conflict with the European traders and one of whom, Nooruddin, had a strong anti-British bias.¹⁵³ The 'Calcutta trio' had also harboured some personal grievances against the Europeans in the affairs of the Calcutta municipal politics.¹⁵⁴ In their conflict with the Europeans they found a ready ally with a section of the Hindu business interest from West India who chafed at the monopolistic control of the IJMA in jute industry. The urban 'trio' belonged to the League and 'although their loyalty to it may vary with their convenience' they were in close contact with Jinnah and used their position in the League as well as their influence among the non-Bengali Muslim community in Calcutta to bring pressure on the cabinet.¹⁵⁵

Ever since the formation of the Forward Bloc, Subhas Bose had been on the look out to exploit any causes of friction between the Coalition Party and the European group.¹⁵⁶ He expected that if the Europeans withdrew their support from the coalition, the Forward Bloc would be put in a strong bargaining position. Bose was also planning to launch a civil disobedience movement as a means to revive his influence in the province which had been at a decline since he had revolted against Gandhi ; a pact with the coalition, he hoped, would give him the political immunity from arrest.¹⁵⁷ Like many of the urban elites, Subhas Bose nurtured complaints against the European 'attitude of independence and civic orthodoxy' and 'indeed it was the obduracy and short-sightedness of comparatively petty Europeans in the Calcutta Corporation which created the occasion for a pact between the League and S. Bose in Calcutta.'¹⁵⁸ The right

wing of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha welcomed any friction between the Coalition Party and the Europeans because in the resulting confusion they expected to derive some benefits. Moreover, they hoped, as did the League, that Subhas Bose would damage his own reputation with the Hindus by attempting to collaborate with a Muslim ministry.

The partial success of the negotiation leading to an 'agreement and understanding' between Subhas Bose and the League in the Calcutta municipal politics¹⁵⁹ highlighted by the election of Siddique as the mayor after a long spell of the Muslim's boycotting the corporation election since 1936 'enhanced the power of the Calcutta trio.'¹⁶⁰ From this newly acquired position of advantage the 'trio' were able to influence the cabinet to adopt measures purported to benefit their interest in jute trade. Both Siddique and Ispahani had substantial investments in the Calcutta jute futures (*fotka*) market and had made 'big money' in the past and hoped to make a 'great deal more' in the future.¹⁶¹ They were apprehensive that unrestricted cultivation of jute resulting in over-production would produce a depressing effect in the jute futures market. They have been pressing their case on the ministers ever since the beginning of the boom in the market after the outbreak of the war.¹⁶² When, in March 1940, the scheme for the regulation of the crop in the 1940 season was dropped, they loudly protested; as self appointed champion of the cause of the *ryots*, they reprimanded the Coalition Party for 'leaving the cultivators to the tender mercies of the powerfully organised jute consuming interest' (IJMA).¹⁶³

In the aftermath of the withdrawal of a jute regulation scheme for the 1940 crop season, the Calcutta jute futures market was at the point of collapse. The 'Calcutta trio' and their West Indian business associates who had large investments in the jute futures market urged the ministry's intervention.¹⁶⁴ Unable to resist the pressure of the 'trio', the ministry issued an ordinance fixing a minimum price for raw jute in the Calcutta futures market.¹⁶⁵ Ironically the ordinance was prefixed with the statement 'to ensure a fair price to the cultivators.' It was perfectly clear that the protection required at the moment was not for the *ryots* but for the few speculators in the futures market who were facing a big loss due to a big drop in the market.

The Europeans gave solid opposition to such intervention by the government on behalf of a handful of Indian businessmen and it was only after a good deal of persuasive effort that they finally agreed 'to differ regarding jute without opposing government's policy as a whole.'¹⁶⁶

The minimum price that was fixed in the Calcutta futures market had no connection with either the actual market price which was much lower or even with the anticipated future price.¹⁶⁷ When the ordinance was announced there was very little stock at the hands of the cultivators. Moreover, the jute enquiry committee of 1932 had definitely held the opinion that the very existence of the jute futures market was detrimental to the interest of the jute growers.¹⁶⁸ The jute enquiry committee appointed by the autonomous government in 1938 had also recommended the immediate abolition of the jute futures market.¹⁶⁹ Naturally the conclusion was drawn by the opposition that the ordinance was 'an eye-wash to beguile the innocent and helpless peasants and to hoodwink the public in general.'¹⁷⁰ The fact that the futures market was closed down soon after the business firm of Ispahani, the biggest holder of jute in the futures market, recuperated from its liabilities added substance to such observation.¹⁷¹

In utter disregard of the allegations by the opposition, the ministry took another step at the command of the 'Calcutta trio' which invited more criticism. On June 3, 1940 the government decided to purchase the old crop of jute in the Calcutta futures market and appointed a Marwari merchant of Calcutta as the purchasing agent.¹⁷² According to the announcement of the ministry, the purchase scheme was to boost the price of the new crop which was to be marketed towards the end of the next month. In pursuance of the decision, the government agent, Chhagumull Tolaram, purchased 50,000 bales of the old jute crop at Rs. 12 per maund when the prevailing market price was only Rs. 8.¹⁷³

The purchase which was quickly completed was of no benefit to the cultivators who, as noted earlier, had no stock of the previous year's fiber.¹⁷⁴ It might have served the interest of the peasantry if the government had decided to make some forward purchases of the new crop or started the purchase after the new crop had arrived. The parties who derived benefit from the purchases were the same

handful of speculators in the futures market on whom the Coalition Party now heavily depended following the Bose-League alliance in the municipal politics especially since a hope was raised in some quarters of a possible ministerial cooperation between the Forward Bloc and the League.¹⁷⁵ It became known that the government agent, a business associate of Ispahani, purchased a substantial quantity from Ispahani's firm.¹⁷⁶ It was also accused by a Congress MLA that some members of the cabinet were involved in the purchase affair.¹⁷⁷ This was a very serious charge but the ministry made no effort to deny it. In panic the leader of the European group demanded a statement from the cabinet on the alleged involvement of the ministers and also demanded an assurance that the jute futures market should not be reopened.¹⁷⁸ Although the desired assurance was furnished, no statement was made by the ministry who called the leader of the European group, W.A.M. Walker, their 'chief enemy'.¹⁷⁹ Yet the European group did not withdraw their support from the League dominated coalition ministry for the worst could happen if a Congress led ministry were to be installed in Bengal.

Ministers were deeply committed to the promise of a fair price to the cultivators for the jute, but they only got themselves deeper into the mire in an endeavour to maintain their political credit and prestige. This consideration alone forced them to keep Subhas Bose, who was trying to foment a civil disobedience movement, at liberty in order to strengthen their hand against the Europeans.¹⁸⁰ However, instead of accomplishing anything to their credit, they came out with diminished prestige and popularity. In their effort to emancipate themselves from the influence of the European group, so that they could tackle the issue of jute prices without fear of intimidation, they allowed themselves to be advised by the 'bull speculators'.¹⁸¹ In this contingency of pressure politics the peasantry became the victim.

The Europeans Prevail Again

As if to throw a clean rug to cover their repeated failures on the problem of jute prices and as a measure to appease the opposition during the impending monsoon session of the legislature scheduled to meet on July 15, the ministry issued a communique in June declaring their 'firm intention' to enforce a minimum price for the new jute crop.¹⁸² As to be expected, the IJMA immediately issued a

re-joinder that it was opposed on principle to the government's intervention in the matter of fixing of a minimum price for raw jute.¹⁸³ The IJMA also submitted a representation to the Government of India asking for its intervention so that the cabinet in Bengal might not be able to implement the programme.¹⁸⁴ It was already aggrieved at the purchase policy of the Government of Bengal and their interference in the trade on behalf of certain speculators in the futures market.

This precipitated a conflict between the European group and the ministry but a confrontation was avoided by the timely occurrence of another event. On July 3, the governor, under instruction from the central government and against the advice of his cabinet, arrested Subhas Bose for inciting the people in civil disobedience.¹⁸⁵ Since the outbreak of the war, Subhas Bose and his Forward Bloc had been carrying on a continuous propaganda against cooperation in the war and in favour of commencing a national struggle for independence and organised periodic demonstrations for focusing public attention on those issues.¹⁸⁶ For instance, in October 1939, a successful anti-imperialist conference was held at Nagpur under the auspices of the Forward Bloc. Again in March 1940 a huge demonstration was conducted by the Bloc at Ramgarh where the annual session of the Congress was being held at the time. The demonstration was called the all India anti-compromise conference and 'was a greater success than the Congress meeting.'¹⁸⁷ The Forward Bloc also organised a 'national week' in April (6-13) when it launched a campaign of civil disobedience all over the country, which led to the arrest of a large number of its leaders.¹⁸⁸

In Bengal the movement met with no enthusiastic response. Bose, however, was resourceful and directed the movement in demand of the removal of the Holwell monument in Calcutta which was built to commemorate the so called 'black hole tragedy' on the night of June 20, 1756, 123 Englishmen were suffocated to death when they were thrown into a small dungeon in Calcutta as a punitive action by the Muslim Nawab (governor) of Bengal, Sirajuddowlah. The story was considered to be purely fabrication by most Bengalis, especially the Muslims, and the monument, which was located in the centre of the city was looked upon by them as an ignominious insult to national prestige.

Agitation for the removal of the monument had occurred from time to time since 1938 emanating from the pro-Congress Muslim sources backed by the group. The agitation made a strong appeal to Muslim sentiment and was one from which it was obviously difficult for any Muslim to dissociate himself. Subhas Bose and the Forward Bloc considered the monument agitation as a good plank on which civil disobedience could be turned into a popular movement in Bengal especially with the assistance of the Muslims. Therefore, Bose gave notice of a 'direct action' day to be observed on July 3, 1940 for the forcible removal of the monument.¹⁸⁹ The ministry had no wish to 'precipitate a conflict' with Bose and to avoid a law and order problem as a result of 'direct action' tried to persuade Bose from following his programme.¹⁹⁰ But Bose remained steadfast with his plan and was arrested under the defence of India rules (1939) when he decided to damage the Holwell monument. The Government of India had been watching with anxiety the persistent endeavour of Subhas Bose to instigate anti-war agitation but refrained from taking any action against him on the intercession of the Bengal ministry.¹⁹¹ The latest plan of Bose was a serious threat to law and order of the province and the ministry could not resist the arrest of Bose any further. Moreover, Subhas Bose had done nothing towards a reconstitution of the ministry with the active cooperation of the Forward Bloc so that the ministry could follow a jute policy satisfactory to the point of view of the *ryots*.¹⁹²

The sudden arrest of Bose eliminated the possibility of obtaining the support of the Forward Bloc for the Coalition Party, thereby forcing the Coalition Party to arrive at some settlement with the IJMA in order to ensure the cooperation of the European group in the legislature without which the ministry would undoubtedly face defeat. According to the terms of the settlement arrived at on July 8, called the 'gentlemen's agreement,' the mills undertook to purchase new crop in the Calcutta market until the end of December at a minimum economic price (Rs. 7.78 per 80 lbs.) in exchange of a guarantee by the cabinet that the government would refrain from legislative interference in raw jute prices and would not purchase the crop on the government's account.¹⁹³ Two important loopholes of the agreement were that because it was voluntary the government could not enforce

it and the price was meant for the Calcutta market and not for the *mufassil* where the primary producers sold their crop.

The mills had no intention of fulfilling their obligation. Within days of the signing of the agreement, pursuing their usual practice, they reduced their working hours to force down the prices of raw jute.¹⁹⁴ They also drastically curtailed their volume of purchase¹⁹⁵ although fresh government orders for a large quantity of sand bags to be delivered in December 1940 was received.¹⁹⁶ The cabinet made continuous efforts to induce the mills to increase their purchase in order to support the *mufassil* market but without any success. Some mills even repudiated the 'gentleman's agreement'.¹⁹⁷

The cabinet complained that any such unilateral repudiation would call for the government's interference and even deliberated over the possibility of the government's purchasing jute from the cultivators but was persuaded by the governor from taking such a course.¹⁹⁸ Ignoring the protest of the cabinet, the IJMA decided to stop production for one week each month.¹⁹⁹ Ultimately the mills put forward certain revised proposals to purchase the jute crop at a much lower price without any undertaking to purchase any specific quantity, an idea which the cabinet considered unsatisfactory.²⁰⁰ Once again the lesson emerged that the Coalition Party could not assert its intention of maintaining a minimum price if the mills did not cooperate.

In desperation the cabinet sought the intervention of the central government but the government in New Delhi was reluctant to push any measure prejudicial to the interest of an industry which was so vital to war supplies. As a face saving device, the industry was persuaded by New Delhi to make a promise to purchase a certain quantity of jute before April 15, 1941 so that the cultivators would be able to get a minimum price.²⁰¹ On April 15, when the date line expired, the mills were far behind in fulfilling their obligation.²⁰²

The predicament of the ministry for the first time evoked some sympathy from the opposition ; the fire of their attack was directed against the Europeans who 'do not know anything but their pocket' and were in the province for 'exploiting the poor cultivators.'²⁰³ They even offered unqualified cooperation to the Coalition Party on the issue of jute prices.²⁰⁴ Without any grounds to stand on, the

Coalition Party reciprocated by voting on a resolution introduced by the opposition urging the government 'to take immediate steps to ensure higher prices of raw jute' thereby creating an unprecedented record.²⁰⁵

The Ryot was Meant to Suffer

The catastrophic fall in raw jute prices for the 1940 crop led to a series of agrarian and labour unrest and the ministry was thoroughly discredited. To avoid such a calamity for the next season the ministry imposed compulsory restriction of jute cultivation for the 1941 season. This was the first time that such an experiment was being attempted. The government started a massive publicity exhorting the cultivators to the need of restricting jute cultivation and increase the production of rice since Bengal was cut off from the graneries of Burma due to the spread of hostilities there.²⁰⁶

The government's restriction scheme was deficient to the extent that it did not guarantee an economic price for raw jute in the *mufassil*. This provided fresh ammunition for the opposition to mount their attack on the Coalition Party. Shamsuddin Ahmed, the leader of the pro-Congress faction of the Proja Samity unleashed an insulting observation :²⁰⁷

You are not able to control the jute market, you do not care to see whether the agreement entered into with the Jute Mill Association is being honoured or not, you are incapable and impotent to do that, you are afraid, because you feel that if you take up the problem in right earnest, your white masters will be displeased and will not vote with you and your ministry will go out.

When the opposition parties decided to observe February 28 as 'Jute Day' throughout the province to protest against the restriction scheme, the government issued orders banning meetings.²⁰⁸ The ministry branded those who opposed the regulation scheme as enemies of the country.²⁰⁹ It even went further and called the Muslim members in the opposition the enemies of Islam since they were obstructing a measure which would in the long run benefit the jute growers, the majority of whom were Muslims.²¹⁰ It was unfortunate that the Muslim coalition tried to introduce a communal dimension to an economic issue.

To meet the administrative expenses involved in implementing the restriction scheme, the cabinet introduced a tax proposal in July 1941 providing a levy of tax on raw jute purchased by the jute mills and shippers.²¹¹ The proposal was approved by the European Association and the IJMA.²¹² The bill added to the grievances of the opposition who called it another instance of sacrificing the interest of the cultivators for the sake of the mill owners. It was argued that in the absence of a fixed minimum price the incidence of the tax would fall on the cultivators.²¹³

Reduction of the area under jute cultivation in 1941 to one third of the previous year's decreased the outturn of the crop substantially.²¹⁴ As the harvesting season approached prices of raw jute showed some hopeful signs but the mills at once announced that they were still holding surplus stock of raw jute from the previous year's stock and urged the government to set a price for the crop which was much lower than the prevailing market price.²¹⁵

The ministry refused to fall in line with industry²¹⁶ and advised the cultivators to hold their stock for a better price.²¹⁷ But it was all in vain ; prices of raw jute in 1941 showed no appreciable improvement, although the industry made brisk business because of the increase in shipping facilities in the summer of 1941 and an increasing flow of the central government's orders for jute bags in the middle of the year.²¹⁸ It may also be noted here that the restriction scheme led to a reduction in demand for agricultural labour causing some unemployment in jute growing areas of the province.²¹⁹

In spite of their failure to increase raw jute prices in 1941 by controlling its supply, the cabinet again decided on the recommendation of the jute advisory board to restrict jute cultivation for the next season to the acreage of 1941. Fearing that two restricted crops in succession might eventually lead to a rise in the price of the fiber, the IJMA called the policy 'short-sighted' which 'merely took care of the present' and urged the government to increase the supply next year 'to ensure the future prosperity of the industry.'²²⁰ Once again the central government stepped in. In consideration of the future needs of war and in expectation of large demands from the United States the central government recommended to the Bengal cabinet to increase the cultivation of jute in 1942 to at least three

fourths of the crop of 1940.²²¹ The provincial governor also 'impressed' on the ministers to abandon their decision to grow a short crop, a plan which he thought was influenced by a 'sinister intention' against the manufacturers and would 'bring ruin to the industry.'²²² In the meanwhile the Coalition Party was plagued by a serious conflict between the Proja Samity and the League and both the groups with aspirations to remain in power wanted to keep the European group in good humour.

Unable to resist the pressures from different directions, the ministry finally conceded to a compromise that the extent of the jute cultivation for 1942 would be equivalent to two thirds of the area recorded in 1940.²²³ The central government in return pledged assistance for the purpose of maintaining prices of the crop and postponed the plan for 'rationalisation' of the industry which would have dislocated at least 150,000 mill operatives.²²⁴ The quota for 1942 pleased the industry²²⁵ but the opposition rebuked the ministry for taking such an unwise step.²²⁶

On December 17, 1941 the ministry in Bengal was reorganised.²²⁷ Although the Muslim League went into the opposition, the new Progressive Coalition Party was strengthened by the support it received from some factions of the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha, the radicals of the Proja Samity and a few other splinter groups. The European group did not abandon the reorganised ministerial coalition, 'it being their policy to support any government which eschews discriminatory legislation, and offers the prospect of stable administration.'²²⁸ However, the importance of the group was much reduced because the legislative majority of the coalition was not dependent, unlike in the past, on their support. It, therefore, raised the high hopes in the countryside that the reconstituted Council of Ministers would be able to take effective measure to improve the price of jute unhampered by the constant selfish predilection of the European group. But war emergencies created unexpected impediments.

Soon after the new ministry was commissioned, Japan stepped up its offensive in South East Asia. Apprehensive that this might affect jute prices due to shipping difficulties, the ministry made numerous representations to the central government to decrease the size of jute cultivation for the 1942 season by half to what was already

announced.²²⁹ The central government, which had undertaken to supply the jute requirements of the United States, failed to see the viewpoint of the Bengal ministry and warned that in case of any unilateral action the Bengal Government would forfeit their right to receive any assistance in the future in matters concerning jute from New Delhi.²³⁰ Under the circumstances the ministry only advised the cultivators to sow jute on less than the licensed acreage.²³¹

Increase in the acreage of jute land in 1942 yielded a big crop, almost double the outturn of 1941.²³² The automatic effort of such a big crop itself would have been undoubtedly a sharp fall in its value. The Japanese success in Burma only deteriorated the situation further. Not only did it dislocate shipping in the Bay of Bengal which cut down the volume of export,²³³ but it also affected manufacturing due to a large exodus of labour from Calcutta caused by the panic of a Japanese air raid on the city.²³⁴ Following their usual practice the mills also showed no interest, when the harvesting began, in making purchases; instead they cut down their working hours and decided to seal ten per cent of their looms.²³⁵ War conditions obviously caused some setbacks to the jute industry but did not create any major crisis. Large government orders were given from time to time and the loss due to the shrinkage in the volume of export was amply compensated for by the rise in the value of jute manufactures.²²²

When the new crop was marketed its price fell even much below the 1940 level.²³⁷ The *ryots* in the coastal districts suffered especially. With the threat of Japanese invasion, the Government of Bengal, under the advice from New Delhi, started a 'denial policy' aimed at denying any facilities to the invaders.²³⁸ As a result of this all country boats were confiscated which made it difficult for the *ryot* to take his crop to the market place; in the riverine countryside of Bengal boat was the only transport available.

The sharp decline in prices of raw jute in 1942 assumed a dangerous proportion since the price of food grains and other necessities had risen beyond the means of the common people in the province.²³⁹ The chief minister declared that Bengal was facing a crisis unparalleled in the economic history of the province in modern times.²⁴⁰ A sub-committee appointed by the Progressive Coalition Party to enquire into the 'present jute position' recommended in its report that

to ensure a reasonable price to the grower, the government should immediately start purchasing the fiber from the *ryot* directly at a remunerative price (Rs. 8 per *maund*). The sub-committee also recommended that sowing for the next season should not exceed one third of the acreage recorded in 1940.²⁴¹

According to the recommendations of the sub-committee, the cabinet announced its decision to purchase the jute crop from the cultivators.²⁴² However, handicapped by lack of funds, the Government of Bengal applied for a loan from the central government which was under obligation, according to an earlier arrangement, to come to the aid of the provincial government to maintain jute prices.²⁴³ The central government under advise from the industry vetoed the purchase scheme, refused to give any advance, and forced the cabinet against the mandate of the Coalition Party to increase the quota of jute cultivation in 1943.²⁴⁴ In the end the cultivators suffered and the Progressive Coalition Party lost their sympathy further.

The Congress and the left wing of the Samity were most vocal in their criticism against the shortcomings of the ministry on the subject of jute prices. The latter had joined the reorganised coalition and the attention of the former from August 1942 was totally engaged in its 'Quit India' movement which attained revolutionary proportion in certain districts of the province.²⁴⁵ During the course of the movement which continued until the end of the year, the question of jute prices lost its priority in Congress politics. In this situation the Muslim League, now in the opposition took the cue in launching its onslaught against the jute policy of the ministry. Claiming to be the only champion of the oppressed *ryots*, the Leaguers lost no scope in publicizing the failures of the ministry for which, unquestionably, they had a major responsibility. The League, however, carefully refrained from offending the European group whose help they were soliciting to evict the Progressive Coalition Party from power.²⁴⁶ Having lost control in the legislature, the Europeans abjured their support from the Progressive Coalition and joined hands with the League in forming a new ministry on April 29, 1943.

Sitting in the opposition, the League called the jute policy of the new cabinet bankrupt, 'a policy of abject surrender of the vital interests of the cultivators'.²⁴⁷ It organised numerous meetings in the

mufassil in which resolutions were passed strongly condemning the ministers for their inability to get better price for jute. Representations were also submitted by the League to the governor urging his interference on jute prices on behalf of the *ryots*.²⁴⁸

In their effort to draw the support of the Muslim peasantry the Leaguers freely used communal slogans on the issue of jute. To their rural audience they explained that the primary cause of the ministry's failure to secure a remunerative price for the jute crop was the Hindu opposition and the only way to obtain a good price would be to support the League. In the Legislative Assembly, a League member claimed that Fazlul Huq could not do anything for the cultivators of jute, an overwhelming majority of whom were Muslims, for fear of losing the support of his Hindu colleagues.²⁴⁹ He went further and invoked the wrath of Allah on the Muslim ministers 'for playing false to the man behind the plough.'²⁵⁰

Conclusion

During most of the period that the coalition led by Fazlul Huq was in power, raw jute seldom fetched an economic price for the cultivators although the jute manufacturing industry continued to flourish. Even during the years of war (1940—1943) when the cultivators were worst hit, the industry was still making profits. This was largely the result of the monopolistic control exercised over the industry by the IJMA. Being the principal consumer of raw jute, they could control its price by manipulating its demand. Before the introduction of the constitution of 1935 the jute manufacturing industry safeguarded their interest through their powerful lobby in London and the British bureaucracy in India. After the provincial autonomy was inaugurated the European group in the legislature took the responsibility of overseeing British business interests in the province.

