A Narration on Muslim Bengal’s Struggle for Freedom

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Abstract

East India Company, a commercial enterprise of United Kingdom, came to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, gradually succeeded in transforming itself into a ‘political power’. In 1757 landmark event of the Battle of Plassey firmly established the Company as the supreme power. Within a few years followed the Grant of the Diwani to the East India Company by Emperor Shah Alam (1765). For a trifling sum of Rs.26 lacs per annum the Company secured the entire control of the affairs of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The wording in which the grant was made would be considered amusing if the consequence of this action were not so tragic for a whole person who suffered foreign subjugation for a period of nearly two centuries. A document described as ‘strange’ in ‘Bengali Literary Review’ (1973) edited by Prof. Syed Ali Ashraf says: “At this happy time (i.e. after the defeat at Buxar) our royal Firmaund (i.e Farman) indispensably requiring obedience, is issued: that whereas in consideration of the attachment of the services of the high and mighty, the noblest of exalted nobles, the chief of illustrations of royal favours, the English Company, we have granted them the Dewanny of the Provinces of Bengal, Behar and Orissa... It is requisite that our royal descendants, the viziers, the bestowers of dignity... as well as the future as the present, using their constant endeavours for the establishment of the royal command, leave the said office in possession of the said Company from generation to generation, forever and ever..... Knowing our commands to be most strict and positive, let them not deviate there from.” That was how the right of collecting the revenues of these provinces along with which went administration of criminal law came into the hands of the Company. For all practical purposes the Financial Instrument the (Diwani) meant the surrender of sovereignty by the Mughal Emperor. This surrender had far reaching effects especially on the position of the Muslims. Great deterioration was noticeable not only in their political status but also in their economic condition. Politically they lost all the importance which they had possessed and the privileges they had enjoyed for centuries as rulers of the land. And since the British had replaced as rulers, they saw to it that the Muslims did not lift their heads once more. This study is a narration of the struggle of Muslim Bengal that describes the role of various actors that finally destined to the struggle for Pakistan.

Key Words: East India Company, Diwani, Battle of Plassey, A.K. Fazlul Haq

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Muslim Bengal’s Struggle for Freedom

In the economic life of Muslims the Company’s rule brought in its wake serious maladjustments. If under Muslims rule a large number of posts; civil and military, were filled by the Muslims, now the higher posts were reserved for the British and lesser posts went to Hindus who were associated with the Company from the beginning as their agents. This meant unemployment for a multitude of hitherto influential families as well as the common Muslim. Moreover, in the beginning of the Company’s rule its servants collected fabulous sums of money. This was made possible through participation in commercial activities not only on Company’s but also on their own individual accounts and, of course, through corruption which was rampant. These activities of the Company’s servants had created a class of so-called “Nabobs” whose evil influence in England was felt by Englishmen themselves. After retirement pensions were also paid in England which was a constant drain on the resources of the country.

The cultured individuals, poets, artist and scholars who had been sponsored by the Muslim rulers had now fallen on evil days and began to experience great culture. The Company’s servants had little use of indigenous culture. Subcontinent’s music had no appeal for them and its literature was despised. The British also diverted the funds of several Muslim endowments to purposes other than those for which they were originally meant. This brought distress to the Muslim scholar and education deteriorated.

Trade and industry suffered even more under the East India Company. Rapacity and greed of the so-called gomashtas or agents of the East India Company were notorious. Its policy led to the end of a well-balanced and self-sufficient