The nature of the political participation of the European group was dominated by their sole objective of preserving and promoting the interest of their community and they joined the Coalition Party hoping that this would facilitate achieving their objective. In 1918 a parliamentary enquiry commission had recorded that :²⁵¹

It is the duty of British commerce in India to identify itself with the interests of India, which are higher than the interests of any community ; to take part in political life ; to use its considerable wealth and opportunities to

command itself to India ; and having demonstrated both its values and its good intentions, to be content to rest like other industries on the new foundations of government in the wishes of the people.

Unfortunately even two decades after that recommendation was written, the European community showed no sign of adjustment. Consequently they failed to elicit the good will of the people of the province and continued to be looked upon as aliens who had no interest in the welfare of the province.

The Coalition Party by its dependence on the European group was circumscribed to act independently on matters in which the interest of the European group was involved. Any attempt to ensure better prices to the cultivator was therefore bound to be frustrated as long as they had to rely on the support of the European group to maintain their legislative majority. On occasions when the coalition tried to assert itself disregarding the obstructions put forth by the European group, it found itself obliged to make compromises with other pressure groups. Even after reshuffling of the coalition in December 1941 the new Progressive Coalition Party was also unable to adopt measures unhampered by extraneous interference, partly, of course, due to war emergencies.

Failure of the coalition to secure at least an economic price for the jute crop heavily affected its credibility especially of the Proja Samity who had been so vocal in promising a better price for jute as a means to improve the economic condition of the poor peasantry. The Congress and other groups in the opposition were never tired of using the coalition's shortcomings regarding jute prices in discrediting the Samity and its leader. It was, however, the persistent effort of the Congress to deplete the coalition of its members and its refusal to take office which made it incumbent on the Coalition Party to yield to the pressure of the European group. In December 1941 when the Leaguers went into opposition, they found in their erstwhile colleague's failure to satisfy the *ryots*, an axe to grind against the new coalition. In order to capitalise on this issue further, the Leaguers converted this purely economic matter into a communal issue by projecting that it was the Hindu elements in the coalition who were sabotaging all efforts to obtain better prices for the crop for the Muslim cultivators. In carrying on this kind of propoganda the League attained tremendous success.

Therefore, it seems that if the Proja Samity was able to solve the problem of jute prices a contented peasantry would not have, perhaps, fallen victim to the communal propaganda of the League which accentuated Muslim separatism in the province.

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2. Assuming that the assembly was divided on communal lines, the Muslims could muster a maximum of 121 members as against 100 Hindus. In such a situation the crucial role was to be played by the Europeans.
3. Botanical name—*corchorus capularis* or *corchorus olitorius*; a strong glossy fiber used for making burlap, sacks, mats, ropes, etc.; was very much in world demand, especially as an essential war material before the use of synthetic substitutes. For a good account of the plant and its uses see James Forbes Royle, *The Fibrous Plants of India* (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1885), pp. 240-51.
4. Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'European and Indian Entrepreneurship in India, 1900-1930,' in Edmund Leach and S.N. Mukherjee (ed.), *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), p. 234. For an eminently readable account of the origin and development of jute industry in Bengal, see D.R. Wallace *The Romance of Jute, a Short History of the Calcutta Jute Mill Industry: 1855-1927* (London: W. Thacker and Co., 1928).
5. Government of Bengal, Department of Agriculture and Industries, *Report of the Bengal Jute Enquiry Committee* (Alipore: Bengal Govt. Press, 1939), vol. II, p. 8.
6. *Ibid.*
7. K. Ahmad, *Social History*, pp. 34-35.
8. The average number of labourers employed by the European jute mills in the 1937-38 year was 278,940. *Report of the Bengal Jute Enquiry Committee*, p. 9.
9. Indian Statutory Commission, vol. I, pp. 46-47.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
12. For details see D.R. Gadgil, *Industrial Evolution of India in Modern Times* (Bombay: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938).
13. Two most important of such associations were the Bengal Chamber of Commerce established in 1834 and the European Association founded in 1883. While the latter 'aimed at embodying the general views of the Europeans,' the former was 'a body of merchants, manufacturers, bankers and shopkeepers, engaged in commerce and industry in the Presidency to safeguard their interests and to extend their trade.' Great Britain, Parliament, East India (Constitutional Reforms), *Addresses Presented in India to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State*, 1918 (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 21, 23.

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27. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
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87. Government of Bengal, Publicity Dept., *Two Years of Provincial Autonomy in Bengal* (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1939), p. 91.

88. All three of these mills were owned by West Indians—Birla, Hukumchand, and Nagurmul.

89. Cut motion on agriculture budget by Abu Hossain Sarkar. *PBLA*. vol. LIV, No. 3, Mar. 15, 1939, p. 375.

90. Meaning respectively : the upcountrymen, the natives of the provinces of Gujrat and Bihar. Any or all these terms were generally used by the Bengalis for persons from outside the province.

91. *PBLA*, vol. LIV, No. 3, Mar. 15, 1939, pp. 374-75. While it is difficult to ascertain the validity of the charges of discrimination, the fact remains that the Bengalis did make such complaints.

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102. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of August. 1939.
103. *Star of India*, Aug. 12, 1939.
104. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Aug. 20, 1939.
105. *Star of India*, Aug. 12, 1939.
106. *PBLA*, vol. LV. No. 1, Nov. 30, 1939, p. 146.
107. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Aug. 20, 1939.
108. *Ibid.*
109. *Ibid.*, The governor regretted in his despatch that such views were expressed by the Europeans.
110. *Two Years of Provincial Autonomy*, p. 63 ; *Star of India*, Aug. 21, 1939.
111. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Sept. 5, 1939.
112. During this time 700 million sand bags were ordered by the British Government alone. *Annual Market Review*, 1939, p. 28.
113. The minimum economic price, i.e. cost of production plus net minimum profit per *maund* (80 pounds) which a cultivator should have obtained was Rs. 7. *Report of the Jute Enquiry Commission*, p. 74. The ordinance fixed the minimum price in Calcutta at Rs. 7.18 when the actual price in the *mufassil* was much higher Government of Bengal, Dept. of Agriculture, *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture*, Bengal. For the year 1939-40 (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1940), Part I, p. 3. The Calcutta price included transportation, storage, brokerage and other profits of the middle man.
114. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 2, Dec. 8, 1939, p. 118.
115. *Ibid.*, No. 3, Dec. 19, 1939, p. 304.
116. *Ibid.*, No. 2, Dec. 8, 1939, p. 118. and *Star of India*, Dec. 5, 1939. The price index of jute goods in 1939 was the highest since 1914. *Annual Market Review*, 1939, p. 29.
117. The Bengal Jute Regulation Bill, 1939. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 1, Nov. 30, 1939, p. 145.
118. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 1, Nov. 30, 1939, p. 153.
119. *Ibid.*, No. 3, Dec. 19, 1939, pp. 312-13.
120. See above, pp. 287-288.
121. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of December, 1939.
122. *PBLA*, vol. LVII, No. 3, Aug. 8, 1940, p. 258.
123. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 23, 1939. In the upper house the European group remained neutral on the war resolution after making it clear that they could not support the 'constitutional' portion of the resolution.
124. *PBLA*, vol. LVI, No. 2, Feb. 29, 1940, p. 34.
125. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Feb. 7, 1940.
126. *Annual Market Review*, 1940, p. 46.

127. In anticipation of large orders, the IJMA increased the working hours from 40 to 60 hours.

128. *Annual Market Review*, 1940, p. 46.

129. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Feb. 7, 1940.

130. *Ibid.*

131. *Ibid.*

132. *PBLA*, vol. LCI, No. 2, Feb. 29, 1940, pp. 47-48, 223-24. Both W.A.M. Walker and I.G. Kennedy, who participated in the debate on behalf of the European group represented the IJMA. Besides being the president of the IJMA, Walker was also the controller of jute purchases of the Government of India.

133. *PBLA*, vol. LVI, No. 2, Feb. 29, 1940, p. 173.

134. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-74.

135. *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37.

136. *Ibid.*, pp. 243-248.

137. A series of petitions from the cultivators were received by the Government ever since the government's intention to regulate jute crop was first announced in Sept. 1939. *Ibid.*, p. 248. In 1941, when restriction was finally imposed there was wide scale opposition to it during the sowing season. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of July, 1941.

138. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Mar. 7, 1940.

139. *Ibid.*

140. *PBLA*, vol. No. 2, Feb. 29, 1940, p. 249.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

142. *Ibid.*, Mar. 1940, p. 350.

143. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

146. The acreage was estimated at 3,670,650 as against 2,549,500 in 1939 ; the outturn was 10,975,7590 bales (400 lbs.) as compared with 8,321,200 in the previous year—an increase of 44% and 31,9% over the previous acreage and yield. *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture*, 1940-41, Part 1, p. 8.

147. *Annual Market Review*, 1940, p. 46.

148. Government of Bengal, Dept. of Agriculture, *Season and Crop Report of Bengal*, 1940-41 (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1941), p. iv. Provincial outturn of the winter paddy was 63% of normal.

149. Government of Bengal, Board of Revenue, *Report of the Land Revenue Administration*, 1940-41 (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1941), p. 2.

150. *Ibid.*

151. *Governor's Report : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, May 7, 1940.

152. *Ibid.*, May 22, 1940. After his split with the Congress in May 1939, Bose had organised a party of his own, the Forward Bloc, as a unified leftist front within the Congress. Subhas Chandra Bose, *Crossroads* (Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 174-77.

153. *Governor's Report : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, July 4, 1940.

154. *Ibid.*, May 7, 1940.
155. *Ibid.*, 4, July 4, 1940.
156. *Ibid.*, May 22, 1940.
157. *Ibid.*
158. *Ibid.*, July 4, 1940.
159. *Star of India*, Apr. 18, 1938.
160. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, June 27, 1940. It was widely speculated that the 'understanding' might soon extend to legislative co-operation. Congratulating the mayor, Bose said 'they should endeavour to see that the understanding that has been arrived at the corporation between these two major parties is enlarged in its scope and application.' *Star of India*, Apr. 28, 1940.
161. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Feb. 7, 1940.
162. *Ibid.*
163. *PBLA*, vol. LVI, No. 2, Mar. 4, 1940, p. 340. A Congress MLA claimed that when it was apparent that the plan for regulation was going to be dropped, these non-Bengali Muslim merchants and their associates sold heavily their stocks in anticipation of a fall in prices. *Ibid.*, Feb. 29, 1940, p. 240. Neither Siddique nor Ispahani denied it.
164. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, May 7, 1940. Some time earlier a similar request was made by the Bengal Muslim Chamber of Commerce of which Siddique was the president. *Ibid.*, Apr. 9, 1940.
165. *Star of India*, May 10, 1940. The minimum fixed price was Rs. 12 per *maund*.
166. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, May 27, 1940.
167. *PBLA*, vol. LVII, No. 1, July 17, 1940, p. 195.
168. *Ibid.*, No. 3, Aug. 8, 1940.
169. *Report of the Bengal Jute Enquiry Committee*, p. 100.
170. *PBLA*, vol. LVII, No. 3, Aug. 8, 1940, p. 238.
171. *Ibid.*, pp. 225, 258.
172. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
173. *Ibid.*
174. According to an estimate of a Congress MLA total arrival of jute in the mills of Calcutta and suburbs by rail and river from July 1939 to May 1940 had exceeded by 1,000,000 bales the estimated total production of the 1939 crop season. *PBLA*, vol. LVII, No. 3, Aug. 8, 1940, p. 250.
175. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, May 22, 1940.
176. *PBLA*, vol. LVIII, Dec. 2, 1940, p. 237.
177. *Ibid.*, vol. LVIII, 3, Aug. 8, 1940, p. 244.
178. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
179. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
180. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, June 7, 1940.
181. *Ibid.* The 'bull speculators' obviously referred to the 'Calcutta trio'.
182. *Star of India*, June 14, 1940.
183. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, June 27, 1940.
184. *Ibid.*

185. *Ibid.*, July 10, 1940. However, in a debate in the Legislative Assembly the ministry took full responsibility for the arrest. *PBLA*, vol. LVII, No. 1, July 15, 1940, pp. 81-82.
186. Subhas Chandra Bose. *The Indian Struggle*, 1920-1942 (New York : Asia Publishing House, 1964), p. 342.
187. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
188. R.C. Majumdar, *Freedom Movement*, vol. III, p. 601.
189. *Star of India*, June 28, 1940.
190. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, July 4, 1940.
191. *Ibid.*, June 22, 1940.
192. *Ibid.*, June 22, 1940.
193. *Ibid.*, July 10, 1940.
194. *Star of India*, July 15, 1940.
195. Between July and September the mills bought only half of what they bought at the corresponding time the pervious year *PBLA*, vol. LVIII, Dec. 2, 1940, p. 203.
196. *Annual Market Review*, 1940, p. 48. By the beginning of the harvesting season the mills had built a reserve stock of both jute manufactures and raw jute. *Ibid.*
197. *Star of India*, Sept 30, 1940.
198. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Oct. 27, 1940.
199. *Star of India*, Nov. 5, 1940.
200. *PBLA*, vol. LVIII, Dec. 2, 1940, p. 203.
201. *Star of India*, Dec. 21, 1940.
202. *Statesman*, May 1, 1941.
203. *PABLA*, vol. LVIII, Dec. 2, 1940, p. 246.
204. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
205. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
206. *Statesman*, Feb. 27, 1941. Bengal usually imported a substantial quantity of rice from Burma.
207. *PBLA*, vol. LIX, No. 3, Mar. 12, 1941, p. 133.
208. *Ibid.*, No. 2, Mar. 3, 1941, p. 240.
209. *Ibid.*, No. 3, Mar. 12, 1941, p. 156.
210. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
211. The Bengal Raw Jute Taxation Bill, 1941, *PBLA*, vol. LX, No. 1, July 30, 1941, p. 130.
212. *Capital*, Aug. 28, 1941.
213. *PBLA*, vol. LX, No. 3, Aug. 18, 1941, p. 118.
214. 5,47,000 bales against 13,186,000 bales in 1940. *Annual Market Review*, 1942, p. 14.
215. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, July 8, 1941. The actual market price for high quality jute was Rs. 10.50 per *maund* but the mills suggested Rs. 8.50.
216. *Ibid.*
217. *Statesman*, July 17, 1940.
218. *Capital*, Nov. 6, 1941.

219. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of August, 1941.
220. *Statesman*, Oct. 9, 1941.
221. *Governor's Report : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, A similar increase was recommended by the IJMA. *Capital*, Nov. 27, 1941.
222. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Jan. 25, 1942.
223. *Capital*, Nov. 27, 1941.
224. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Aug. 10, 1942. The central government was considering the 'rationalisation' plan as a remedial measure against possible labour shortage in case the war zone extended to Bengal.
- Ibid.*
225. *Statesman*, Feb. 26, 1942.
226. *PBLA*, vol. LXII, No. 1, Feb. 24, 1942, p. 318.
227. For details see below pp. 432-441. *Ibid.*
228. *Capital*, Dec. 4, 1941.
229. *PBLA*, vol. LXII, No. 2, Mar. 2, 1942, p. 71.
230. *Ibid.*, vol. LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 25, 1942, p. 66.
231. *Statesman*, Apr. 2, 1942.
232. *Market Review*, 1942, p. 14.
233. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
234. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Apr. 21, 1942.
235. *PBLA*, vol. LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 25, 1942, p. 57.
236. *Market Review*, 1942, p. 13; IJMA's annual report, *Statesman*, Feb. 25, 1943.
237. In certain districts it was selling at Rs. 3 *maund*. *PBLA*, vol. LXIII, No. 1, Sept. 15, 1942, p. 7.
238. See below, pp. 452.
239. *Statesman*, Dec. 17, 24, 1942. *Ibid.*
240. *PBLA*, vol. LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 25, 1942.
241. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Sept. 20, 1942.
242. *Ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1942.
243. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Oct. 5, 1942.
244. See Fazlul Huq's statement, *PBLA*, vol. LXIV, No. 3, Mar. 15, 1943, p. 394 also see the statement of the chairman of the IJMA, *Statesman*, Feb. 25, 1943.
245. The movement was aimed at forcing Britain to leave India. For details see Government of India, *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances 1942-43* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1943).
246. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Oct. 22, 1942.
247. *PBLA*, vol. LXIV, No. 1, Feb. 22, 1943, p. 302.
248. *Ibid.*, vol. LXIII, No. 1, Sept. 27, 1942, p. 168.
249. Abdur Rahman Siddique on the special resolution moved by him on the government's failure to take effective measures to secure fair and reasonable prices for jute. *PBLA*, vol LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 25, 1942, p. 53.
250. *Ibid.*
251. *Report on Indian Constitutional Reform*, par. 344.

CHAPTER SIX

Reforms and Reaction

Introduction

The scheme of provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935, granted full responsible government in Bengal with few 'safeguards'. After the election of 1937 a Muslim dominated ministry adopted a series of administrative and legislative measures. The ministry owed its political control of the province to the Muslim electorate ; therefore, many of these measures were designed to cater to the interests of the Muslim masses. The Hindu middle class reacted by bitterly opposing the ministry both from within the legislature and outside since some of the measures affected their vested interest. Hindu opposition hardened the Muslim attitude and to counter this the ministry started to depend on the Muslims more and more for political support. A struggle ensued for political power and for the opportunities which political power conferred, resulting in the general deterioration of the communal relations.

As long as political authority was firmly established in British hands, Hindu-Muslim rivalry was contained within a narrow field involving only the middle classes, but with the introduction of self government, communal ill-feelings were carried for the first time to the countryside. Extension of the franchise had vested political authority in the peasantry and the middle class political elite felt it necessary to maintain their political strength with the support of the village masses. The defection of the League from the Coalition Party in 1941 and the organisation of a broad-based inter-communal ministry arrested the course of the deteriorating communal relations in the province. But unfortunately the reconstituted ministry became the target of a fierce attack by the Muslim communalists who had gone into opposition. Ultimately this led to the downfall of the Huq ministry which set the process of the rigid political separatism between the Hindus and the

Muslims. In the following pages an effort will be made to discuss some aspects of these complexities of Bengal politics.

The Ministry At Work

On the eve of their assumption of office the Coalition Party adopted a fifteen point programme.¹ It included the appointment of a land revenue commission to suggest ways and means to replace the Permanent Settlement by a more 'equitable system and laws suitable to the needs and requirements of the people.' Other points in the programme were: reduction of agricultural rents and rural indebtedness; abolition of landlord's customary exactions (*abwabs* and *nazar sala-mi*); regulation of jute prices; repeal of tobacco taxes and taxes on the necessities of life; introduction of measures of public health and rural sanitation; encouragement of rural cooperative societies for the economic advancement of the people; solution of the unemployment problem; reduction in the cost of administration; introduction of free compulsory primary education without taxation of the poor who were unable to bear the burden; administrative reorganisation of the secondary education and university education; amendment of the Calcutta Municipal Act; and abolition of repressive laws and the release of political prisoners consistent with public safety.²

The striking feature of the programme was its emphasis on agrarian problems. Bengal was predominantly an agricultural country and the land was the basis of life for the great majority of the people. Consequently the masses could be immediately and profoundly aroused by anything which touched the land, in particular land revenue and land tenure. With the political strength of the ministry mainly dependent on the support of the peasantry, the ministry appreciated the importance of appealing to the rural masses by recognizing their interest which were so fundamental and intense in their everyday living.

The ministry lost no time in implementing their programme. In a policy statement the ministry announced that it was dedicated 'to lift the masses from the depths of misery, ignorance and poverty to which they have sunk and to help the nation to march forward as rapidly as possible to its political destiny.'³ In the first budget session of the Legislative Assembly the ministry announced its decision to appoint a commission to examine the system of land revenue in Bengal

with particular reference to the Permanent Settlement (*zamindari* system).⁴ The commission submitted its report in 1940. The majority recommended the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and suggested a system which would convert the cultivators into direct government tenants.⁵ A minority of the members, mostly Hindu landholders, held the view that state acquisition of the *zamindari* system would not only be a hazardous experiment financially, but also was undesirable for social and economic reasons.⁶ They contended that liquidation of the estates of the *zamindars* would be disastrous to the Bengali middle class and would lead to social upheaval in Bengal.⁷

The report provides valuable insight into the nature of agrarian problems in Bengal and the extent to which the peasants, landlords and other agricultural interests were organised. It is interesting to note that while the entire peasantry represented by the Proja Samity, the Bengal Kisan Sabha and other local associations testified to the commission demanding immediate abolition of the Permanent Settlement, all the landholder's associations and many middle class groups including the local bar (lawyer) associations favoured the retention of the existing system. The Bar Association and People's Association of Khulna in their joint evidence opposed the abolition of the *zamindari* system on the grounds that it will create 'a sort of revolution through which it will probably take another century to bring back stable conditions.'⁸ Similarly, the Bar Association of Dinajpur pleaded for the retention of the Permanent Settlement in the interest of the middle class.⁹

It is the middle class of Bengal that has contributed to the cultural, economic, religious and social development of the country and it is this class which is responsible for the growing political consciousness of the people. The principle means of subsistence of this class is land. To deprive this class of people of land will mean their extinction. We oppose this.

It is also significant that both the League and the Congress did not testify before the commission although they were requested to do so. These two parties had a large following among the landholders and the middle classes with interests in land whom they were therefore afraid to alienate.

The recommendations of the commission were never put into effect,

After the report was submitted, the ministry decided to postpone its implementation until the end of the war and appointed a special officer to examine the report mainly from financial and administrative points of view.¹⁰ The actual reason for which the ministry did not act on the report was its fear of antagonising the Hindu *bhadrolock* who had direct interest in the retention of the existing system. Besides, because a majority of ministers were landholders, they were not keen in giving effect to the recommendations of the commission.

The ministry also introduced a series of legislations modifying the existing tenancy laws.¹¹ The new enactments conferred extensive rights on the tenants by restricting powers of the landlords to recover arrear rent or to enhance rent, abolishing landlord's fees on the transfer of holdings and reducing rates of interest on arrears of rent. These reforms were very similar to those of the corresponding legislation in the Congress provinces.¹²

The tenancy legislations in Bengal were accompanied by measures for relief of rural indebtedness.¹³ To curb the activities of the village moneylenders a bill was introduced in 1939 which required all the moneylenders to be licensed and interest rates were fixed both on secured and unsecured loans.¹⁴ Furthermore, to lighten the burden of debt of the peasantry, the ministry speeded up the works of the debt settlement boards under the newly created department of rural indebtedness.¹⁵ By the end of 1939, 3,316 boards were established in 25 districts of Bengal and debts amounting to approximately 60 million rupees were scaled down all over the province.¹⁶ To launch an effective 'co-operative movement' for inculcating the spirit of self help among the peasantry and eliminating their dependence on the moneylenders, necessary legislations were passed in 1940.¹⁷

The Bengal Famine Insurance Fund Act of 1938 created a fund partly by government grant and partly by public contribution for the relief and insurance against famine.¹⁸ Another bill was enacted in 1939 to provide relief to the poor and unemployed in rural areas.¹⁹ To remove the difficulties in agricultural marketing and ensure fair prices to the cultivators an Agricultural Produce Market Bill was introduced in 1939.²⁰

Alongside the legislative measures, the government took some administrative action to uplift the conditions of the rural masses. A

rural reconstruction department was established in 1938 to organise and coordinate village development works.²¹ Government grants were allocated annually for medical facilities, water supply, sanitation and drainage in rural areas.²² An adult education programme was carried on in rural areas by the education department in collaboration with the rural reconstruction department.²³ In addition the ministry appointed an adult education committee to investigate the problem of adult education.²⁴

The government also took measures to improve the conditions of factory workers. The Bengal Workman's Protection Act of 1940 gave relief to the labouring classes from the tortures of the moneylenders.²⁵ Another act of the same year regulated holidays, leaves, payment of wages and hours of work.²⁶ Another act introduced benefits to women factory workers by allowing them to keep their job and obtain subsistence during the period of childbirth.²⁷ The government also established a new labour department in charge of a labour commissioner²⁸ and encouraged the development of a 'sound trade union movement.'²⁹

The government took some steps to tackle the problem of middle class unemployment and appointed an officer to consider the question of unemployment.³⁰ The employment advisor periodically issued handbooks giving details of job opportunities.³¹ The department of industries of the government also launched a scheme for relieving middle class unemployment which provided facilities for training of middle class young men in local and indigenous industries.³² Industrial demonstrations were organised in suitable centres of the province and district industrial associations were formed to encourage young men to receive training in industries.³³

The legislative and administrative measures adopted by the ministry were no doubt impressive and compared favourably with the achievements of the Congress provinces, but some of the measures were taken in haste without giving due considerations to their effects. Promotion of factional interest in the Coalition Party also prevented the adoption of comprehensive plans.³⁴ The operation of the Moneylender's Act and the Agricultural Debtor's Act froze rural credit facilities to the eventual predicament of the cultivators who had to borrow money for sowing seeds or purchasing cattle at the harvest time or even

for maintaining themselves until the next harvest was reaped. The government sponsored rural cooperative credit societies covered only six per cent of the rural population.³⁵ The sudden liquidation of indebtedness of the *ryots*, the drastic tenancy legislations conferring extensive rights to them and the constant wooing of the peasantry both by the ministerial coalition and the opposition created in the countryside a 'no rent mentality' or an agitation to withhold the payment of rent.³⁶ This affected the government's revenue collection. Lack of coordination between the different departments created unnecessary administrative problems.³⁷ Due to inadequate finances, many rural development projects also had to be abandoned.

One major shortcoming of the ministry was its total inertia towards encouraging the growth of rural self-governing institutions. The wide extension of franchise had put real power in the villages which undoubtedly fostered political consciousness among the hitherto inert rural masses. For lack of institutional participation at local levels, this newly generated political consciousness could not find a proper direction and at the hands of misguided politicians it could be easily employed in creating communal ill-feeling and in promoting factional interest. To make the provincial autonomy meaningful to the masses, proper institutions of self-government should have been organised at the grass root level. Barring an ephemeral effort in 1938 to renovate the archaic village self government law of 1888³⁸ and the setting up the Chowkidary Enquiry Committee to suggest reforms in the existing village police system,³⁹ there is nothing to record to the credit of the Huq ministry. Even two non-official bills for reforms of the local institutions were shelved by the ministry.⁴⁰ Perhaps it was feared that any proposal for reforms of the local self government system would inevitably result in controversies over the electoral system, thereby spreading communal bitterness in the villages.

Hindu Reaction

The ministry's programme of reform bore heavily on the Hindu *bhadrolok*. The establishment of debt settlement boards, restrictions on the activities of the moneylenders and the tenancy reform were prejudicial to the Hindu interest since the overwhelming majority of the *zamindars* and *mahajans* were Hindus.⁴¹ The operation of the

Debtor's Act was a salutary reform in relieving the peasantry from the burden of debt although in some areas it led to a drastic reduction of credit.⁴³ The Land Revenue Commission in its report categorically stated that the debt settlement boards served a very useful purpose 'when indebtedness had become such a serious problem in the province' and that 'grave results might have ensued had there been no means for bringing creditors and debtors together.'⁴³ Nevertheless, the Hindu *bhadrolaks* severely criticized the Debtor's Act and demanded that it should be repealed. The *zamindars* complained that the act interfered with 'the sanctity of arrear rent' and hence added to their difficulties in realising rents from the peasants.⁴⁴ They were also found to be discouraging the tenants resorting to the boards. The *mahajans* clamoured that the act destroyed their hereditary means of livelihood.⁴⁵ Hindus in the legal profession also protested because the quasi-judicial nature of the boards deprived them from the handsome income they usually earned from the lengthy legal suits involving rural indebtedness.⁴⁶

Similarly, although the Muslims strongly supported the Agricultural Produce Market Bill providing the establishment of government controlled markets and licensing of private markets for agricultural products the bill was a very necessary measure. This did not stop the Hindus from protesting the bill. They were convinced that the real intention of the bill was to give the Muslims the power to expropriate or break up markets of private landowners by indirect means.⁴⁷

The legislation to control the activities of the village money lenders undoubtedly originated from the Muslims but its application benefitted both the Hindu and Muslim *ryots*. Because the measure was injurious to the professional interest of a segment of the Hindu *bhadrolak*, it was fiercely protested by the *bhadrolak* class as an anti-Hindu legislation.⁴⁸ Under pressure from their 'wild men' and as a means to win the good will of the Muslim masses, the Congress refrained from opposing the bill in the legislature. This involved the Congress in criticism from the Hindu press that it was more preoccupied in befriending the Muslims than in looking after the vital interest of the Hindu community.⁴⁹ The Hindu press was quite prepared to preach socialistic views but was far too concerned with the middle class Hindu interest to regard the measure with equanimity.

The tenancy legislations in Bengal were somewhat similar to those of the corresponding legislations in the Congress provinces and their operations gave widespread satisfaction to the *ryots*.⁵⁰ But to the Hindus of Bengal the tenancy reform was a serious challenge against their vested interests in land and an incitement to the peasantry to upset the traditional functioning of the landlord-tenant system.⁵¹ They felt aggrieved that one of the most stable classes in the country was 'let down for political effect.'⁵² A series of petitions was submitted to the governor by various landholder's associations urging him to withdraw his assent to the Tenancy Bill of 1938.⁵³ Even a Muslim *zamindar* Sir A.H. Ghuznavi, said publicly that all the *zamindars* of Bengal, Hindu and Muslim, were 'united as one man in their determination to fight to the last the attempt of the Bengal ministry to place the Tenancy Bill in the statute book.'⁵⁴ The Hindu press gave their full support to the agitation against the bill and when the bill was finally put in the statute book the Hindu press completely ignored the subject.⁵⁵

Representatives of the Hindu landholders resisted the bill in every stage of its consideration by the legislature. To obstruct the passage of the bill, no fewer than 1700 amendments were pressed in the assembly.⁵⁶ Maharajkumar Uday Chand Mahtab of Burdwan opposed the bill as expropriatory in nature and pleaded that the landlords have a special claim for protection because it was for the help of the landlords that the British rule in India was established' and they 'represented creative forces in society stable elements in the polity and great interests in the body economic of the country.'⁵⁷ In the upper house the landlord group left the chamber in protest when the final vote on the Tenancy Bill was taken.⁵⁸ The leader of the group, the Maharaja of Santosh, deplored that 'the majority are bent upon tyrannising the helpless minority (*zamindars*) for political aggrandisement,' and invoked the protection of the British Government.⁵⁹

The uncompromising attitude of the landholders to the tenancy reform put the Congress in an awkward situation. On the one hand, in case the Congress supported the bill, it was sure to lose the sympathy of the powerful and influential landowning class, and on the other hand, if it sided with the *zamindars*, it would have certainly antagonised its own progressive elements and the Muslims. Therefore, as a face saving strategy, the Congress declared that it was 'not in favour of perpetuation

of landlordism' but opposed the bill on the grounds that it did not go far enough.⁶⁰ When a 'division' was taken on the bill, the Congress Party abstained from voting⁶¹ and once the bill was passed, the Congress, curiously enough, organised mass rallies against the ministry for delay in obtaining the assent of the governor to the bill.⁶²

The intransigence of the Hindus to the tenancy reform was naturally looked upon by the Muslims with utmost mistrust. As a counterweight to the Hindu representations to the governor, the Muslim members of the Coalition Party submitted a memorandum setting forth the arguments in favour of the Tenancy Bill and threatening that if the bill was not assented by the governor 'a political crisis will arise of the most serious character which is likely to render constitutional government impossible in Bengal.'⁶³ Muslim mass meetings were also organised throughout Eastern Bengal urging the approval of the governor to the bill.⁶⁴ Because the bulk of the opposition against the tenancy reform came from the Hindu *zamindars*, an analogy was easily drawn that it was the Hindu communal antipathy that was at work to stall a reform which was to benefit the Muslim peasants. In retrospect it may be said that if the agrarian reform was initiated by a ministry with the cooperation of the Congress or any other party with substantial support from the Hindus, controversies over it certainly would not have taken a communal character. The governor of Bengal reported that of the 410 letters and telegrams he received from various peasant groups, all, excepting four, were in favour of his granting assent to the bill.⁶⁵ Thus, what was originally a conflict of interest between the landlords and tenants ultimately gained a communal complexion.

While the agrarian reforms indirectly threatened the Hindu interest, a measure which appeared to be blatantly anti-Hindu and a serious challenge to the political power of the Hindu community was the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment) Act of 1939.⁶⁶ The act introduced separate electorate for the Muslims and Anglo-Indians and reserved certain seats for the Scheduled Castes by reducing caste Hindu representation. Under the act, 93 seats of the councillors of the Calcutta Corporation were distributed in the following manner : general (or Hindu) 47, of which 4 seats were reserved for the Scheduled Castes to be returned by joint electorate; Muslims 22; Anglo-Indian 2; labour 2; representatives of commerce and trade 12; seats to be filled by

government nomination 8, of which 3 were reserved for the Scheduled Castes.

Ever since the year 1923, when the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment) Act was passed by the Bengal 'dyarchy' council, the Calcutta Corporation 'became the forum of nationalist politics.'⁶⁷ Sir Surendranath Banerjea, who initiated the amendment of 1923, remarked in the council : 'here in the control of the municipal affairs of Calcutta as constituted under the new Act, we have a veritable Swaraj in the government of the second city of the Empire.'⁶⁸ This legislation of 1923 which amended the Municipal Act of 1899 conferred greater power to the corporation which was to be for the first time exercised by councillors and aldermen, a majority of whom (80 out of 90) were to be elected.⁶⁹

When the act of 1923 was discussed in the 'dyarchy' council a section of the Muslims, by drawing an analogy to the electoral principle in the Government of India Act of 1919, demanded the adoption of separate electorate for the Muslims in the constitution of the corporation. It was argued that although the Muslims constituted one fourth of the population of the city⁷⁰ in the past they have been 'practically unrepresented in the corporation except through government nominations.'⁷¹ In making this claim an important fact that was ignored was that a large segment of the Muslim population of the city was industrial labour, mostly immigrant from other provinces, who took very little interest in municipal politics. However, to accommodate the Muslim demand a compromise formula was adopted by which 15 Muslim councillors were to be elected on the principle of separate electorate. This provision was to remain in effect for a period of 9 years after which 15 reserved seats for the Muslims were to be elected through joint electorate.⁷²

In the first Calcutta municipal election held in 1923, the Swaraj Party with strong Muslim support won an overwhelming majority of seats and C.R. Das was elected the first Mayor and a Muslim lieutenant of Das was chosen as the deputy mayor. After the death of Das conflict developed between the Hindus and Muslims in the city's government. The Muslims had hoped that appointments under the corporation would be granted to them up to the percentage laid down in the Hindu-Muslim pact of C.R. Das. But this policy received very little

support from the Hindu members. C.R. Das's death also led to factionalism within the Swaraj and the Congress resulting in ineffective administration of the corporation.⁷³ During the decade following Das's death the corporation became a hot bed of terrorist and subversive groups. It was believed by the government that the corporation and its machinery was used for subsidising the terrorists.⁷⁴ Naturally, strained relations developed between the government and the Congress councillors of the corporation.

The question of setting up a committee of enquiry in the affairs of the corporation was mooted by the Government of Bengal from time to time,⁷⁵ and even the secretary of state for India desired such an enquiry.⁷⁶ For fear of offending the Hindu nationalists, the Government of Bengal refrained from instituting an enquiry.⁷⁷ But an amending bill was introduced in the 'dyarchy' council in 1932 providing for disqualification for appointment in the services of the corporation of any person who had been convicted of offence against the state and prohibiting grants-in-aid to any educational institution employing such persons.⁷⁸ In justification of the bill, the government circulated a pamphlet containing statistics of persons convicted of terrorist and subversive activities while employed by the corporation.⁷⁹ The pamphlet also quoted a series of resolutions passed by the corporation praising the action of the terrorists and supporting the civil disobedience movement. The Congress and the nationalist press raised a great outcry against the bill.⁸⁰ However, in spite of their opposition the bill was passed into law in August 1933 with strong Muslim and European support. To the Hindus this was an Anglo-Muslim chicanery to weaken their hold in the largest self-governing institution of the province and a clear indication of an ominous future when attempts would be made for an artificial stabilization of power at the hands of the Muslims with the help of special constituencies.

The apprehension of the Hindus proved to be real when in 1933, after the end of nine years, the question of electoral principle of the corporation was reopened and there was a general Muslim demand for separate electorate. The 'Communal Award' undoubtedly provided the incentive for the Muslim demand. Matters came to a head in January 1936 when all the Muslim councillors except one resigned as a protest against what they considered 'to be an injustice to their commu

nity in the matter of recruitment of the corporation staff.⁸¹ This was followed by a general Muslim boycott of the elections of the corporation until the demand for separate electorate was recognized. Taking advantage of this situation, a section of the Schedule Castes also demanded separate representation for their community as 'joint electorates will deprive the Scheduled Castes from genuine representation ... and those who were subservient to the wishes of the caste Hindus will be elected to the great detriment of the interest of the community.'⁸² The Scheduled Castes were obviously induced in such an action by the Muslims who thought it to be advantageous to split the ranks of the Hindus to obtain a strong foothold in the corporations.

The election of a Muslim Congressman, A.K.M. Zakariah, as the Mayor in 1938 irritated the Muslims and intensified their determination for separate electorate. They called the election 'a stabbing on the Muslims by the Congress,'⁸³ and demanded separate electorate as the only safeguard to the Muslim interests.⁸⁴ On the mayoral election the governor reported: 'It is a good example of the tactlessness of the Congress leaders in Calcutta and it has certainly failed in its object which was to show goodwill to the Muslims.'⁸⁵ One of the strong causes cited by the Muslims for introducing the amending act of 1939 was: 'election through joint electorate does not assure the return of men on the corporation who really represent the view of the Muslim community in matters vitally affecting their interests.'⁸⁶

In view of the legislative majority of the Muslims and constitutional provision for separate electorate, it was inevitable that the Muslims would demand separate electorate in the corporation, but very few Hindus were prepared to realize this. The act of 1939 for the first time introduced communal representation on the basis of separate electorate in the formation of a local self-governing institution.⁸⁷ It was feared by the Hindus that similar legislations affecting other institutions in the *mufassil* would reduce their control over those institutions especially in East Bengal. The greatest grievance of the Hindus against the new municipal legislation was the distribution of seats of the corporation which was deliberately calculated to end the preponderance of the Hindus from the most important stronghold of their political power.

Granting of special representation to the Scheduled Castes was also an insult to the Hindu *bhadrolok* who were still agitating for the abrogation of the 'Communal Award' and the Poona Pact.

The new municipal act raised a furour among the Hindus and wide protests were heard throughout the province. During the course of a debate in the assembly on the act, a Hindu MLA referred to it as a 'pernicious measure' and a 'tyranny of the majority.'⁸⁸ Another member looked upon it as 'a conspiracy of the European group in not allowing the two communities to work together'.⁸⁹ The European group's contention that they supported the bill to get a 'balance of power' in the corporation only strengthened the ground for such an allegation.⁹⁰ Suggestions were also made that the whole scheme was inspired by the non-Bengali Muslim community who had no chance of being elected through joint electorate.⁹¹ Even a Muslim MLA said that 'under the false cry of representing Muslim interests in the Calcutta Corporation the non-Bengali elements are trying to perpetuate their hold in Calcutta'.⁹² These remarks were based on the fact the leading role in the Muslim demand for separate electorate in the corporation was played by some non-Bengali Muslims, namely, Ispahani, Siddique, and Mulla Jan Muhammad.

The most bitter opposition against the Calcutta Municipal Act came from the militant Hindu Mahasabha who called the act anti-Hindu and anti-national.⁹³ In the legislature the Mahasabha leader Syma Prasad Mookerjee attacked the measure as 'nothing but an outrage on Hindu rights and privileges' and an instrument of 'dividing the Hindus, of weakening them, of crushing them.'⁹⁴ In desperation Mookerjee warned:⁹⁵

My last appeal to the government is this : realise that there are dark and ominous clouds today geathering over the horizon of this province. The choice between peace and conflict is to be made by the government with a full sense of responsibility. If you fight, we also fight for our lives, our rights, our liberties.

The threat to violence met with counter threats from the Muslims⁹⁶ and was followed by mutual recriminations. The Muslims were arrogant, the Hindus despondent. As communal distrust became strong, the government appeared to be partisan and the task of administration, especially maintenance of law and order and keeping communal peace became increasingly difficult.

Hindu ire was aroused over the persistent demand of the Muslims

for communal reservation in the recruitment of government servants with a view to achieving parity among the various communities in the public services of the province. One of the earliest political grievances of the Bengali Muslims was their inadequate representation in the public services and this had greatly determined the course of Muslim politics. The British Government in India recognized the authenticity of the Muslim grievance and from time to time adopted measures to ameliorate it which, however, only served to strengthen the Muslim case. In 1914 the Government of Bengal issued an order that at least one third of all ministerial (clerical) appointments should go to the Muslims.⁹⁷ The chief secretary of the Government of Bengal in his minute of September 17, 1925 observed that the 'Muhammadans constitute a majority of the population and that in many respects the interests of the majority are better served by Muhammadan officers than by Hindu officers.'⁹⁸ A communique of the Government of Bengal of September 21, 1925 stated :⁹⁹

Quite apart from their official duties administrative officers of Government are through their position, able to exercise a beneficent influence over the lives and general fortunes of the people, and the Governor in Council has met with numerous instances in which Muhammadan officers have advanced the interests of their community by encouraging them to exertions often in connection with educational institutions. In Bengal, the majority of the population is Muhammadan, and the Governor in Council has been convinced that without a large proportion of Muhammadan officers in administrative posts than are now employed, the general interest of the population as a whole are not likely to be secured. Putting aside the natural reliance of members of the several communities on officers of their own community in times of tension the Governor in Council considers it inevitable that Muhammadans will be in a closer sympathy with the needs and aspirations of a Muhammadan community than any other officer.

The Government of India also admitted the existence of the Muslim grievance and adopted a resolution on July 4, 1934 to the effect that different communities should get appointments in the government services on the basis of their numerical strength.¹⁰⁰ Even the Congress in Bengal was convinced of the justice of the Muslim grievance and admitted that the Muslims did not enjoy a proper share in the administration of the province.¹⁰¹

In spite of these official pronouncements at the time of the inauguration of the provincial autonomy a gross disparity existed between

the Hindus and the Muslims in the public services. In all cadres of the provincial civil services, only 33 per cent of the appointments were held by the Muslims¹⁰² and nearly 75 per cent of the expenditures incurred in salaries of government employees from the provincial exchequer went to the Hindus.¹⁰³ Therefore, the coming to power of a Muslim dominated ministry led to a renewed Muslim demand for preferential treatment for the community in the recruitment policy of the government. They argued that if self-government were to be real, the administration of the province should be run by people who were capable of evincing the goodwill of the majority of the people.

Immediately after the Huq ministry was installed, a memorial was presented to the chief minister signed by a large number of Muslims belonging to the Coalition Party demanding 75 per cent of all new appointments in the cooperative department for the Muslims.¹⁰⁴ Again during the budget session in 1938 a 'cut motion' was pressed for the ministry's failure to reserve a certain percentage of government jobs for the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes.¹⁰⁵ To meet these pressures the chief minister assured a cabinet decision on the question in the future 'so long as they do not infringe upon the legitimate rights and interests of the other communities.'¹⁰⁶ Although Huq was in sympathy with the Muslim claim for a larger share in the government jobs, he could not ignore the fact that any sudden reversal of the existing structure would certainly cause grave resentment among the Hindus. Moreover, forcible closure of the doors of legitimate employment opportunities to the Hindu youth could easily turn them into potential terrorists and anti-ministerial activities.

Since the promised cabinet decision was not forthcoming, the issue was once again raised in the assembly. On August 24, 1938 a resolution was tabled by a Scheduled Caste member that to curtail the cost of administration and minimise the unemployment problem, all provincial government servants should be compulsorily retired after 25 years of service.¹⁰⁷ Obviously the real objective of the resolution, which was passed by the overwhelming support of the Muslims and Scheduled Castes in the Coalition Party, was to expedite the retirement of the existing officers, most of whom were Hindus, so that the Muslims and Scheduled Castes could be employed in the vacancies. In anticipation of the serious repercussion of the Hindu middle class

against the resolution, the ministry tried to shelve it by raising some technical points and remained neutral while the resolutions was voted upon. After the resolution was passed, the ministry made no effort to implement it.¹⁰⁸

On August 24, another resolution was introduced threatening the class interest of the Hindu *bhadrolok* even more seriously. This resolution sponsored by a Muslim MLA Abdul Hafiz, and 25 other members of the Coalition Party recommended that all government appointments should be based on a communal quota of 60 per cent for the Muslims, 20 per cent for the Scheduled Castes, and 20 per cent for the 'rest'.¹⁰⁹ Apprehensive of the communal bitterness that a full scale debate on the resolution could provoke, the ministry abstained from participating in the discussion on the resolution. In announcing this, the chief minister stated his firm determination to hold the scale even between the various contending communities so that the government could 'draw forth the willing allegiance of all communities'.¹¹⁰ He also made a passionate appeal to the Muslims to abandon the mad scramble for jobs: 'We have come to power not for the sake of plunder.'¹¹¹ However, the governor was later informed that the ministry made no serious effort to prevent voting on the resolution; their objective was to put Sarat Bose, who was too prone to allure the Muslims with 'big promises' in an awkward position.¹¹² The ministers only realised too late that the trick had recoiled upon them as a boomerang by creating demands that it was impossible to satisfy.

The Hafiz resolution spread panic among the Hindu community and the whole province reverberated with protest. On account of their superior educational attainments and their predominance amongst the educated classes in Bengal, the Hindu *bhadrolok* had hitherto enjoyed superemacy in the public services. The proposal for communal reservation naturally brought extreme disappointment of personal and family hopes. At a time when the income from land on which the *bhadrolok* depended was showing signs of uncertainty and when the ever present problem of middle class unemployment was haunting the *bhadrolok*, the grim possibility of shrinkage of avenues of employment and advancement brought him to the breaking point.

The Hindu press unanimously condemned the resolution.¹¹³ Protest meetings were organised throughout the province by the Hindu

bhadrolok. The Hindu Mahasabha raised the cry of Hinduism in danger, branded the Huq ministry as a 'Muslim Raj' from which the Hindus could not expect justice and advocated its removal.¹¹⁴ In a memorandum submitted to the governor the Hindus opposed the principle of communal reservation in government jobs as unjust and unfair to their community and threatened that failure to protect the legitimate interests of the Hindus would affect the peace and tranquility of the province.¹¹⁵ A Hindu member of the cabinet also circulated a note that public servants recruited on the basis of communal ratio would be so at the cost of efficiency.¹¹⁶

The Hindu attitude was further hardened by the publication of an indiscreet private letter in a section of the Calcutta press addressed by the chief minister to one of his political supporters.¹¹⁷ In that letter the chief minister had expressed his mistrust of the Hindu government officials on whom he had to depend. This naturally produced a chorus of condemnation from the entire Hindu press.¹¹⁸ Huq offered a public apology for the letter which he said was written in a 'moment of temporary exasperation.'¹¹⁹ Commenting on the incident the governor observed that 'such a letter written by anybody else would probably have done more political harm'.

The attitude of the Congress on this issue was ambivalent. Only a few days earlier, primarily to placate the Muslim opinion, the Congress had approved the Muslim claim for communal reservation in government jobs.¹²⁰ Therefore, when the Hafiz resolution was discussed in the assembly the Congress lent its support to it and recommended that the final decision of the government on the subject should be taken in a conference of the representatives of all parties.¹²¹ Outside the legislature Sarat Bose advocated the Muslim case for increasing their percentage in the government services.¹²² But the general agitation of the Hindu community against the Muslim demand forced the Congress to reverse its attitude. Clearly to extricate himself from the muddle into which he had gotten himself, Sarat Bose withdrew from the all parties conference which was convened at his suggestion, on the grounds that the ministry by its attitude on the Calcutta Municipal Bill and in other matters had shown itself incapable of doing communal justice.¹²³ He also made it a point that the Congress could not agree to the principle of communal representation since it would result in

splitting up the Indian nation into a number of self-conscious and water tight communities.¹²⁴ This volte face of the Congress was bound to affect its image so far as the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes were concerned. It seemed to them that the Congress in Bengal was engrossed more with the rancours of the Hindu *bhadrolok* than with their party interests.

With the full fury of the Hindu opposition to the proposal for fixing a communal percentage in the recruitment of public services, the ministry was reluctant to act upon the Hafiz resolution.¹²⁵ but the force of the Hindu opposition only intensified the determination of the Muslims to implement the resolution. Unable to resist the pressure of its followers,¹²⁶ the ministry after a prolonged deliberation adopted a compromise formula. According to this, all future direct recruitment to government services was to be based on the following communal quota : Muslims 50 per cent, Scheduled Caste 15 per cent, and the 'rest' 35 per cent.¹²⁷ The governor was impressed by the spirit of accommodation that was shown by the Muslim ministers, bearing in mind the very great pressure to which they were subjected by their followers.¹²⁸

The compromise formula somewhat appeased the Muslims although the chief minister had to face criticism from some of his followers on the grounds that it did not go far enough in the Muslim interest.¹²⁹ The Hindu agitation however, continued unabated as more allegations of ministerial interference in the government services of the provinces were publicised. The knowledge that some appointments were made by the government disregarding the recommendations of the Provincial Public Service Commission stirred up the Hindus greatly.¹³⁰ Although there was no constitutional provision binding the government to the recommendations of the commission so far as appointments were concerned,¹³¹ it was only reasonable that the government should adhere to the advice of the commission especially in cases where the commission had been consulted. What was more objectionable was that in defiance of the advice of the commission, many appointments and promotions were made simply on communal considerations so that competent persons were not selected.¹³² The complaints about the communal bias of the ministry demoralized the services and communal feelings were spread within the services giving rise to divided loyalties.

The progress achieved by the ministry in the field of education lagged much behind its promises but in this field the Hindu opposition was remarkably pronounced. The quinquennial report on the progress of education in the province recorded an increase in the number of both students and schools, but regretted the government's failure to solve the problem of primary education.¹³³ Soon after the assumption of office, the ministry had to abandon the proposal for free primary education mainly due to the inadequate financial resources of the province.¹³⁴ As an alternative measure the ministry decided to put into effect the existing Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act of 1930 which had created provision for the introduction of primary education in the rural areas through the imposition of an education 'cess' both on the cultivators as well as on the landowners.¹³⁵

While the decision of the ministry was generally welcomed by the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes,¹³⁶ the Hindu *bhadrolok* resented it.¹³⁷ The *bhadrolok* had no interest in contributing financially or otherwise to the creation of educational institutions in the villages since their children did not attend those institutions. Moreover, they were alarmed that wide dissemination of education might lead to social unrest in the countryside which would certainly endanger their interest by upsetting the traditional relationship between the landlords and the *ryots*. Therefore, to obstruct the scheme the Hindus started a propaganda that in the newly established primary schools the Muslim influence would dominate and Hindu pupils would be forced to receive instructions contrary to their religious beliefs.¹³⁸ The adoption of a few new text books written by Muslim authors was pointed out to be a sinister move 'to corrupt the Bengali language and undermine the foundations of Hindu culture.'¹³⁹ The Hindus also complained of communal discrimination in the distribution of scholarships and government grants to educational institutions.¹⁴⁰ The ministry usually refuted such charges¹⁴¹ but it had very little effect in abating the anti-ministerial activities of the Hindus.

From the beginning of the Huq ministry there was a consistent demand by a section of the Muslims to curb the Hindu influence in Calcutta University which had been predominantly a Hindu institution since its foundation in 1857.¹⁴² Largely to satisfy this demand a Muslim, Sir Azizul Huq, the speaker of the Legislative Assembly, was

appointed as the vice-chancellor of the university in 1938 and in the same year the Hindu emblem of 'sree and lotus' was removed from the crest of the university.¹⁴³ These moves naturally perturbed the Hindus but a far more serious affront on their interest was the introduction of the Secondary Education Bill of 1940 which sought to remove the control of the university from the secondary education of the province.¹⁴⁴ According to the bill the control and regulation of secondary education was to be vested in a board to be constituted on a communal distribution of seats.

The idea of the establishment of a board was nothing new. In 1919 an imperial commission to study the problem of university education had suggested the creation of such a board with 'adequate representation of Hindu and Muslim opinion and interest.'¹⁴⁵ Since then all government efforts to establish the board had failed due to strong opposition by the university.¹⁴⁶ Apart from the fact that communal allocation of seats in the proposed board was provocative to the Hindus, the bulk of the pupils and funds for the maintenance of secondary schools came from the Hindus. Obviously the establishment of the board would not only curtail the academic jurisdiction of the university but would also mean the end of Hindu influence in secondary education which they had exerted through their control of the university.

The bill, which was mainly supported by the Muslim League,¹⁴⁷ provided a common platform for carrying on a country-wide agitation by the Hindus in the name of Hindu culture. In a large protest meeting of the Hindu teachers from all over the province held in Calcutta in December 1940, demands were made for immediate withdrawal of the bill. The resolution passed in the meeting condemned the bill as 'especially designed to cripple the educational interests of the Hindus of Bengal' by making the interest of education subservient to political and communal considerations.¹⁴⁸ The university, then under a Muslim vice-chancellor, bitterly protested that the ministry did not consult it before drafting the bill and petitioned against the creation of the board.¹⁴⁹

In the legislature the bill met with the most vocal opposition from the Hindu members. One Hindu MLA called it 'ugly, official and communal.'¹⁵⁰ The Hindu Mashasabha leader, Mookerjee, roared :¹⁵¹

We shall never accept this bill and shall paralyse its operation if it is forced upon us. Education has been to us a vital and sacred thing in the building up of our national life, and we cannot allow the death knell of our culture and progress to be sounded by a band of reactionaries who have been impelled by a short-sighted policy to formulate their scheme of educational deformation, utterly unacceptable to all progressive sections of the people.

In the face of these angry protests the bill was shelved ; but when the same bill in a slightly modified version was reintroduced in 1942 by a new coalition ministry in which the Hindus dominated, the press remained indifferent and the party platforms ceased to protest it.¹⁵²

Opposition of the Congress

The Bengal Provincial Congress participated in full vigour in leading attacks on the ministry. The Congress parliamentary group in Bengal was an ineffective minority and had no possibility of forming a ministry by its own strength even if it were allowed to do so by the Congress 'High Command'. The party knew it had very little future in the Bengal legislature and accordingly assumed a role of 'irresponsible opposition',¹⁵³ Sarat Bose, leader of the Congress parliamentary party in Bengal, said in his first speech in the assembly that his party's objective was to 'combat the constitution and to end it if possible.'¹⁵⁴ With such an attitude by the opposition, effective functioning of the legislature was bound to be difficult.

The lead of the Congress was faithfully followed up by the Congress dominated press which directed its attack not only against the government but also against the ministers personally.¹⁵⁵ The Congress press was so partisan in spirit that in one breath it condemned the ministers for accepting office, and in another breath urged the Congress to accept office. Huq, in defence, maintained that his ministry was the target of attack by the Congress newspapers simply because it was non-Congress.¹⁵⁶ The predominance of the Hindu Congressmen in the opposition and the attitude of the Congress press was quickly interpreted by the Muslims as a manifestation of Hindu opposition to a Muslim government. The Muslim newspapers directed Muslim public opinion against the Hindus. The resulting mutual revilement was so much acrimonious that the universally venerated poet Tagore castigated the newspaper editors for transgressing the limits of propriety in journalism.¹⁵⁷

When the ministry was sworn in, Bengal was in the grip of a severe strike of the industrial workers which had started on February 1, 1937. Even before the ministry was installed, Jogesh Chandra Gupta, the Chief Whip of the Bengal Provincial Congress Assembly Party, presiding over a labour conference threw a challenge to Huq that he should seize the opportunity which the strike had now afforded him for fulfilling his electoral promises to the labouring classes.¹⁵⁸ Gupta, however, made no reference to Huq's personal initiative to resolve the strike.¹⁵⁹ On April 7, the Congress pressed an adjournment motion in the assembly to discuss the strike situation and ruthlessly criticized the government's labour policy although the government had as yet no chance to declare its policy. A spokesman of the Congress waxed eloquent on the inability of the government to check the exploitation of the masses by the capitalists and to grant the masses 'the elementary rights of citizenship and the ordinary privilege of existence.'¹⁶⁰

Anything which tended to embarrass the ministry was naturally welcome to the Congress. Therefore, the Congress readily availed of all the opportunities to incite industrial unrest and even worked in 'comparative harmony' with communist agitators.¹⁶¹ Addressing a mass meeting of the labourers in Calcutta convened by the All India Trade Union Congress on September 15, 1937, Sarat Bose assured his audience that his party would always espouse the cause of the workers.¹⁶² On October 29, the Congress organised a huge rally of the labourers to demonstrate the lack of confidence in the ministry by the working classes.¹⁶³ Largely because of these Congress instigations a series of violent labour strikes plagued the province during the entire period of the Huq ministry creating severe strains on the administrative machinery and also seriously affecting the prestige of the ministry among the working classes. To check the rapid erosion of support from the industrial proletariat, the labour minister, Suhrawardy, started a campaign to organise the Muslim industrial workers separately by feeding them the idea that the Congress was creating labour strikes to overthrow the Muslim administration of the province.¹⁶⁴ The effect was the spread of communal sentiments among the working classes and industrial strikes in most cases turned into communal strifes.¹⁶⁵

On April 1, 1937 the day of the inauguration of the new constitution the Congress launched a province-wide *hartal* against the consti-

tution.¹⁶⁶ As a precautionary measure the government had to arrest some Congress workers which gave a propaganda point to the Congress to create adverse public opinion against the ministry. Later in the summer, the Congress began an agitation against the ministry for release of all political prisoners and 'detenus' and repeal of repressive laws, although the Congress ministries in other provinces until then had not been able to release all political prisoners. The protest meetings organised in this connection were used as platforms to make highly inflammatory speeches against the ministry. On one occasion when a fracas took place between the police and the demonstrators the Congress sought unsuccessfully to capitalize on this by means of an adjournment motion in the assembly.¹⁶⁷ To put pressure on the ministry Gandhi also visited Bengal in November and pleaded for the release of the 'detenus'. He gave an undertaking on his part to do all that he could 'to counteract the venomous spirit of opposition' to the ministry, to satisfy himself by assurances from the 'detenus' that they will not engage in secret conspiracies or subversive movements as opposed to movements openly approved by the Congress, and to see that Congress does not countenance demonstrations in favour of released 'detenus'. He also promised to express the view that the Bengal ministry is as representative in Bengal as the Congress ministries are in the Congress provinces.¹⁶⁸

The question of release of the political prisoners and 'detenus' was an extremely vexed one. In recent years the province had a notorious record of political crime and terrorist activities.¹⁶⁹ When the ministry took office it not only inherited all repressive legislations of the past régime but with it 3,300 persons detained without trial.¹⁷⁰ The problem was complicated by the fact that although there was a considerable pressure from the left wing of the Proja Samity for 'wholesale release' of the 'detenus' the governor and the European group disapproved any such policy.¹⁷¹ Moreover, in the past between 1930 and 1935, release of political prisoners and 'detenus' was followed by a recrudescence of terrorism.¹⁷²

The ministry, therefore, had to be very cautious in tackling the problem. In August 1937 the government declared its policy of progressive release of 'detenus' as the situation improved and gave assurance that special cases would be considered separately where adequate

guarantees of good behaviour were provided,¹⁷³ By July 1938, the government had succeeded in releasing all the 'detenus'.¹⁷⁴ Many terrorist convicts were also released in 1938 leaving only 249 at the beginning of 1939.¹⁷⁵ Against the wishes of the British bureaucracy the ministry quietly allowed the Public Security Act of 1932 to lapse when it expired in December 1938.

The measures adopted by the ministry failed to satisfy the Congress and it carried on agitation for the release of political convicts and repeal of other repressive laws.¹⁷⁶ The continued pressure on the ministry was inspired not merely by altruistic motives but perhaps still more by the desire to force the ministry to get an awkward problem out of the way in order to make the path smoother for a new ministerial coalition with the Congress participating which certain elements in the Congress ardently desired. The agitation was also considered to be a powerful weapon to discredit the ministry and rehabilitate the Congress among the Hindus who felt aggrieved at the compromising attitude of the Congress on the legislative programme of the ministry.

In the summer of 1939 the Political Prisoners Release Committee of the Bengal Congress whipped up an agitation in Bengal and also in other provinces.¹⁷⁷ Violent and intemperate speeches were made and a flood of virulent articles appeared in the press, many of which contained open incitement to violence. These pressure tactics of the Congress bore fruit and by the end of the year only 80 political convicts remained in jail.¹⁷⁸ Much credit went to the Congress but the Congress came out of the agitation not without affecting party solidarity. During the course of the agitation a sharp rivalry developed between the left and right wings of the party for stealing the credit of forcing the government to release the prisoners. Also, the influx of the released prisoners to the Congress and their activities in fomenting agrarian and labour unrest alienated many conservative Hindu *bhadroloks* from the party.¹⁷⁹

Along with these overt anti-ministerial activities, the Congress, to put an end of the Huq ministry, also periodically resorted to various clandestine efforts to form an alternative ministry with the support of the progressive elements in the assembly which led to periodic defection from the Coalition Party.¹⁸⁰ With the dwindling majority the Huq ministry could survive only because of the factionalism and

indiscipline in the Congress ranks in Bengal. In marked contrast with its rigid discipline in provinces dominated by the Congress, the Bengal Congress was split in warring sections which even Gandhi's personal influence could not unite.¹⁸¹

In May 1939 Subhas Bose, confronted with the opposition of Gandhi resigned from the Congress presidentship and announced the formation of the Forward Bloc.¹⁸² The Gandhians retaliated by putting a ban on Bose for three years and replaced the Bose brothers by their rivals, B. C. Roy and P. C. Ghosh in the new Working Committee of the National Congress and by suspending the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee which continued to be controlled by the Bose group. The highhanded treatment of Subhas Bose by the All India Congress Committee and its interference in the internal affairs of the Bengal Congress caused a wave of resentment in the province. The Bose group more or less declared a revolt against the national leadership of the Congress which precipitated a series of struggles between the left and right wingers of the party in Bengal.¹⁸³ By the beginning of the new year the provincial Congress was not only rigidly divided into two hostile camps, the left wing or the Bose group and the right wing or the Roy group, but within these two camps there were also feuds over leadership and strategy.¹⁸⁴

The Congress party in Bengal was further weakened when in October 1939 the All India National Congress decided that all Congress ministries should immediately resign as a protest against the war policy of the British Government.¹⁸⁵ Imposition of this decision totally frustrated the lingering hope of the Bengali Hindus of the possibility of sharing power in the province and their continued association with the Congress appeared to be futile. On the eve of the decision taken by the Congress, B. C. Roy threatened to resign from the Working Committee as he was opposed to the non-cooperating attitude of his colleagues.¹⁸⁶ The prestige and good will of the Congress in Bengal was seriously damaged on another issue. Since the introduction of autonomy a bitter controversy developed in Bihar on the question of employment of the Bengalis in the government services and educational facilities for the Bengali speaking population of that province.¹⁸⁷ The Congress Working Committee on the recommendation of a Bihari, Rajendra Prasad, gave its verdict in favour of the Biharis which was,

therefore, prejudicial to the interests of the Bengalis.¹⁸⁸ To the Bengali Hindus this was a glaring case of the Congress's complete disregard of the interests of the province. However, the Bengali Hindus took strong objection to the employment of outsiders in Bengal.

The disunity in the Bengal Congress, its weak leadership and the antipathy of the Hindus towards its national leadership brought the province under the grip of the virulently communal party, the Hindu Mahasabha, which was bent on the vindication of the rights of the Hindus of Bengal. The efforts of the Mahasabha to organise a Hindu National Militia in 1940 to safeguard the rights of the Hindus was widely acclaimed by the Hindus.¹⁸⁹ The short-lived alliance between the Bose group and the Mahasabha between December 1939 and March 1940 in respect of the politics in the Calcutta Corporation¹⁹⁰ enhanced the prestige of the Mahasabha and was a definite indication of the growing strength of that party. The Mahasabha gained tremendous popularity when its candidate defeated the candidate of the Bose group in the Calcutta municipal election in 1940 and later in 1951 in a by-election to the Legislative Assembly. The rising popularity of the Mahasabha and its communal emphasis in politics fired the communal zeal of the League. The result was a grave menace to the communal peace in the province. Between March and October 1941, serious communal disturbances took place in Dacca city and district entailing the loss of several lives and extensive damage to properties. The whole province was put in the grip of terrible communal tension. Before the Dacca outbreak of 1941 there were only a few reports of any serious communal disturbances.¹⁹¹

A committee appointed by the Government of Bengal headed by justice G.D. McNair of the Calcutta High Court to enquire into the 'causes and nature' of the Dacca disturbances reported that while in the past communal disorders were caused by either religious, economic or political factors, all of these three factors seemed to have been present in 1941.¹⁹² Analysing the causes of the Dacca disorder, the committee reported that, apart from the legislative attack of the ministry on the Hindu interests, the feelings of both communities were inflamed by the vigorous propaganda in the press and by public speech by the protagonists of both the communities, especially the League and Mahasabha.¹⁹³ It is rather significant that the committee recorded in

its findings that disorders in the rural areas of the district were engineered by a band of 'outsiders' who spread false and exaggerated reports of the oppression of the Muslims in the city.¹⁹⁴ Although the communal disorders of 1941 were utterly reprehensible and cast serious aspersions on the Bengali political leadership, they indirectly contributed to give, at least temporarily, a new turn in Bengal's politics. In the aftermath of the Dacca disturbances remorse overtook many political leaders of both the communities and they earnestly desired to put an end to the senseless frenzy of communalism.

Inter-communal Ministry and the League's Opposition

Huq's entente with the League was not destined to last long. His personal relation with Jinnah was never cordial. Jinnah had never forgiven Huq for his refusal to merge the Proja Samity with the League in the election of 1937 or for Huq's initiative after the election to enter into a ministerial coalition with the Congress. The fabulous personal popularity of Huq in Bengal, and even outside of Bengal, was a threat to Jinnah, whose ambition was to be the undisputed leader of the Muslims of India.¹⁹⁵ Occasional rumours about Huq's overtures to Congress for an alternative ministerial coalition were a cause of great anxiety to Jinnah since Jinnah's claim to leadership could be seriously questioned if the League lost its political control in the largest Muslim populated province.

The first sign of a conflict between Huq and the League was apparent on the issue of war. Taking advantage of Britain's difficulties, the League, like the Congress, pressed for certain concessions from Britain if the cooperation of the Muslims in Britain's war efforts was to be forthcoming.¹⁹⁶ Huq denounced the bargaining attitude of the League as a 'humbug'.¹⁹⁷ He believed that the claims of the Congress and the League were 'mutually destructive'; that the 'real question was whether they were friends of Britain or not and for him there could be no question of conditional loyalty.'¹⁹⁸ Immediately following the viceroy's declaration of September 3, 1939,¹⁹⁹ Fazlul Huq offered full cooperation to Britain's war policy and to associate the people of the province to the war efforts of the government he actively assisted the governor in organising a provincial war committee.²⁰¹ As a further means to secure the cooperation of all sections of the people in the war

efforts, he suggested to the viceroy the formation of an all party ministry including the Congress.²⁰²

In offering the cooperation to Britain, Fazlul Huq made it clear that as a minister of the 'crown' it was his constitutional obligation to support the government's war efforts.²⁰³ However, there were other important considerations influencing Huq in extending strong support to Britain's causes. Huq aspired to utilize the situation created by the war in forging communal unity in Bengal which was lately under serious stress due to controversies over reforms and the League's deliberate efforts to intensify communal tension in the province.²⁰⁴ The war also presented an opportunity to Huq to free himself from the absolute dependence on the League for legislative support which seriously restrained all his efforts to secure political accommodation with the Hindus. To achieve this objective he issued several emotional appeals for communal unity,²⁰⁵ and convened a Hindu-Muslim unity conference.²⁰⁶ He also expressed his willingness to meet the Congress president to solve the communal and constitutional problem.²⁰⁷

Fazlul Huq's advocacy for total cooperation with the government's war policy antagonised the League, for it had not only refrained from committing itself to cooperating with the government on the issue of war but had imposed a taboo on all its members against participation in any war committees.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, Huq's personal efforts to arrive at a communal settlement with the Congress and his pleading for an all party ministry were considered to be a sacrilege in the League circle.²⁰⁹ The famous 'Calcutta Trio' who acted as the mouthpiece of Jinnah in Bengal issued a stern warning to Huq against any settlement with the Congress 'over the head of the Muslim League.'²¹⁰ When in November 1940 Huq made an appeal to Jinnah that the League and the Congress should get together to settle the communal problem of Bengal, Jinnah replied brashly : 'Pakistan is the only solution of Hindu-Muslim tension.' Jinnah also charged Huq for causing disruptions in the Muslim camp.²¹² Just as the Congress 'High Command' had frustrated all of Huq's previous efforts at a settlement, so now the chief obstacle was again not in Bengal but in the all India policy of the League as dictated by Jinnah.²¹³

Matters came to a crisis in July 1941, when Fazlul Huq joined the governor-general's National Defence Council which was constituted

for associating Indian opinion to the war policy of Britain in India.²¹⁴ Huq was invited to join the council as the premier of Bengal and not as a representative of the League,²¹⁵ and Jinnah was fully aware of this.²¹⁶ Also, the League had relaxed the ban on its members on the question of serving in the war committees by permitting its members to participate in the war efforts in their individual capacities,²¹⁷ but nevertheless, the League censured Huq for breach of party discipline and asked him to resign from the defence council.²¹⁸ To this he complied after considerable delay, but in protest he also resigned from the Working Committee and the Council of the League.²¹⁹ In his letter of resignation Huq bitterly complained against the authoritarianism of Jinnah and made an emphatic protest against the manner in which the interests of the Muslims of Bengal were being imperilled by the Muslim leaders from outside of Bengal.²²⁰

Fazlul Huq's public criticism of Jinnah made him unpopular in the League circle in Bengal. The Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League passed a resolution reiterating its full confidence on Jinnah and agreeing with the decision of the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League.²²¹ A demonstration was organised in Calcutta by the pro-Jinnah group mostly composed of the non-Bengali Muslims and a violent clash between it and a counter-demonstration organised by the pro-Huq group was narrowly averted.²²² Peace returned, but only temporarily, and all efforts to a reconciliation between Huq and the League failed mainly due to Jinnah's uncompromising attitude.²²³ In view of the imminent collapse of the shaky ministerial coalition, Huq started preparations to build up his strength from other quarters.

In November 1941, politics in Bengal took a dramatic turn. The League withdrew its support from the Coalition Party and formed the Muslim League Assembly Party under the leadership of Sir Nazimuddin.²²⁴ However, the League's efforts to form a new ministerial coalition failed because its expectation of rallying the Muslim and Schedule Caste members did not materialize.²²⁵ Apparently the governor also took personal initiative to install a League dominated cabinet to forestall the possibility of an alliance between Sarat Bose and Fazlul Huq since the Government of India was contemplating the arrest of Sarat Bose on charges of subversive activities.²²⁶ The League's

failure to form a ministry was a great setback to Jinnah who had come to think that his writ ran throughout India. Fazlul Huq gave him a sharp reminder that in at least one important province it was possible for the Muslims to govern without his 'bind permission' and that the League's call for Muslim unity had no impact on the great majority of the Muslim members of the assembly of Bengal.

After the defection of the League group from the coalition, Huq and his cabinet resigned on December 7, but Huq was able to form a new Progressive Coalition Party in the assembly which included, besides a faction of the League, the Proja Samity, the Bose group of the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Scheduled Castes.²²⁷ The official Congress Party in the assembly led by Kiran Sankar Roy did not join the coalition but gave assurance of its support.²²⁸ The European group did not join the new coalition either but expressed its intention as not to oppose the coalition 'so long as it does not attempt to release the security prisoners or does not permit any interference with the labour which might lead to dislocation of the war effort.'²²⁹

Fazlul Huq was commissioned to form a ministry on December 10. The new ministry contained four Hindus and four Muslims besides himself. Of the four Hindus, two belonged to the Bengal Congress Parliamentary Party or the Bose group,²³⁰ one was a representative of the Scheduled Caste and the fourth was the militant Hindu Mahasabha leader, S.P. Mookerjee. The ministry commanded a large majority and certainly represented a variety of views and had 'a number of capable men.'²³¹ For the first time a Bengal ministry could claim the substantial support of the caste Hindus and was generally hailed as the beginning of a new era of unity and communal peace. Contrary to the treatment extended to the League dominated ministry, the nationalist press in Bengal acclaimed the new ministry as progressive in outlook and capable of exploring the constitution more effectively.²³² Fazlul Huq proudly announced that his new intercommunal ministry was an example to the rest of India of the Hindu-Muslim cooperation at the most critical phase of Indian history.

The new ministry contained unexpected bed-fellows. The inclusion of Mookerjee surprised many, especially for his recent record of fierce communal controversy with Huq.²³³ In the words of Broomfield, there 'was no more startling event in modern Indian political history than the

reconciliation of these two apparently irreconcilable men.²³⁴ The weighty reason for which Fazlul Huq sought cooperation with his onetime adversary was to put a check on the most terrible communal riots which raged in Bengal since March 1941.²³⁵ In a press statement on January 3, 1942 Huq declared that henceforth he would be the best defender of Hindu interest and Mookerjee would protect Muslim interests.²³⁶ Mookerjee justified his action in joining the ministry on the grounds that an intercommunal ministry could best protect the interests of the Hindus.²³⁷

The inclusion of the Bose group undoubtedly strengthened the ministry, but it also proved to be embarrassing. Immediately after Huq was commissioned, Sarat Bose was arrested on Dec. 11 under the Defence of India Rules for his alleged contact with the Japanese; yet two members of Bose's party took the oath of office in a government committed to the war, keeping at the same time their allegiance to Sarat Bose as their party leader. The matter was further complicated by the overwhelming approval of the assembly of a special motion introduced by the followers of Sarat Bose, recommending to the Government of Bengal to take necessary measures to secure the early release of Sarat Bose.²³⁸ Accordingly, the ministry made a representation to the Government of India for his release.²³⁹ The intercession of the ministry gave its critics an opportunity to question its loyalty.²⁴⁰ The ministry, by pressing for the release of Bose antagonised the European group and also the governor who had strongly advised the chief minister that there should not be any release of the security prisoners.²⁴¹

Completely isolated by the new political alignment, the League with its hard core of 35 members of the assembly went into the opposition.²⁴² Huq still called himself a Leaguer, asserted his allegiance to the party, and with the support of those League members who remained loyal to him continued to be the president of the provincial League.²⁴³ But Jinnah retaliated by expelling Huq from the ordinary membership of the League on the grounds that he 'has completely forfeited the confidence of Msussalmans by his repeated betrayal of their cause generally in India and particularly in Bengal.'²⁴⁴ Jinnah obviously took this preemptive measure to prevent the possibility of Fazlul Huq's gaining an upper hand in the League in the future.

Huq's expulsion from the League gave him the much awaited

opportunity to work towards communal harmony without the interference of the League leaders from outside of Bengal. He now contemplated organising a rival Progressive Muslim League with the hope of eliminating the communal influence of the League from the province and he undertook a serious campaign for communal cooperation.²⁴⁵ To inspire confidence in his Hindu colleagues, Huq renounced the resolution and declared that the Pakistan scheme could not be applied to Bengal²⁴⁶. In contrast to some of the provocative speeches he had made in the past, he now appealed to the Bengalis to unite to face the common danger of communalism, for a house divided against itself shall fall.²⁴⁷ Huq was rewarded in his efforts; during the sixteen months the new ministry was in office, there were fewer communal riots in the province in spite of the incitement by the League.²⁴⁸ Labour unrest also decreased considerably and the few cases were settled quickly.²⁴⁹

Deprived of the political control of the province, the League employed its entire energy to turn the Muslim public opinion against Huq and the coalition. The governor reported that after the League's setback to form a ministry, it planned its future strategy of a vigorous propaganda campaign in Calcutta and in the *mufassil* to discredit Huq and rally Muslim opinion in its favour.²⁵⁰ The national executive of the League also called upon its members in Bengal 'not to rest content until the present ministry which is composed of the various elements antagonistic to the cause of Muslim Bengal and of which Mr. Fazlul Huq is a mere titular head, is overthrown.'²⁵¹ Addressing a session of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in Sirajganj on February 15, 1942, Jinnah denounced Fazlul Huq as a 'treacherous person doing incalculable harm to Muslims of Bengal,' and called the Progressive Coalition Party 'a party of multifarious and conflicting political and economic interests, a party created overnight to destroy Muslim solidarity and to bring confusion in their ranks.'²⁵² He urged the intervention of the governor to check the anti-Muslim activities of the 'wretched' ministry for otherwise a 'dire consequence' would follow.²⁵³ The Muslim League press also carried a vile propaganda against Huq for dividing the Muslim community against the mandate of the League and making pacts with the Hindus; while carrying on these anti-Huq propaganda, the League itself was secretly negotiating with the Hindus for forging a ministerial coalition.²⁵⁴

To discredit the ministry in the eyes of the Muslims, the League vigorously opposed the legislative measures of the government some of which were even its own responsibility. The League put all its force against the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education (Amendment) Bill of 1942 which sought to increase the proportion of nominated and official members of the school boards.²⁵⁵ The bill was 'gazetted' in August 1941 and obviously had the consent of the League. Similarly the League bitterly criticized the ministry for its failure to impose sufficient restriction on the cultivation of jute although the jute policy of the government was framed before the League defected from the coalition ministry.²⁵⁶ The League also complained that the ministry took no steps to secure a reasonable price for jute to the cultivators and submitted representation to the governor against the ministry.²⁵⁷ In the past there were occasions when some of the stalwarts of the League stood in the way of the securing of better prices for jute to the cultivators. Another *casus belli* of the League was the inability of the ministry to take any step to pass the Secondary Education Bill.²⁵⁸ In making its complaint the League took no account of its own past experience with Hindu opposition in so far as the bill was concerned. Therefore, it is too obvious that the League's affront against the ministry was based on political expediency ; its main concern was to create adverse public opinion against the ministry.

For further agitating the Muslim feelings against the ministry, the League accused the ministry for not enforcing the communal ratio rules in the recruitment of the newly created air raid precaution department and civil defence services.²⁵⁹ The League, however, conveniently refused to take note of Mookerjee's personal effort in recruiting Muslims in some other government departments and in the Calcutta University.²⁶⁰ The League also blamed the ministry for political repression of the Muslims²⁶¹ when the indulgence of some of the Leaguers in anti-British activities to obtain Hindu support had to be dealt with firmly by the government. Just as during the previous ministry the Hindus were out to discredit it as a Muslim Raj, so during the present ministry the League took up the cry that the Hindus were running it to the prejudice of the Muslims.

In carrying on anti-Huq propaganda, the League derived all benefits from its controversy with the Congress. By the end of 1938 all

efforts to negotiate a settlement on communal and constitutional issues had come to an end.²⁶² The Muslim mass contact programme of the Congress and its scheme of basic education which emphasized a secular curriculum²⁶³ provided the League with a powerful appeal for rallying Muslim support. The League started in on an earnest programme of Muslim mass contact, mostly in religious and anti-Congress terms, and catalogued in a grossly exaggerated way a series of Muslim grievances against the Congress ruled provinces.²⁶⁴ These indictments with stories of persecution of the Muslims and outrage on their culture and religion²⁶⁵ in the Congress provinces had its psychological impact on the Muslims of Bengal who began to look at the League as the only organisation interested in protecting Muslim rights.

The new ministry was formed at a time when the League gained a considerable foothold in Bengal. The Bengali Muslims had looked at the first ministry as the reestablishment of the Muslim Raj after two centuries of Hindu domination. It is, therefore, only natural that they became suspicious of the new political alliance in which the Hindus had a large control. Taking advantage of this, the League tried to convince the Muslims that the only way to get back their lost supremacy was to overthrow the ministry of Fazlul Huq, who had sold himself to the Hindus.²⁶⁶ To substantiate this, the League pointed to the legislative record of the new ministry which had nothing to its credit so far as socio-economic reforms were concerned. Fazlul Huq had to stop all legislative and administrative actions which might affect the interest of the Hindu *bhadrolok*.²⁶⁷ But by halting the progressive legislations, Huq only lost the good will of the Muslims without being able to build up a solid Hindu support because the Hindus were getting sensitive to the Leagues communal rhetorics. Thus Huq lost on both counts. In all the by-elections held between December 1941 and March 1943 the League candidates comfortably defeated the nominees of the Progressive Coalition Party.²⁶⁸

From the time Huq joined the League, he neglected the Proja Samity which had brought him to power. He used the party as a vehicle to his political ascendancy but never seriously took up the organisational work of the party. Even after he was banished from the League he did not make any real effort to resuscitate the Proja Samity. The party also gradually lost its mass appeal because of the

new ministry's reluctance to carry into effect its agrarian programme. The Muslim middle class also became indifferent to the Samity since it took no interest in national political issues. Some sporadic efforts were made by a section of the Samity to rejuvenate the party in collaboration with the Kisan Sabha and other leftist elements but failed because they could not come to an agreement on ideological issues.²⁶⁹ With the decline in the influence of the Proja Samity, the League was left without a rival.

The all round offensive of the League against the ministry was bad enough but the ministry had other adversities to contain. By the beginning of 1942, the war in the East had taken a dangerous turn for India. The fear of a Japanese invasion of Bengal compelled the military authorities to put into operation, early in 1942, a 'denial' policy involving the removal of food grains estimated to be in excess of local requirements, and all large boats from those parts of delta considered to be vulnerable. In addition, considerable areas were requisitioned for military purposes requiring evacuation of the inhabitants from their land and homes. These measures were necessarily unpopular. Removal of foodgrains and boats caused panic in the countryside and seriously interfered with the economic life of the people.²⁷⁰ Although the 'denial' policy was carried on without the approval of the ministry,²⁷¹ it could escape responsibility in the public eyes or the criticism of opposition.²⁷²

To the misfortune of the ministry while the 'denial' policy was in progress large areas of West Bengal were visited on October 26, 1942 by a devastating cyclone accompanied by torrential rains and followed later in the day by three tidal waves which took a heavy toll of life and damaged the standing paddy crop. The result was a very low yield of the crop and by the end of the year a severe food crisis was imminent.²⁷³ The situation was worsened by the loss of Burma which cut off the main source of rice supply and the confusion caused by the Japanese bombing of Calcutta in December and January 1942-43. To avoid the food crisis, the ministry hastily adopted a programme of controlling the prices of goods but without ensuring supply which only encouraged profiteering and black marketing.²⁷⁴ The incidence of the whole affair was loss of confidence of the masses in the ministry. Thus the military situation combined with crop

failure over which the ministry had no control caused profound repercussions on the political life of the province.

The ministry found itself in another perplexing situation following the 'Quit India' movement launched by the Congress on August 8, 1942. In Bengal, the movement took on revolutionary proportions causing severe strain on the administration.²⁷⁵ To check the movement, the governor, without the advice of the ministry arrested all prominent Congressmen in Bengal and adopted severe repressive measures including collective fines, especially in Midnapore district.²⁷⁶ A deep sense of resentment spread throughout the province which was further intensified when on August 31, several non-political prisoners 'on strike' in Dacca central jail were 'shot down' and no action was taken against the imperial service officer responsible for the incident. The whole province reverberated with protest and demands were made even by the supporters of the ministry to conduct enquiries into this 'terrible atrocity'.²⁷⁷ To these Huq conceded²⁷⁸ but no meaningful enquiry could be conducted due to the non-cooperation of the governor.²⁷⁹ On November 16, the Mahasabha leader, S. P. Mookerjee, resigned, bitterly complaining against the repressive policy of the government and the governor's interference in the work of the ministry which had 'rendered so called provincial autonomy into a meaningless farce.'²⁸⁰ Mookerjee's resignation was symptomatic of the frustration of the Bengali politicians to influence the course of Bengal politics. It is remarkable that Mookerjee did not make any communal grievance as the cause of his parting company with his colleagues ; rather he expressed his preparedness to the chief minister to work for maintaining a healthy communal atmosphere in the province.²⁸¹ Mookerjee's resignation considerably deteriorated the political atmosphere of the province. In an attempt to pacify public opinion Huq promised in the assembly to conduct an impartial enquiry into the allegations of official excesses in Midnapore,²⁸² but once again, nothing came out of his promise because of the opposition of the governor.²⁸³

From the chain of events in 1942 it was abundantly clear that there was severe strain on the constitutional machinery in the province ; not only were advice tendered by the Council of Ministers disregarded by the governor, but the governor was taking actions without consulting his Council of Ministers. Mookerjee made that clear in a

statement on his resignation in the assembly.²⁸⁵ Huq also disclosed in the assembly on March 15, 1943, that there had been numerous occasions when advice tendered by the ministry were not accepted by the governor in his discretion.²⁸⁶ This open allegation of the chief minister against the governor precipitated a conflict which ultimately led to the overthrow of the Huq ministry.

Ever since Fazlul Huq had formed his second ministry, his relation with governor was increasingly deteriorating. It may be recalled that in December 1941, the governor had reluctantly commissioned Huq to form a ministry only after Nazimuddin had failed to secure a majority. There were serious differences between the governor and his chief minister especially for the latter's refusal to take responsibility for the drastic measures that were being adopted by the governor in connection with the 'denial' policy and the 'Quit India' movement.²⁸⁸ Therefore, the governor felt very uneasy over Huq's public criticism of his policy and Huq's promises for open enquiries into the Dacca and Midnapore incidents and began looking for an opportunity to dislodge Huq. It was largely due to the governor's initiative that two successive no-confidence motions were tabled in the assembly on March 24 and March 27, 1943 by the League in collaboration with the European group but on both occasions the motions were rejected by narrow margins.²⁸⁷ As a preventive measure Fazlul Huq thought of forming an all party cabinet but before he could conduct negotiations, he was asked by the governor on March 28 to sign a 'prepared letter of resignation.'²⁸⁸ The sudden resignation of Huq came as a surprise to the province.²⁸⁹ It was true that his support in the legislature had dwindled, but he had the majority all the same. Even after his resignation all the members of the Progressive Coalition Party signed a statement reaffirming their confidence in Huq and their willingness to work the constitution under Huq's leadership.²⁹⁰

After securing the resignation of Huq the governor assumed himself the responsibility of administering the province under section 93 of the constitution. A month later, on April 29, a League dominated cabinet was installed with Sir Nazimuddin as the premier. It was too obvious that section 93 was imposed to give time to the League to obtain a majority in the legislature. The League was supported by the European group and scattered elements of the Scheduled Castes and other

groups. Thus the last cooperative effort of the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal for working the constitution was foiled and from this time onward the two communities moved in opposite directions. From now on the League became the self proclaimed champion of the Muslim cause in Bengal and this development ultimately contributed to the partition of the province in 1947.

Conclusion

The Muslim dominated coalition ministry, to fulfil its electoral promises, initiated a programme of reform which had as its main concern the benefit of the Muslims. In the course of the implementation of the programme many of the vital interests of the Hindu *bhadrolok* were seriously affected. Lacking in control of the political institutions, the *bhadrolok* was unable to halt the process of reform. The compromising attitude of the Congress on the agrarian policy of the government and on the controversies over public services as a palliative to the Muslims and Scheduled Castes added to the frustration of the *bhadrolok*. In sheer desperation to check the encroachment of the ministry on their vested interest the *bhadrolok* took recourse to the weapon of political agitation. To add strength to the agitation and to carry the Hindu masses with them they found it politically expedient to brand the programme of the ministry as solely inspired by an anti-Hindu feeling. In this the initiative was taken by the Hindu Mahasabha who took advantage of the growing factionalism and indiscipline within the Congress in Bengal and projected itself as the only champion of Hindu interest. Growing in strength the Mahasabha promoted communal tension as the breakdown of law and order was considered to be the only way to subvert the political control of the province by the Muslims.

The incessant attack of the Hindus on the ministry aroused the Muslim suspicions and to counteract Hindu opposition, they tried to play on the Muslim communal sentiments. The League, as the champion of the Muslim cause, gradually built its popularity among the Muslim masses. After the formation of the inter-communal ministry when the League went into the opposition it was able to mount its communal propaganda in full force since it did not have the responsibility of the maintenance of law and order. Once the Huq ministry was thrown out and a League ministry was installed, the League was able

to swing Muslim opinion in its favour and a line of division between the two communities was rigidly drawn.

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37. See Banerjee, 'Provincial Autonomy.' p. 76.
38. *Correspondence*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Feb. 1, 1938.
39. *Bengal Weekly*, Nov. 14, 1938.
40. *Correspondence*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Feb. 1, 1938 and *PBLA*, vol. LVI, No. 5, 1940, p. 327.
41. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 38.
42. Government of Bengal, Home Department, (Confidential), *Brief Summary of Political Events in the Presidency of Bengal During the Year 1937* (hereinafter referred to as *Summary of Events*), (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1938), p. 12.
43. *Report of the Land Revenue Commission*, vol. I, 157.
44. *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 325-27.
45. *Ibid.*, vol. V. p. 436.
46. *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 88-89, III-112, 134, 162, 228,
47. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Dec. 19, 1939.
48. *Report of the Land Revenue Commission*, vol. VI, pp. 315-322.
49. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of August, 1938.
50. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Reid to Linlithgow, April 19, 1939.
51. *Report of the Land Revenue Commission*, vol. III, p. 108.
52. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of April, 1938.
53. It was reported that the Maharaja of Burdwan secured the signatures of the ten thousand zamindars against the bill, *Star of India*, July 30, 1938.
54. *Star of India*, May 27, 1938.
55. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Aug. 6, 1938.
56. *Summary of Events*, 1937, p. 5.
57. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 4, Sept. 30, 1937, p. 2292.
58. *Bengal Legislative Council Debates*, vol. I, No. 31, Apr. A. 1938, p. 1370.
59. *Ibid.*,
60. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 4, Sept. 1937, pp. 2293-94.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 2311.
62. *Star of India*, July 30, 1938. The delay was caused by the governor's reservation of the bill for the consideration of the governor-general, Section XVIII of the

Instruments of Instructions to the Governor laid down that any bill which altered, the character of Permanent Settlement should be reserved for the consideration of the governor-general.

63. *Star of India*, May 9, 1938.

64. *Ibid.*, May 24, 26, 30, 1938 and *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, June 3, 1938.

65. *Brabourne Collection*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, June 3, 1938.

66. *Bengal Acts*, Act III of 1939.

67. Ali Ashraf, *The City Government of Calcutta, A Study of Inertia* (New York : Asia Publishing House, 1966), p. 27.

68. Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making* (Calcutta ; Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 333.

69. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1922-23*. p. 13.

70. According to the census of 1931 the city with its suburbs contained 1,045, 599 Hindus and 371,919 Muslims. *Census of India*, 1931, vol. VI, p. 97.

71. *PBLA*, vol. LCI, No. 1, Feb. 27, 1939, p. 16.

72. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1922-23*.

73. Ashraf, *City Government of Calcutta*, p. 27.

74. *Templewood Collection*, Anderson to Templewood, June 15, 1932.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Templewood Collection*, Templewood to Anderson, May 27, 1932.

77. *Ibid.*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Dec. 10, 1932.

78. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1932-33*, p. xxx.

79. Government of Bengal, *Terrorism, Civil Disobedience and the Calcutta Corporation* (Alipore : Bengal Government Press, 1933-34).

80. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1932-33*. p. xxx.

81. Corporation of Calcutta, *The Chief Executive Officer's Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the Year 1935-36* (Calcutta : Corporation Press, 1938), p. 5.

82. *Bengal Weekly*, Mar. 6, 1939.

83. *Star of India*, Apr. 30, 1938.

84. *Ibid.*, June 17, 1938.

85. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, May 5, 1938.

86. *PBLA*, vol. LIV, No. 2, Feb. 27, 1939, p. 20.

87. The Bengal local Self-Government (Amendment) Act III of 1933 provided for reserved seats to be elected through joint electorate for the representation of minority communities on district and local boards.

88. *PBLA*, vol. LIV, No. 2, Feb. 27, 1939, p. 29.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

93. Government of Bengal, Publicity Department, *Bengal Ministry and the Hindus of Bengal* (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1940), Part I, p. I.

94. *PBLA*, vol. LIV, No. 7, May 10, 1939, p. 419.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 420.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 459.
97. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XIV, No. 4, Mar. 13, 1924, p. 61.
98. Fazlul Huq's note to his cabinet, *Star of India*, May 16, 1939.
99. See Huq's letter to Sarat Bose, *Star of India*, May 29, 1939.
100. Mohammad Mozammel Huq, 'Public Services and their Distribution,' *Star of India*, Apr. 18, 1939.
101. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XIV, No. 4, Mar. 13, 1924, p. 83.
102. Fazlul Huq's note to the cabinet, *Star of India*, May 16, 1939, Also see *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XLV, No. 3, Apr. 2, 1935, pp. 61-63.
103. *Bengal Ministry and the Hindus of Bengal*, p. 18.
104. *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No. 4, Aug. 24, 1938, p. 117. The cooperative department was about to make a large recruitment as a part of the rural upliftment programme of the ministry.
105. *PBLA*, vol. LII, No. 4, Mar 10, 1938, p. 127.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
107. *Ibid.*, vol. LIII, No. 4, Aug. 24, 1938, p. 89. According to the government service rules then in force, a public servant was to retire after 30 years of service.
108. The Hindu finance minister N.R. Sarkar, strongly urged his colleagues not to implement the resolution. *Star of India*, Nov. 4, 1938.
109. *PBLA*, Vol. LIII, No. 4, Aug. 24, 1938, p.120. The resolution was passed overwhelmingly although the ministers remained neutral.
110. *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No. 4, Aug. 24, 1938, p. 120.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
112. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, June 20, 1939.
113. *Ibid.*, Brabourne to Linlithgow, Sept. 4, 1938.
114. *IAR*, Vol. I, 1939, pp. 385-86, and 415.
115. *Star of India*, May 29, 1939.
116. *Ibid.*, Apr. 18, 1939.
117. For the text of the letter see *PBLA*, vol. LIV, No. 2, Mar. 6, 1939, pp. 1962-63.
118. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of March, 1939. In the assembly an adjournment motion was moved to discuss the matter but this was rejected by 62 votes in favour and 175 against. *PBLA*, vol. LIV, No. 2, Mar. 6, 1939, pp. 161, 175.
120. See Sarat Bose's statement on the programme of the Congress Party, *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No 2, Aug. 10, 1938, p. 100.
121. *PBLA*, vol. LIII, No. 4, Aug. 24, 1938, pp. 285-86.
122. Sarat Bose's speech at the Bengal Provincial Political Conference, Jalpaiguri, Feb. 4, 1939. *IAR*, vol. I, 1939, p. 415.
123. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Reid to Linlithgow, May 22, 1939.
124. Sarat Bose to Fazlul Huq, *Star of India*, May 29, 1939.
125. *Bengal Weekly*, Jan. 16, 1939.

126. See the proceedings of the Muslim League meetings, *Star of India*, Feb. 20, Apr. 19, May 13, 16, 1939.
127. *Sar of India*, June 13, 1939.
128. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, June 19, 1939.
129. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1939.
130. Naresh Chandra Roy, 'The Working of the Public Service Commission in Bengal,' *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 1941, vol. III, No. 2, p. 203.
131. See *Government of India Act*, 1935, sec. 266.
132. Reid, *Years of Change*, p. 131 and *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Jan. 6, 1940.
133. Government of Bengal, *Tenth Quinquennial Review on the Progress of education in Bengal for the Period 1937-38 to 1941-42* (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1944), pp. 4, 28.
134. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 3, Aug. 26, 1937, pp. 641-42.
135. *Ibid.*, pp. 644-45. For the act see *Report on the Administration of Bengal*, 1929-30, p. 18.
136. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of August, 1938.
137. *Ibid.*, first half of August, 1938.
138. *IAR*, 1941, vol. I. p. 218, and *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 3, Dec. 15, 1939, p. 200.
139. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Jan. 1, 1940.
140. *Ibid.*
141. *Star of India*, Feb. 15, 1940.
142. See *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 3, Aug. 26, 1937, pp. 601-605, and vol. LII, No. 4, Mar. 17, 1938, pp. 360-396.
143. *IAR*, 1939, Vol. I, p. 11.
144. For the full text of the bill see *Star of India*, Aug. 2, 1940.
145. Great Britain, Parliament, East India (Calcutta University Commission), *Report of the Commission Appointed by the Government of India to Enquire into the conditions and Prospects of the University of Calcutta* (London : HMSO, 1919), vol. IV. Part II, *Recommendations of the Commission*, p. 37.
146. University of Calcutta. *Hundred years of the University of Calcutta* (Calcutta : Sree Sarasawati Press, 1957) pp. 196-206. 303-322.
147. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 383.
148. Probadh Chandra Sinha, *The Problem of Education in Bengal* (Calcutta : Thacker Spink and Co., 1941), pp. 323-24.
149. *Hundred Years of University of Calcutta*, p. 402.
150. *PBLA*, vol. LVII, No. 5. Aug. 22, 1940, p. 83.
151. *Ibid.*, vol. LVII, No. 5. Aug. 28, 1940, p. 278.
152. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 384. Finally in 1950 a Secondary Education Act was passed which created a board of secondary education in West Bengal. *Hundred Years of University of Calcutta*, p. 366.
153. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 256.
154. *PBLA*, vol. L, Apr. 7, 1937. p. 18.
155. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 3 1937, p. 1074. *The Bengal Weekly*, issued by the public

department of the Government of Bengal periodically quoted some passages from the Congress press. See *Bengal Weekly*, Jan. 23, May 1, 1939.

156. *Bengal Weekly*, Nov. 7, 1938.

157. *Star of India*, Dec. 28, 1937.

158. *Star of India*, Mar. 29, 1937.

159. See *Ibid.*, Feb. 15.

160. Nalinaksha Sanyal, *PBLA*, vol. L, Apr. 8, 1937, p. 29.

161. *Brief Summary of Political Events, 1937*, p. 10.

162. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

163. *Report on the Police Administration of Calcutta, 1938*, p. 11.

164. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 3, Aug. 20, 1937, p. 356. The new unions fostered by the ministry were called 'white unions' as opposed to the 'red unions' led by the Congress and the communists. *Report on the Police Administration of Calcutta, 1938*, p. 12.

165. *PBLA*, vol. LIV, No. 3, Mar. 16, 1939, pp. 406-9, 489.

166. *Brief Summary of Political Events, 1937*, p. 6.

167. *PBLA*, vol. LI, No. 2, Aug. 16, 1937, pp. 259-279.

168. *Governor's Report*, Anderson to Linlithgow, Nov. 21, 1937.

169. For details see John Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson Viscount Waverly* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1962), pp. 134-143 and David M. Laushey, 'The Bengal Terrorists and their Conversion to Marxism : Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India, 1905-1942' (Ph. D., dissertation, Univ. of Virginia, 1969).

170. *Report on Police Administration in Bengal, 1938*. p. 24.

171. *Governor's Report*, Anderson to Linlithgow, July 23. Aug. 7, Nov. 21, 1937

172. *PBLA*, vol. LI, 1937, No. 1, p. 62.

173. *Confidential Review of Events*, second half of Nov. 1937.

174. *Report on Police Administration in Bengal, 1938*. p. 34.

175. *Ibid.*, 1939, p. 28.

176. These repressive laws were the Bengal Criminal Law (amendment) Acts of 1925 and 1930) and the Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrage Act of 1932.

177. *Report on Police Administration of Bengal, 1939*, p. 29.

178. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

179. *Confidential Review of Events*, first half of May 1938 and first half of Jan. 1939.

180. See Chap. IV. pp. 241-277.

181. Coupland, *Indian Problem, Part II*, p. 28.

182. An account of the conflict between Bose and Gandhi may be found in Gordon, 'Bengal's Gandhi,' pp. 96-103.

183. *Report on Police Administration in Bengal, 1939*, p. 29.

184. *Ibid.*, 1947, pp. 34-35.

185. See Chap. IV, p. 290.

186. *Governor's Report*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Oct. 6, 1939.

187. Percentage of the Bengalis in the elite services of the province were as follows :civil service 26.3, police service 28.5, education service 50, health services 46.15, agricultural service 66, and public prosecutors and government attorneys

40.9. All India Congress Committee, *Bengali-Bihari Question* (Allahabad : Kitabistan, 1938), p. 26.

188. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

189. The Hindu National Militia was the answer to the League's Muslim National Guard formed in 1939 to protect the 'liberties, rights and interests' of the Muslims. See the resolution of the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League of March 26, 1939. *Resolutions of All India Muslim League*, Dec. 1938-Mar. 1940.

190. *Report on the Police Administration of Bengal*, 1940, p. 34.

191. *Ibid.*, 1937-1940 and *Report on Police Administration of Calcutta*, 1937-1940.

192. Government of Bengal, Home Department, Political, *Report of the Dacca Riot Enquiry Committee* (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1942), p. 27.

193. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

194. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

195. Huq was the most sought after speaker in various meetings and conferences organised by the League, Muslim student organisations and Muslim educational conferences.

196. The Working Committee of the All India Muslim League resolved on September 18, 1938 that 'no declaration regarding the question of constitutional advance for India should be made without the consent and approval of the All India Muslim League nor any constitution be framed and finally adopted without such consent and approval.' *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League from December 1938 to March 1940*.

197. *Zetland Collection*, Linlithgow to Zetland, Nov. 2 1933.

198. *Private Telegrams between the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy*, Viceroy to the Secretary of state, Sept. 22, 1939.

199. See above, p. 287.

200. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Woodhead to Linlithgow, Sept. 5, 1939.

201. *Star of India*, Jan. 21, 1940.

202. *Zetland Collection*, Linlithgow to Zetland, Feb. 6, 1940.

203. *PBLA*, vol. LV, No. 3, Dec. 13, 1939, p. 62.

204. The governor reported in a political analysis that from the League's point of view continued offensive on Hindu interest would cause intense resentment among the Hindus and in effect would turn them away from the Congress and force them to look up to the Mahasabha for the protection of Hindu interest. The League thought that it would be easier to deal with the Mahasabha who spoke for the Hindu interest alone and made no pretension, as did the Congress, to speak for the Muslims. *Governor's Reports: Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Jan. 6, 1940.

205. *Star of India*, Feb. 5, May 24, 1940.

206. *Ibid.*, Feb. 27, 1940.

207. *Ibid.*, Apr. 30, 1940.

208. See the resolution of the Working Committee of June 16, 1940. *Resolution of the All India Muslim League from March 1940 to April 1941*.

209. Jinnah had laid out in very definite terms that there cannot be even any negotiation with the Congress until the Congress recognized the League as the only 'authori-

- ritative and representative organisation of the Muslims of India.' Jinnah to Nehru, Dec. 13, 1939. *Star of India*, Jan. 8, 1940.
210. *Star of India*, June 14, 1940.
211. *IAR*, vol. II, 1940, p. 38 and *Star of India*, Dec. 16, 1940.
212. *Statesman*, Jan. 30, 1941.
213. Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 30.
214. See Great Britain, Parliament, East India, India and the War. *Text of the Announcement Issued by the Governor-General of India on July 22, 1941*. (London : HMSO, 1941).
215. See the statement of the secretary of state. *Statesman*, Aug. 28, 1941.
216. *Correspondence*, Linlithgow to Herbert, June, 18, 1941.
217. *Star of India*, July 30, 1940.
218. See the resolution of the Working Committee, Bombay, Aug. 24, 1941. *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League From March 1941 to April 1942*.
219. *Statesman*, Sept. 11, 1941.
220. Fazlul Huq to Liaquat Ali Khan (secretary, All India Muslim League). *Statesman*, Spt. 18, 1941.
221. *Statesman*, Sept. 18, 1941.
222. *Ibid.*,
223. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Oct., 21 and Nov. 10, 1941
224. *Dawn*, Dec. 7, 1941.
225. *Correspondence*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 20, 1941.
226. *Ibid.*, Sarat Bose's brother Subhas Bose had escaped from home detention in January 1941 and was reportedly in Berlin collaborating with the Axis Powers.
227. *Dawn*, Dec. 14, 1941 and Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims*, p. 277.
228. *Correspondence*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 20, 1941.
229. *Ibid.*
230. This party has been identified by some authors as the Forward Bloc. See Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 29 ; Gopal, *Indian Muslims*, p. 276 ; and Broomfield, *Elite Conflict*, p. 298. But the party claimed to have no association with the Forward Bloc. See *PBLA*, vol. LXII, No. 3 Mar. 24, 1942, pp. 381-82 and 406-409.
231. *Correspondence*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 20, 1941.
232. Singh Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 267.
233. See *PBLA*, vol. LIX, No. 6 Apr. 1941, pp. 204-209. Also Mookerjee's speech at the annual session of the Bengal provincial Hindu conference, Nov. 29, 1941. *Statesman*, Dec. 4, 1941.
234. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict*, p. 297. In spite of their occasional public display of communal rhetorics, Huq and Mookerjee had a deep personal friendship and respect for each other. Huq was a life-long admirer of Syama Prasad Mookerjee's father, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, the eminent and widely respected jurist, under whose affectionate care Huq worked as a probationer advocate in the Calcutta High Court.
235. Soon after the cabinet was formed, Huq accompanied by Mookerjee toured the province to bring communal harmony. Habibullah, *Sere Bamla*, p. 110.

236. *Dawn*, Feb. 15, 1942.
237. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict*, p. 298.
238. *PBLA*, vol. LXI, Dec. 12, 1941, pp. 9-13.
239. *Ibid.*, vol. LXII, No. 3, Mar. 16, 1942, pp. -9-13 and Mar. 24, p. 384.
240. *Ibid.*, Mar. 24, 1942, pp. 191-93.
241. *Correspondence*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 20, 1941.
242. Ispahani, *Jinnah*, p. 34.
243. *Dawn*, Dec. 14, 1941.
244. Resolution of the League Council, Allahabad, Apr. 3, 1942. *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League from March 1941 to April 1942*.
245. See Smith, *Modern Islam*, p. 230 and *Dawn*, July 19, 1942.
246. Sitaramayya, *Indian National Congress*, vol. II, p. 521. Also see Nicholas Mansergh and E.R. Lumby (Eds.). *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47* vol. I (London : HMSO, 1970) Document No. 30. It was also reported that Huq thought of starting a movement for recognition of Bengal as a separate state. *Dawn*, June 21, 1942.
247. Huq's speech at the Hindu-Muslim unity conference, July 21, 1942. *IAR*, vol. I, 1942, p. 335.
248. See K. Ahmad, *Social History*, p. 53.
249. Coupland, *Indian Problem*, Part II, p. 35.
250. *Correspondence*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Dec. 20, 1941.
251. Resolution of the Working Committee, Nagpur, Dec. 26, 1941. *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League, from March 1941 to April 1942*.
252. *Dawn*, Mar. 1, 1942.
253. *Ibid.*
254. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Feb 11, Feb. 25, 1942.
255. *PBLA*. vol. LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 17, 1942, pp. 69-99 and Sept. 24, 1942, pp. 17-21.
256. *Ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1942, pp. 53-55.
257. *Ibid.*, No 1, Sept. 21, 1942, p. 108.
258. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
259. *PBLA*, vol. LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 22, 1942, pp. 226-245 and Sept. 28, 1942, pp. 95-96, and *Dawn*, Aug. 30, 1942. The recruitment to these departments was done by the central government which had no obligation to follow the Bengal communal ratio rules.
260. Habibullah, *Sere Bamla*, p. 111.
261. *Dawn*, Feb. 8, 1942.
262. Becker, 'All India Muslim League,' p. 285.
263. For details about the scheme see Zakir Hussain Committee Report, *IAR*, vol. II, 1937, pp. 451-58 and N.P. Pillai, *The Educational Aims of Mahatma Gandhi* (Trivandrum : Kalyanmandir Publications, 1959).
264. See All India Muslim League, *Report of the Inquiry Committee Appointed by the Council of the All India Muslim League to Inquire into Grievances in Congress Provinces* (Pirpur Report) (Delhi : All India Muslim League, n.d.) The Muslim

case for Congress misrule was also presented by Fazlul Huq in a pamphlet. *Muslim Sufferings Under the Congress Rule* (Calcutta ; Bengal Provincial Muslim League, 1939).

265. Both the secretary of state and the governor-general doubted the authenticity of the allegations. *Private Telegrams*, secretary of state to the governor-general, Dec. 11, 1939 and governor-general to the secretary of state, Dec. 12, 1939.

266. *Dawn*, Jan 11, 1942. A contemporary observer has given an interesting account that to attract good audiences in the anti-Huq rallies in the *mufassil*, the League gave publicity that Fazlul Huq would be the principal speaker. Abbasuddin Ahmed, *Amara Silpi Jibanera Katha*, p. 100.

267. For example no initiative was taken to introduce any tenancy and agrarian reforms since the ministry was re-constituted. Similarly, no definite action was taken to implement the recommendations of the *Report of the Bengal Land Revenue Concerning the Secondary Education Bill of 1940*.

268. Sing Roy, *Parliamentary Government*, p. 268, Coupland, *Indian Problem*, part II, p. 333.

269. A. M. Ahmed, *Amara Dekha.....*, p. 175.

270. *Governor's Reports ; Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, June 19, 1942.

271. *Ibid.*, Mar. 22, 1942 and *PBLA*, vol. LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 15, 1942, p. 38.

272. *PBLA*, vol. LXIII, No. 1, Sept. 21, 1942, pp. 168, 170-71, 194.

273. Beginning May 1943 Bengal was overtaken by a catastrophic famine which took a toll of two million lives. Government of India, Famine Enquiry Commission, *Report on Bengal* (Delhi : Govt. of India Press, 1945) p.1.

274. Sing Roy, *Food Policy in India* (Calcutta : British Indian Association, 1943), 1943), p. 68.

275. For details see Government of Bengal, Home Department, Political (Secret), *District Officer's Chronicle of Events of Disturbances Consequent upon the All India Congress Committee's Resolution of 8th August 1942 and the Arrest of Congress Leaders thereafter : August 1942 to middle of March 1943*. (Alipore : Bengal Govt. Press, 1943).

276. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Oct. 8, 1942.

277. *PBLA*, vol. LXIII, No. 2, Sept. 28, 1942, pp. 108-20, 138-142.

278. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

279. *Correspondence*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Nov. 6, 1942.

280. S.P Mookerjee to Herbert, Nov. 16, 1942, *Correspondence*, Herbert to Linlithgow, (enclosure) Nov. 25, 1942. Earlier in August Mookerjee had written to the viceroy complaining about the interference of permanent officials 'with the legitimate activities of the ministry.' *Ibid.*, Aug. 10, 1942. The governor advised Mookerjee not to publicise his resignation letter. *Ibid.*, Telegram No. 259 of Nov. 20 1942.

281. *Ibid.*, Nov. 25, 1942.

282. *PBLA*, vol. LXIV, No. 1, Feb. 15, 1943, p. 98.

283. *Governor's Reports : Bengal*, Herbert to Linlithgow, Feb. 22, 1943.

284. *PBLA*, vol. LXIV, No. 1, Feb. 12, 1943, pp. 25-35.

285. *Ibid.*, vol. LXIV, No. 3, Mar 15, 1943, p. 273.

286. For details see Fazlul Huq's resignation speech, *PBLA*, vol. LXV, July 5, 1943.

287. *PBLA*, vol. LXIV, No 3, pp. 594 and 749.

288. *Ibid.*, vol. LXV, No. 3, Mar. 29, 1943, p. 753.

289. The viceroy seriously questioned the propriety of the governor in obtaining the resignation of Huq when he commanded a majority in the assembly. *Correspondence*, Linlithgow to Herbert, Apr. 2, 1943.

290. *Dawn*, Apr. 2, 1943.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

Before the introduction of the constitution of 1935, communal rivalry was confined to a small section of the urban elite involving conflict of interest in educational and employment facilities and controversies over constitutional reforms. Because the Muslims were the majority in the province and because they demanded special constitutional safeguards in the form of separate electorate, the Hindus were suspicious that constitutional progress, especially introduction of adult franchise, would result in a Muslim domination of the political institution of the province to the prejudice of the Hindu interest. Similarly, the Muslims were apprehensive that 'self-rule' would mean the political subjugation by the Hindus who were educationally more advanced and politically more articulate than the Muslims. However, this conflict among the elites for sharing political control of the province had very little impact in the countryside where the Hindus and Muslims generally lived in peace. Operating under a restricted franchise and with the British Government as their main target of attack, the elites were necessarily limited in their political activities to urban centers only.

With the implementation of the scheme of provincial autonomy, legislatures became the focus of all political activities. Since the members of the legislatures were to be elected preponderantly by the newly enfranchised rural voters, politicians and political parties for the first time appreciated the vote value of the masses, and the countryside became the hub of electioneering campaign and political propaganda. Election manifestoes issued by different parties and independent candidates contained various identical promises of socio-economic reforms to bring far-reaching changes in the countryside, but the new mass oriented politics also introduced communalism in the rural areas which had been until then limited to the urban elites. In approaching the illiterate villagers for votes many unscrupulous individuals and political parties thought it to be politically expedient

to make communal appeals. One important fact of the rural life of Bengal, especially Esastern Bengal, was that the lines of cleavage between the haves and have-nots ran almost parallel to the religious demarcation between the Hindus and Muslims. This constituted a built-in advantage to make communal appeals in the countryside. The constitutional provision for separate electorate also substantially encouraged coummunal propaganda in electioneering campaigns. The very principle of communal electorate created a general impression that the political interest of the Hindus and Mulslims were distinctly different.

In spite of the communal emphasis in the electoral campaigns, the non-communal parties still held their ground. The religious appeals made by the League and other communalist groups, like the Hindu Sabha and the Hindu Nationalist Party, were responded to primarily by the vested interest and conservatives sections of the middle class. In the Muslim constituencies, the League captured all the urban seats and seats reserved for special interest groups but the Proja Samity with its non-communal platform, captured more rural seats than the League. Similarly, in the Hindu constituencies, the majority of seats were won by the Congress and the few Hindu constituencies which returned the nominees of the Hindu Sabha and the Hindu Nationalist Party, the personal influence of the candidates rather than party affiliation decided the mind of the voters.

An important feature of the election was the return of a large number of independent candidates, especially from rural constituencies. Before the election of 1937 the main interest of the political parties was on national and constitutional issues and, therefore, parties were not adequately prepared to conduct election on a large scale. In the remote countryside where the parties were not able to set up their organisational units, a candidate with local influence returned easily. Another significant aspect of the election was that none of the parties were able to set up candidates in both Hindu and Muslim constituencies. This could be partially attributed to the organisational weakness of the parties but perhaps more to the principle of communal division of the electorate which provided very little scope to any party with a non-communal platform, such as that of the Congress and the Proja Samity, to contest seats in both types of consti-

tenuencies. The failure of the non-communal parties to elect their candidates from the Hindu and Muslim constituencies seriously impaired their political strength, particularly their claim to represent the interest of both the communities. This also deprived the parties from the possible benefit of receiving opposing points of view on issues involving communal interests.

With the announcement of the election results it was apparent that a coalition ministry was inevitable. Of the three major parties in the legislature the Congress, the Proja Samity and the League, none commanded a workable majority. Contrary to the expectation of the League to unite all the Muslims in an effort to form a Muslim dominated ministry in Bengal, the Proja Samity appealed to the Congress to join it in a ministerial coalition. As a non-communal party with a progressive socio-economic programme, the Samity had more affinity with the Congress than the League. But the Samity's attempt to forge an alliance with the Congress did not materialise because the Congress 'High Command', in pursuing its all India policy, prevented the Congress in Bengal from entering into a ministerial coalition.

It was extremely short-sighted of the national leadership of the Congress to ignore the realities of Bengal politics in imposing its all India policy. In Bengal the Congress had no scope for forming a ministry by its own strength. By refusing permission to join in a ministerial coalition with a non-communal party a valuable opportunity was denied to the Congress in Bengal for combining progressive forces to combat the evils of communal influence in politics. A ministry participated in by the Congress and the Proja Samity on the basis of an economic programme would have isolated the League in Bengal and would have given very little scope to the League to flourish on communal propaganda. Moreover, by perpetually staying out of power, a sense of despondency overtook the Congress men in Bengal ultimately contributing to disunity and factionalism in their ranks. The Congress was the oldest and most organised party in Bengal, but without the prospect of coming to power it took the role of irresponsible opposition by obstructing the government in all possible ways which made the working of provincial autonomy difficult.

After being rejected by the Congress, the Samity was forced to negotiate an alliance with the League which was subsequently joined

by the European bloc and other splinter groups and individuals. The League took advantage of a situation which the Congress inadvertently refused. The post-electoral strategy of the League, to redeem its poor electoral performance, was to find ways to install itself in power. It openly offered to cooperate with any group or party in the legislature if the basic principles of cooperation were determined by mutual agreement. In spite of its ideological differences and past conflicts with the Samity, the League was especially interested to enter into a ministerial alliance with the Samity. The fact that the League could win only one third of the Muslim seats in the legislature was a great setback to the party in its claim to represent Muslim interests. The League was especially concerned about its lack of mass support in the countryside. Therefore, by joining hands with the Proja Samity, the League aspired to share the popularity of the Samity and also fulfil its goal of establishing itself in power. However, with the Congress staying out of the coalition, the ministry for all practical purposes appeared to be a Muslim ministry. The few collaborating Hindus commanded very little support among the influential sections of the Hindu community. The task of the ministry in carrying on effective administration without any substantial support of the Hindu *bhadrolok* was bound to be difficult. In the past it was the Hindu *bhadrolok* who controlled the political institutions of the province. Resenting their loss of control, they therefore started a confrontation with the ministry from the very beginning.

The hurriedly organised ministerial coalition was an ensemble of divergent groups and individuals and did not develop into a cohesive party. The two principal constituents of the coalition, the Proja Samity and the League, did not forget their past rivalry during the election. The League especially detested the Proja radicals for their pronounced hostility to the landlord elements and for their advocacy of sweeping agrarian reforms. Therefore, from the very inception of the coalition, the League was anxious to curb their influence in the coalition. Similarly, the radical elements of the Proja Samity never approved of the Samity's joining in a ministerial coalition with the League. Because of the predominance of the conservative elements in the League's leadership, they entertained grave doubts about the possibility of carrying on the socio-economic programme

of the Samity which was its main plank for receiving the support of the masses. Their initial resentment caused by the modification of the Samity's original programme in order to accommodate the conservative leaders of the League turned ultimately into bitter frustrations as they experienced staunch opposition from the League while pressing their demands for progressive legislation.

The Congress remaining in the opposition took full advantage of the internal conflict within the coalition between the conservative and progressive forces. In its passion to bring the downfall of the ministry which it could not control, the Congress was only too eager to encourage disgruntled groups in defecting from the coalition by promising an alternative ministerial alliance. The Congress especially looked at the radicals of the Samity as their potential allies ; many of them had actually belonged to the Congress but sought election on the Proja ticket only when the Congress decided not to contest any Muslim seat. The personal grievances of the leaders of the radical faction of the Samity against Fazlul Huq was also exploited by the Congress. In addition, to fraternize with the Proja radicals the Congress announced its plan, soon after the ministry was installed, to support all schemes of agrarian reforms as advocated by the Proja. The overtures of the Congress to the discontented elements in the coalition proved successful ; within two years all progressive elements of the coalition defected from it bitterly complaining against the reactionary leadership of the party. The activities of the Congress to subvert the legislative majority of the coalition was not limited to the Samity alone. Largely due to the Congress insinuations, sections of the Scheduled Castes also seceded from the coalition.

Withdrawal of support of the radical wing of the Proja Samity, led to the League's domination of the coalition. Facing the dwindling strength of the coalition the League attempted to consolidate its position by urging a united front of the Muslims. The League branded the defectors as betrayers of the cause of Islam, reinvigorated its propaganda as the only savior of Islam in Bengal and attacked the Congress for intrigues to disrupt Muslim unity. Because the Congress was predominantly a Hindu party, all its activities against the coalition could easily be interpreted as Hindu opposition to a

Muslim ministry. The intensive anti-ministerial campaign of the Proja radicals after they seceded from the coalition and their active collaboration with the Congress in the legislature in opposing the ministry only added strength to the League's call for Muslim unity. Thus the persistent effort of the Congress to subvert the majority of the coalition resulted in the consolidation of the League's control in the ministry and the steady drawing together of the Muslims. The internal feud in the coalition between the progressive and conservative elements was skilfully manipulated by the League in giving it a communal direction.

The split of the Samity into two warring camps, one supporting the coalition and the other opposing it, brought disaster to the party. With the increasing necessity of maintaining his political strength on the goodwill of the League, Fazlul Huq took very little interest in the organisational activities of the Samity. Even after he was thrown out of the League, he made no serious effort to resuscitate the party. The main wing of the Samity which remained loyal to him in course of time became identified with the League and the left wing, as an ally of the Congress, became equated with it. The increase in the League's influence in the Samity depleted its Hindu membership and it could no longer claim the support of both the communities. This brought about the decline of the political influence of a party which had tremendous potential of maintaining communal unity in Bengal. With the decay of the Samity, the League was left without a rival in carrying on its communal propaganda in the countryside.

The increase in the League's influence in the coalition and its emphasis on communal propaganda as a means of building the support of the Muslim masses behind the party put a severe strain on the handful of Hindus supporting the coalition. Hindu public opinion became increasingly critical of the collaborating Hindus for their continued association with a ministry which was deliberately engaged in a communal policy. While this resulted in the gradual desertion of the Hindu members of the coalition, including the resignation of a Hindu minister, it deteriorated the communal relation of the province. The Hindus lost their confidence in the ministry which was least susceptible to Hindu sentiments. With the growth of such feelings it was only natural that the Hindus felt

increasingly attracted towards the Hindu communalist parties, especially the Hindu Mahasabha, which was vociferous in championing the Hindu interests.

The Proja-League ministerial coalition was supported by the European group. As elected representatives of the European community in Bengal, an overwhelming majority of whom were traders, the European group's main concern was the protection of European business interests. Before the introduction of provincial autonomy, the commercial interest of the Europeans was safeguarded through their powerful lobby in London and intercession of the British members of the imperial services in India. After the transfer of power to the legislatures, the elected representatives of the European community took it to be their responsibility to oversee the interest of European commerce in the province. Their task was facilitated by the political control they exercised in the legislature which was far in excess of their numerical strength. Because of the communal distribution of seats which made it impossible for any community to form a stable ministry by its own strength the delicate balance of power in the legislature was, therefore, held by the twenty five Europeans.

The persistent efforts of the Congress to sabotage the strength of the coalition further increased the political influence of the European group as the coalition's legislative majority became increasingly dependent on European support. In exchange for this much needed support, the European group was able to coerce the ministry to make compromises on economic issues involving the interests of the European mercantile community, especially in matters connected with jute trade and industry. Enjoying a monopolistic control over jute trade and industry the European businessmen, to increase their margin of profit, sought to buy raw jute at a minimum price and sell jute manufactures at a high price.

The prices of raw jute played a very significant role in the rural economy of Bengal which was based on subsistence farming. As the only 'money crop' the economic wellbeing of the peasantry entirely depended on the price they received from jute. This importance of the price of jute to the peasantry was recognized by the political parties. The Proja Samity, a major component of the Coalition Party, had committed itself through its election manifesto and

the various promises made by its leader, Fazlul Huq, to secure a remunerative price for jute to the cultivators. The programme adopted by the ministerial coalition also contained an identical pledge. However, due to the control exercised by the European group on the ministry for providing the crucial support in maintaining a workable majority in the legislature it became difficult for the ministry to fulfil its pledge. The few attempts made by the ministry in disregarding the opposition of the European group were frustrated by the machinations of other pressure groups. Even after the reshuffling of the coalition in December 1941, which considerably reduced the reliance of the ministry on the European group for legislative majority, the ministry still failed to improve the prices of jute due to the interference of the Government of India and war emergencies.

During most of the period that the coalition ministry led by Fazlul Huq was in power, raw jute seldom fetched an economic price although the jute manufacturing industry continued to make a profit. This heavily affected the credibility of the ministry particularly of the Proja Samity and its leader, Fazlul Huq, who had been so vocal in promising a better price for jute as a means to improve the economic condition of the peasantry. The failure of the ministry on the issue of jute prices was taken advantage of by the opposition in discrediting the ministry to the peasantry. It provided a valuable popular issue against the ministry to the League when it went into opposition. To elicit the support of the Muslim masses in the countryside, the League carried on a propaganda that only a ministry completely controlled by the Muslims could secure better prices for raw jute. Thus the League, for making political gains, transformed a purely economic issue into a communal one.

The influence exerted by the European group on the ministry affected its interests in other vital matters also. In the frequent conflict between labour and capital in the jute manufacturing industry, the ministry often bailed out the European capitalists. This led to the discontentment of the jute mill labourers who constituted the most volatile political force in the metropolis of Calcutta. The preferential treatment often enjoyed by the European trading community in Calcutta because of the intercession of the European group also antagonised the local non-European business community against

the ministry.

To fulfil the promises in the election manifesto issued by the Proja Samity and the League, the ministry introduced a series of administrative and legislative measures. Many of those measures, especially the agrarian reforms were essential for improving the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, and were identical to the policy of the Congress governed provinces. As principal beneficiary, the Muslims welcomed those measures but the Hindu *bhadrolok* strongly opposed them since those constituted a serious threat to their vested interest. However, in the absence of their control of the legislature, there was very little the Hindu *bhadrolok* could do to halt the attack of the ministry on their established privileges. The failure of the Congress to protect their interest only added to their frustrations and their loss of faith both in the Congress leadership and the path of constitutionalism. Consequently, they took recourse to the weapon of political agitation in which they had long experience in the past through their association with revolutionary activities. To add strength to their agitation they sought to associate the Hindu masses behind them and this they tried to achieve by raising the cry of Hindu interest in danger. The initiative in the Hindu agitation against the ministry was taken by the Hindu Mahasabha. Taking advantage of the growing factionalism and indiscipline in the Congress in Bengal and its declining popularity among the Hindu *bhadrolok*, the Mahasabha declared itself as the only protector of Hindu interests. Growing in strength the Mahasabha launched a virulent campaign against the ministry and instigated communal violence as a means to dislodge the Muslims from the political control of the province. The Hindu agitation against the ministry facilitated the League in gaining further ascendancy. To counter the Mahasabha agitation, the League carried its anti-Hindu propaganda to the villages. To the class consciousness of the peasantry, which was built up by the Proja Samity, was now added a religious vendetta against the Hindus. The constitution of 1935 vested political control of the province in the legislature. This inevitably resulted in a struggle for power between the two communities causing considerable deterioration of communal relations.

However, the bitter conflict between the two communities for controlling political power did not totally alienate the Hindus and the

Muslims. For, in December 1941, they joined together to form an inter-communal ministry. For the first time, the ministry could claim to be truly representative of both communities and received support from all the parties with the exception of the Muslim League which went into opposition. This opened a fresh prospect for resolving the communal problem of Bengal. So long as the ministry remained in office, there was very little communal tension in the province although the League carried on its incessant communal propaganda. However, the ministry's tenure of office was shortened by the contingency of war and the opposition it encountered from the provincial governor and the British bureaucracy. Once the Huq ministry was thrown out and League ministry was installed, the League was able to swing Muslim opinion in its favour and a rigid division between the two communities was drawn. Bengal was partitioned in 1947 because it was felt that the Muslims and Hindus could not live together in peace, but looking at the working of the inter-communal ministry and the circumstances under which it was thrown out, it becomes difficult to accept the development of 1947.

Throughout this study a very significant aspect of the politics in Bengal was the political influence exercised by the non-Bengali elements residing in the province. The bulk of the non-Bengalis lived in Calcutta and its industrial suburbs and broadly fell into two categories— industrial workers and business classes. Because of the lack of Bengali entrepreneurs, most of the trade and commerce in Calcutta was controlled by the non-Bengali business community and this was generally resented by the Bengalis. The Bengalis were also aggrieved by the preferential treatment of the non-Bengalis in the employment of the business and industrial establishments run by the non-Bengalis. It was to the interest of this non-Bengali business community to incite communal tension in Bengal since they were apprehensive that Hindu-Muslim political unity in Bengal might lead to a strengthening of Bengali regionalism thereby jeopardizing their economic interest. The number of the non-Bengali businessmen in Bengal was indeed very small but their political control in the province was not dependent on their numerical strength ; it was their influence on the all India leadership of the dominant political parties and their hold on the large non-Bengali industrial workers of metropolitan Calcutta who

readily responded to their call for political demonstrations in the city as a show of strength. Calcutta being the seat of the provincial government and the centre of all political activities, all political demonstrations in Calcutta were bound to have wide repercussions throughout the province.

In spite of their internal political differences, both the Hindu and the Muslim political leaders complained about the interference of the Calcutta non-Bengali business community in all efforts at communal accommodation. There was also a striking similarity between the grievances of the Bose Brothers against Gandhi and the grievances of Fazlul Huq against Jinnah for the partisan spirit of both Gandhi and Jinnah towards the non-Bengali business interest in Calcutta. It was the non-Bengali Muslims who provided the foothold to Jinnah in the election of 1937 and throughout the period acted as his mouthpiece. Again after Huq had fallen out with Jinnah, it was largely at the initiative of the non-Bengali Muslims that the League in Bengal revolted against him. To the non-Bengali Muslims the League was the only party which could be trusted to oversee their interests since that party's goal was the protection of Muslim interest over all of India. Although it may be difficult to ascertain the total effect of the role of non-Bengali elements in the political developments of Bengal in the period, it could be reasonably asserted that they put powerful obstacles to all attempts at communal settlement and had also a large share in fomenting communal disturbances that took place in the province.

The possibility of a communal settlement was greater in Bengal than anywhere else in India as neither community could ignore the political strength of the other. The successful working of the provincial autonomy required the active cooperation of both the communities but all attempts at cooperation by sharing political power were thwarted by outside interference. In the face of the authoritarianism of the Congress and the League, the local parties were always under a constant pressure and did not have the option to settle the communal issues locally. Left alone the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal might have been able to resolve their political issues as they attempted to do on several occasions, and in that case the tragedy of partition, which has led to many regrettable consequences, could have been avoided.

Appendices

APPENDIX I

Statement Showing the Total Number of Votes Obtained by Successful Candidates of Several Parties in Contested Constituencies in the Bengal Legislative Assembly.

Class of Constituency	Congress	Hindu Nationalist	Hindu Sabha	Independent Hindu
General :				
Urban	52,245			
Rural	827,444	28,413	4,912	357,335
Total	879,689	28,413	4,912	357,959
Muhammadan :				
Urban				
Rural				
Total				
Women's :				
General Urban	10,451			
Muhammadan urban				
Total	10,451			
Indian Commerce				212
Landholders		186		523
Labour Factory and Colliery	101,242			
Trade Union Labour				
University				
Total	991,382	28,599	4,912	358,130
Muslim League	Krishak Proja Samity	Tippera Krishak Samity	Independent Muslims	Total
13,437				1,270,409
191,274	318,546	27,639	256,822	807,71
204,711	318,546	27,639	256,822	11,570
1,119				248
1,119				709
36				117,472
			16,230	0
500				500
206,366	318,546	27,639	273,052	2,208,626

APPENDIX II

Glossary of Bengali Terms

- Abwab* (অবগাব) : Landlord's customary exaction on the tenants.
Bhadrolok (ভদ্রলোক) : elite
Chowkider (চৌকিদার) : village police
Dal-bhat (ডাল-ভাত) : lentil soup and rice—the staple diet of Bengali peasants.
Fatka (ফটকা) : futures market.
Hartal (হরতাল) : suspension of activities.
Iman (ঈমান) : faith.
Jotedar (জোতদার) : rich peasant.
Khatak (খাতক) : debtors.
Krishak (কৃষক) : peasant.
Madhyabitta (মধ্যবিত্ত) : middle class.
Mahajan (মহাজন) : money-lenders.
Mathat (মাথট) : head tax.
Maund (মণ) : a unit of weight approximately equivalent to 80 pounds.
Mufassil (মফঃসল) : countryside.
Mullah (মুন্সাহ) : expounder of Islamic laws and doctrines.
Nazar Salami (নজর সালামী) : customary exactions of the landlords on the tenants at the time of transfer of property.
Proja (প্রজা) : tenant.
Punthi (পুঁথি) : folk literature.
Purdah (পরদা) : veil.
Ryot (রয়ত) : peasant.
Samity (সমিতি) : association.
Swadeshi (স্বদেশী) : boycott of British goods and institutions and promotion of indigenous goods and institutions.
Swaraj (স্বরাজ) : self-rule.
Zamindar (জমিদার) : landlord.

APPENDIX III

Governors of Bengal (1937-43)

- Anderson, Sir John, 1932-Nov. 26, 1937.
 Brabourne, Michael Herbert, Lord, Nov. 27, 1937- Feb. 23, 1939, relinquished charge to act as Viceroy and Governor-General on June 25, 1938 and resumed charge on Oct. 24, 1938.
 Reid, Sir Robert Neil, (officiating), June 25, 1938-Oct. 24, 1938 and Feb. 24, 1939 June 12, 1939.
 Woodhead, Sir John A., (officiating), June 12, 1939 Nov. 17, 1939
 Herbert, Sir John Arthur, Nov. 18, 1939-Oct. 18, 1943.

APPENDIX IV

Members of the Council of Ministers, I, (April 1937)
Proja-League Coalition Party

- Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq in charge of the Education Department.
 Nalini Ranjan Sarkar in charge of the Finance Department.
 Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin, K.C.I.E., in charge of the Home Department.
 Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy, KT., in charge of the Revenue Department.
 Nawab Khawaja Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca, in charge of the Department of Agriculture and Industries.
 Maharaja Sris Chandra Nandy of Kasimbazar, in charge of the Department of Communications and Works.
 Huseyan Shaheed Suhrawardy in charge of the Department of Commerce and Labour.
 Nawab Musharruf Hossain, Khan Bahadur, in charge of the Judicial and Legislative Departments.
 Syed Nausher Ali in charge of the Department of Public Health and Local Self-Government.
 Prasanna Deb Raikut in charge of the Forest and Excise Department.
 Mukunda Behary Mullick in charge of the Co-operative Credit and Rural Indebtedness Department.

APPENDIX V

Members of the Council of Ministers, II, (Dec 1941)
Progressive Coalition Party

- Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq in charge of the Home and Publicity Departments.
 Symaprasad Mookerjee in charge of the Finance Department.
 Nawab Khwaja Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca, in charge of the Department of Agriculture and Industries.
 Santosh Kumar Basu in charge of the Department of Public Health and Local Self-Government.
 Khan Bahadur M. Abdul Karim in charge of the Education Department and the Department of Commerce and Labour.
 Pramatha Nath Banerjee in charge of the Revenue Department and the Judicial Legislative Departments.
 Khan Bahadur Maulvi Hashem Ali Khan in charge of the Co-operative Credit and Rural Indebtedness Department.
 Shamsuddin Ahmed in charge of the Department of Communications and Works.
 Upendra Nath Barman in charge of the Forest and Excise Department.

APPENDIX VI

*Members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly (April 1937)*¹

- Abul Aziz, Maulvi, Narayanganj East (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Bari, Maulvi, Berhampore (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hafeez, Khan Bahadur Syed, Dacca Central (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hafiz, Maulvi Mirza, Tangail West (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hafiz, Mr. Kurigram South (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hakeem, Mr. Khulna (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hakim, Maulvi, Mymensingh West (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hakim Vikrampur, Mr. Md., Munshiganj (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hamid, Mr. A. M., Pabna West (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Hamid Shah, Maulvi, Kishoreganj North (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Jabbar, Maulvi, Dinajpur Central East (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Jabbar Palwan, Mr. Md., Jamalpur North (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Kader, Mr. Patuakhali South (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Karim, Mr., Jamalpur *cum* Muktagacha (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Latif Biswas, Maulvi, Manikganj West (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Majid, Maulvi, Mymensingh North (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Majid, Mr. Syed, Noakhali South (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Wahab Khan, Maulvi, Bakarganj West (Muhammadan).
 Abdul Wahed, Maulvi, Mymensingh East (Muhammadan).
 Abdulla-Al Mahmood Mr., Serajganj North (Muhammadan).
 Abdur Rahman, Khan Bahadur A.F.M., 24-Parganas North-East (Muhammadan)
 Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, Mr., (Muslim Chamber of Commerce).
 Abdur Rasheed, Maulvi, Birbhum (Muhammadan).
 Abdur Raschid Mahamood, Mr., Serajganj North (Muhammadan).
 Abdur Rauf, Khan Sahib Maulvi S., Howrah (Muhammadan).
 Abdur Rauf, Mr. Shah, Rangpur South (Muhammadan).
 Abdur Razzak, Maulvi, Feni (Muhammadan).
 Abdus Shaheed, Maulvi, Md., Dacca North Central (Muhammadan).
 Abidur Reza Chowdhury, Khan Bahadur, Chandpur West (Muhammadan).
 Abu Hossain Sarkar, Maulvi, Gaibandha North (Muhammadan).
 Abul Fazl, Mr. Muhammad, Madaripur West (Muhammadan).
 Abul Hashim, Maulvi, Burdwan (Muhammadan).
 Abul Hossain, Mr. Ahmed, Netrokona North (Muhammadan).
 Abul Quasem, Maulvi, Hooghly (Muhammadan).
 Acharyya Choudhury, Maharaja Sashi Kanta, Dacca (Landholders.)
 Aftab Ali, Mr., (Water Transport Trade Union.)
 Aftab Hossain Joardar, Maulvi, Nadia East (Muhammadan).

1. Names of members deceased, removed or resigned have not been deleted. Also, this list does not include the names of new members elected in the by-elections subsequent to April 1937.

- Ahmed Ali, Khan Sahib Maulana, Enayetpuri. Jhenidah (Muhammadan).
 Ahmed Ali Mridha, Maulvi, Goalundo (Muhammadan).
 Ahmed Hosain, Mr., Gaibandha South (Muhammadan).
 Ahmed Kabir Choudhury, Maulvi, Chittagong South (Muhammadan).
 Ahmed Khan, Mr. Syed, Noakhali South (Muhammadan).
 Alfazuddin Ahmed, Khan Bahadur, Midnapore (Muhammadan).
 Aminullah, Maulvi, Noakhali Central (Muhammadan).
 Amir Ali. Md. Mia, Rajshahi South (Muhammadan).
 Armstrong. Mr. W. I., Burdwan Division (European).
 Ashraf Ali. Mr. M., Natore (Muhammadan).
 Asimuddin Ahmed. Mr., Tippera Central (Muhammadan).
 Aulad Hossain Khan. Maulvi, Manikganj East (Muhammadan).
 Azahar Ali, Maulvi, Pabna East (Muhammadan).
 Azizul Haque, the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur M., C.I.E. Nadia West (Muhammadan).
 Banerjee, Dr. Suresh Chandra, Calcutta and Suburbs (Registered Factories).
 Banerjee, Mr. P., 24 Parganas North-West (General).
 Banerjee, Mr. Pramatha Nath, Burdwan North-West (General).
 Banerjee, Mr. Sibnath, Howrah (Registered Factories).
 Banerji, Mr. Satya Priya, Rajshahi (General).
 Bannerjee, Babu Monoranjan, Dacca East (General).
 Bannerman Mr. H. C. (Indian Tea Association.)
 Barat Ali, Mr. Mohammad, Sirajganj Central (Muhammadan).
 Barma, Babu Premhari, Dinajpur (General).
 Barma, Mr. Puspajit, Rangpur (General).
 Barman, Babu Shyma Prosad, Dinajpur (General).
 Barman, Babu Upendra Nath, Jalpaiguri *cum* Siliguri (General).
 Basu, Babu Jatindra Nath, Calcutta North (General).
 Basu, Mr. Santosh Kumar, Calcutta East (General).
 Bhawmik, Mr. Gobinda Ch., Midnapore East (General).
 Biswas, Babu Lakshmi Narayan, Nadia (General).
 Biswas, Mr. Rasik Lal, Jessore (General).
 Biswas, Babu Surendra Nath, Faridpur (General).
 Blair, Mr. A.P., (Bengal Chamber of Commerce.)
 Bose, Mr. Sarat Chandra, Calcutta South (General).
 Brasher. Mr. F.C., Calcutta and Suburbs (European).
 Chakrabarty, Babu Narendra Narayan, Bogra *cum* Pabna (General).
 Chakrabarty, Mr. Jatindra Nath, Rangpur (General).
 Chattopadhyay, Mr. Haripada, Nadia (General).
 Chaudhuri, Rai Harendra Nath, 24-Parganas Municipal (General).
 Chippendale, Mr. J.W., (Anglo-Indian).
 Clark, Mr. I.A., (Bengal Chamber of Commerce.)
 Cooper, Mr. C.G., (Indian Jute Mills Associations.)
 Crosfield, Mr. L. M., Chittagong Division (European).

- Das, Babu Mahim Chandra, Chittagong (General).
 Das, Babu Radha Nath, Hooghly North-East (General).
 Das, Mr. Anukul Chandra, 24-Parganas North-East (General).
 Das, Mr. Kirit Bhusan, Murshidabad (General).
 Das, Mr. Monomohan, Mymensingh East (General).
 Das, Babu Debendra Nath, Birbhum (General).
 Das Gupta, Babu Khagendra Nath, Jalpaiguri *cum* Siliguri (General).
 Das Gupta, Dr. J.M., Calcutta Central (General).
 Das Gupta, Mr. Narendra Nath, Bakarganj South-West (General).
 Datta, Mr. Dharendra Nath, Tippera (General).
 Dolui, Mr. Harendra Nath, Jhargram *cum* Ghatal (General).
 Dutt, Mr. Sukumar, Hooghly South-West (General).
 Dutta Gupta, Miss Mira, Calcutta General (Women).
 Dutta Mazumdar, Mr. Niharendu, (Barrackpore Registered Factories.)
 Edbar, Mr. Upendra Nath, Bakarganj South-West (General).
 Emdadul Haque, Kazi, Kurigram North (Muhammadan).
 Farhad Raza Chowdhury, Mr. M., Jangipur (Muhammadan).
 Farhut Bano Khanam. Begum, Dacca (Muhammadan).
 Faroqui, Nawab Sir Mohiuddin, of Ratanpur, (Muhammadan).
 Fazlul Huq, the Hon'ble Mr. A.K., Patuakhali North (Muhammadan).
 Fazlul Quadir, Khan Bahadur Maulvi, Chittagong North-West (Muhammadan)
 Fazlur Rahaman, Mr. Jamalpur East (Muhammadan).
 Fazlur Rahman, Mr. Dacca University (Muhammadan).
 Ferguson, Mr. R.H. Rajshahi Division (European).
 Ghose, Babu Autul Chandra. Jessore (General).
 Giasuddin Ahmed, Mr. Jamalpur West (Muhammadan).
 Gyasuddni Ahmed Chowdhury, Maulvi. Madaripur East (Muhammadan).
 Golam Sarwar Hosaini, Mr. Shah Syed. Ramganj *cum* Raipur (Muhammadan).
 Gomes, Mr. S.A. Dacca Division (Indian Christian).
 Goswami, Mr. Tulsi Chandra. Burdwan Division North Municipal (General).
 Griffiths, Mr. C. (Anglo-Indian.)
 Gupta, Mr. Jogesh Chandra. Calcutta South Central (General).
 Gupta, Mr. J.N Railway Trade Union (Labour).
 Gurung. Mr. Damber Singh. (Darjeeling (General).
 Habibullah, the Hon'ble K., Nawab Bahadur of Dacca. Dacca Municipal (Muhammadan).
 Hafizuddin Chowdhury Maulvi, Thakurgaon (Muhammadan).
 Hamiduddin Ahmed. Khan Sahib. Kishoreganj East (Muhammadan).
 Hamilton. Mr. K.A. (Calcutta Trades Association.)
 Hasan Ali Chowdhury, Mr. Syed. Tangail North (Muhammadan).
 Hasanuzzaman, Maulvi Md. Tippera South (Muhammadan).
 Hashem Ali Khan. Khan Bahadur Maulvi. Bakarganj North (Muhammadan).

- Hasina Murshed, Mrs. Calcutta (Muhammadan—Women).
 Hatemaally Jamadar, Khan Sahib. Pirojpur South (Muhammadan).
 Henry. Mr. David. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce.)
 Himatsinka, Mr. Probhudoyal. Calcutta West (General),
 Hirtzel, Mr. M.A.Z. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce.)
 Idris Ahmed Mia. Mr., Malda South (Muhammadan).
 Ispahani, Mr. M.A.H., Calcutta South (Muhammadan).
 Jalaluddin Ahmed, Khan Bahadur. Cox's Bazar (Muhammadan).
 Jalaluddin Hashemy, Mr. Syed. Satkhira (Muhammadan).
 Jasimuddin Ahmed, Mr. 24-Parganas South (Muhammadan).
 Jonab Ali Majumdar, Maulvi. Chandpur East (Muhammadan).
 Kabiruddin Khan, Khan Sahib Maulvi. Netrokona South (Muhammadan).
 Kazem Ali Mirza, Sahibzada Kawan Jah Syed. Murshidabad South-West (Muhammadan).
 Khaitan, Mr. Debi Prosad. (Indian Chamber of Commerce.)
 Khan. Mr. Debendra Lall. Midnapore Central (General).
 Kumar, Mr. Atul Chandra. Malda (General).
 Kundu, Mr. Nishitha Nath. Dinajpur (General).
 Maclauchlan, Mr. C.S., Calcutta and Suburbs (European).
 Mafizuddin Ahmed, Dr., Bogra North (Muhammadan).
 Mafizuddin Choudhury, Maulvi., Balurghat (Muhammadan).
 Maguire, MM. L.T. (Anglo-Indian.)
 Mahtab, Maharajkumar Uday Chand. Burdwan Central (General).
 Mahtabuddin Ahmed, Khan Bahadur, Dinajpur Central West (Muhammadan).
 Maiti, Mr. Nikunja Behari. Midnapore South-East (General).
 Maitra, Mr. Surendra Mohan. North Bengal Municipal (General).
 Maji, Mr. Adwaita Kumar. Burdwan Central (General).
 Majumdar, Mrs. Hemaprova. Dacca (General—Women).
 Mazumdar, Mr. Birendra Nath. East Bengal Municipal (General).
 Mal. Mr. Iswar Chandra. Midnapore South. West (General).
 Mandal, Mr. Amrita Lal. Mymensingh West (General).
 Mandal, Mr. Banku Behari. Burdwan North-West (General).
 Mandal, Mr. Birat Chandra. Faridpur (General).
 Mandal, Mr. Jagat Chandra. Tippera (General).
 Mandal, Mr. Jogendra Nath. Bakarganj North-East (General).
 Mandal, Mr. Krishna Prasad. Midnapore Central (General).
 Maniruddin, Akhand, Maulvi. Rajshahi North (Muhammadan).
 Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Maulana Md. Chittagong South Central (Muhammadan).
 Maqbul Hosain, Mr. Tippera North-East (Muhammadan).
 Masud Ali Khan Panni, Maulvi. Tangail South (Muhammadan).
 Miles, Mr. C.W. (Indian Tea Association.)

- Millar, Mr. C. Calcutta and Suburbs (Europæan).
 Mohsin Ali, Mr. Md. Meherpur (Muhammadan).
 Mookerjee, Mr. Symaprosad. (Calcutta University.)
 Morgan, Mr.C,C.I.E., Presidency Division (European).
 Moslem Ali Mollah, Maulvi. Rajshahi Central (Muhammadan).
 Mozammel Huq, Maulvi Md. Bhola North (Muhammadan).
 Muhammad Afzal, Khan Sahib Maulvi Md., Pirojpur North (Muhammadan).
 Muhammad Ali, Khan Bahadur. Bogra West (Muhammadan).
 Muhammad Ibrahim, Maulvi. Noakhali North (Muhammadan).
 Muhammad Ishaque, Maulvi. Bogra South (Muhammadan).
 Muhammad Israil, Maulvi. Kishoreganj South (Muhammadan).
 Muhammad Siddique, Dr. Syed. Bankura (Muhammadan).
 Muhammad Solaiman, Mr. Barrackpore Municipal (Muhammadan).
 Mukherjee, Mr. B., Colliery (Coal Mines Labour).
 Murkherji, Dr. H. C., Calcutta *cum* Presidency Division (Indian Christian).
 Mukherji, Dr. Sharat Chandra. Birbhum (General).
 Mullick, the Hon'ble Mr., Mukunda Behari. Khulna (General).
 Mullick, Mr. Pulin Behary. Howrah (General).
 Mullick, Srijut Ashutosh. Bankura West (General).
 Musharruf Hossain, the Hon'ble Nawab, Khan Bahadur. Jalpaiguri *cum* Darjeeling (Muhammadan).
 Mustagaswal Huque, Syed. Bagerhat (Muhammadan).
 Mustafa Ali Dewan. Mr. Brahmanbaria North (Muhammadan).
 Nandy, the Hon'ble Maharaja Sris Chandra, of Kasimbazar. Presidency (Land-holders.)
 Nasarullah, Nawabzada K. Brahmanbaria South (Muhammadan).
 Nasker. Mr. Hem Chandra. 24-Parganas South East (General).
 Nausher Ali the Hon'ble Mr. Syed. Jessore Sadar (Muhammadan).
 Nazimuddin, the Hone'ble Khawaja Sir, K.C.I.E., Calcutta North (Muhammadan)
 Nimmo, Mr. T.B., (Indian Jute Mills Association.)
 Nooruddin Mr. K., Hooghly *cum* Howrah Municipal (Muhammadan).
 Norton, Mr. H.R., (Calcutta Trades Association).
 Ordish, Mr. H.E., Dacca Division (European).
 Page, Mr. W.W.K., Calcutta and Suburbs (European).
 Pain, Mr. Barada Prosanna. Hooghly *cum* Howrah Municipal (General).
 Patton, Mr. W.C., Darjeeling (European)
 Paul, Sir Hari Sankar, Kt., (Bengal National Chamber of Commerce.)
 Pramanik, Mr Tarinicharan. Malda (General).
 Quara Yousuf Mirza. 24-Parganas Central (Muhammadan).
 Rahman, Khan Bahadur A.M.L., Rajshahi Central (Muhammadan).
 Raikat, The Hon'ble Prasanna Deb. Jalpaiguri *cum* Siliguri (General).
 Rajibuddin Tarafdar. Maulvi. Bogra East (Muhammadan).

- Ramizuddin Ahmed. Mr., Tippera West (Muhammadan).
 Ray Choudhury, Mr., Birendra Kishore Mymensingh East (General).
 Razaur Rahman Khan. Mr., Dacca South Central (Muhammadan).
 Ross, Mr. J.B., (Indian Mining Association).
 Roy, Babu Patiram. (Khulna General).
 Roy, the Hon'ble Sir Bijoy Prasad Singh. Kt., Burdwan (Landholders.)
 Roy, Kumar Shil Shekhaheswar. (Rajshahi Landholders).
 Roy, Mr. Charn Chandra. Mymensingh West (General).
 Roy, Mr. Dhananjoy. Dacca East (General).
 Roy, Mr. Kamalkrishna. Bankura East (General).
 Roy, Mr. Kiran Sankar. Dacca West (General).
 Roy, Mr. Kishori Pati. Jhargram *cum* Ghatal (General).
 Roy. Mr. Manmatha Nath. Howrah (General).
 Roy, Rai Bahadur Khirode Chandra, Chittagong (Landholders.)
- Sadaruddin Ahmed, Mr., Bakarganj South (Muhammadan),
 Safiruddin Ahmed, Haji, Rangpur North (Muhammadan).
 Salim, Mr. S. A. Narayanganj North (Muhammadan).
 Sanaullah, Al-Haj Maulana Dr., Chittagong North-East (Muhammadan).
 Sanyal D-. Nalinaksha. Presidency Division Municipal (General).
 Sanyal, Mr. Sasanka Sekhar. Murshidabad (General).
 Sarker, Babu Madhusudan. Bogra *cum* Pabna (General).
 Sarker, the Hon'ble Mr., Nalini Ranjan. (Bengal National Chamber of Commerce).
 Sassoon, Mr. R.M., (Bengal Chamber of Commerce.)
 Sen, Babu Nagendra Nath. Khulna (General).
 Sen, Rai Bahadur Jogesh Chandra, 24-Parganas South-East (General).
 Serajul Islam, Mr., Bongaon (Muhammadan).
 Shahabuddin, Mr., Khawaja. Narayanganj South (Muhammadan).
 Shahedali, Mr., Matlabazar (Muhammadan).
 Shamsuddin Ahmed, Mr. M., Kushtia (Muhammadan).
 Shamsuddin Ahmed Khandkar, Mr., Gopalganj (Muhammadan).
 Shamsul Huda, Maulna Mymensingh South (Muhammadan).
 Singha Babu Kshetra Nath. Rangpur (General).
 Sinha, Srijut Manindra Bhusan. Bankura West (General).
 Sirdar, Babu Litta Munda, Bengal Dooars (Western) Tea Gardaen Labour.
 Som, Srijut Gour Hari, Hoogly North-East (General).
 Studd, Mr. Eric. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce.)
 Suhrawardy, the Hon'ble Mr. H. S., 24-Parganas Municipal (Muhammadan).
 Sur Mr. Harendra Kumar. Noakhali (General).
- Tamizuddin Khan, Maulvi. Faridpur West (Muhammadan).
 Tapuria, Rai Bahadur Mungtootal. (Marwari Association.)
 Thakur, Mr. Promatha Ranjan. (Faridpur (General).
 Tofel Ahmed Choudhury, Maulvi Haji, Bhola South (Muhammadan).

Waliur Rahman, Maulvi, Jessore East (Muhammadan).
 Walker, Mr. J.R., Hooghly *cum* Howrah (European).
 West. Mrs. Ellen. Anglo-Indian (Women).
 Wordsworth, Mr. W. C., (Bengal Chamber of Commerce.)
 Yusuf Ali Choudhury, Mr., Faridpur East (Muhammadan).
 Zahur Ahmed Choudhury, Mr., Malda North (Muhammadan).
 Zaman, Mr. A.M.A., Hooghly *cum* Serampore (Registered Factories) Labour.

APPENDIX VIII

Members of the Bengal Legislative Council (Feb. 1941)¹

Ahmad, Khan Bahadur Naziruddin. Burdwan Division (Muhhammadan) Rural.
 Ahmed, Mr. Nur. Chittagong (Muhammadan) Rural.
 Ahmed, Mr. Mesbahuddin. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).
 Ali, Mr. Altaf. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).
 Aziz, Khan Sahib Abdul. Presidency Division South (Muhammadan) Rural.
 Baksh, Mr. Kader. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).
 Banerjee, Rai Bahadur Keshab Chandra. Dacca Division North, General (Rural).
 Barua, Mr. Dharendra Lal. (Chosen by the Governor).
 Bose, Rai Bahadur Manmatha Nath. Burdwan Division South-West, General (Rural).
 Chakraverti, Mr. Shrish Chandra. Calcutta General (Urban).
 Chaudhury, Mr. Moazzemali *alias* Lal Mia. Faridpur (Muhammadan) Rural.
 Chowdhury, Khan Sahib Abdul Hamid. Mymensingh West (Muhammadan) Rural
 Chowdhury, Mr. Khorshed Alam. Bakarganj (Muhammadan) Rural.
 Chowdhury, Khan Bahadur Rezzaqul Haider. Noakhali (Muhammadan) Rural.
 Chowdhury, Mr. Hamidul Huq. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).
 Chowdhury, Mr. Humayun Reza. Rajshahi *cum* Malda (Muhammadan) Rural.
 Cohen, Mr. D.J. (Chosen by the Governor).
 Das, Mr. Lalit Chandra. Chittagong Division General (Rural).
 Datta, Mr. Bankim Chandra. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).
 Datta, Mr. Narendra Chandra. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).
 D' Rozario, Mrs. K. (Chosen by Governor).
 Dutta, Mr. Kamini Kumar. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

1. This list does not include the names of members deceased, removed or resigned prior to Feb. 1941.

Esmail, Khan Bahadur Alhadj Khawaja Muhammad. Dacca North-West, Muhammadan (Rural).

Ferguson, Mr. R. W.N., (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Goswami, Mr. Kanai Lal. Calcutta Suburbs, General (Urban).

Hosain, Khan Bahadur Saiyed Muazzamuddin. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Hossain, Mr. Latafat. (Chosen by the Governor).

Hossain, Mr., Mohamed. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Huq, Khan Bahadur Syed Muhammad Ghaziul, Tippera Muhammadan (Rural).

Jan, Alhadj Khan Bahadur Shaikh Muhammad. Calcutta and Suburbs Muhammadan (Urban).

Kabir, Mr. Humayun. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Karim, Khan Bahadur M. Abdul. Mymensingh East Muhammadan (Rural).

Khan, Khan Bahadur Muhammad Asaf. Rangpur Muhammadan (Rural).

Khan, Maulana Muhammad Akram. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Laidlaw, Mr. W.B.G., (European).

Lamb, Sir T., (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Maitra, Rai Bahadur Brojendra Mohan. Rajshahi Division South-West, General (Rural).

Mitra, the Hon'ble Mr. Satyendra Chandra. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Molla, Khan Sahib Subidali. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Momin, Begum Hamida. (Chosen by the Governor).

Mookerjee, Mr. Naresh Nath. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Mookerji, Dr. Radha Kumud. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Pal Chaudhuri, Mr. Ranajit. Presidency Division, General (Rural).

Quasem Maulvi Abul. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Rahman, Khan Bahadur Aatur. Presidency Division North, Muhammadan (Rural).

Rahman, Khan Bahadur Mukhlesur. Rajshahi Division North, Muhammadan (Rural).

Rashid, Khan Bahadur Kazi Abdur. Dacca South-East, Muhammadan (Rural).

Ray, Mr. Nagendra Narayan. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Ray, Rai Sahib Jogenedra Nath. Burdwan Division North-East, General (Rural)

Ray, Dr. Kumud Sankar. Dacca Division South, General (Rural).

Ross, Mr. J.B. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Roy, Mr. Amulya Dhane. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Roy, Rai Bahadur Radhica Bhusan. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Roy Chowdhury, Mr. Krishna Chandra. (Chosen by the Governor).

Roy Chowdhury, Mr. Birendra Kishore. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Sanyal, Mr. Sachindra Narayan. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Scott-Kerr, Mr. W. F. (European).

Sen, Rai Sahib Jatindra Mohan. Rajshahi Division North-West (Rural).

Shamsuzzoha, Khan Bahadur M. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Singh Roy, The Hon'ble Sir Bijoy Prasad. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Sinha, Raja Bahadur Bhupendra Narayan, of Nashipur. (Bengal Legislative Assembly).

Talukdar, Dr. Kasiruddin. Bogra *cum* Pabna, Muhammadan (Rural).

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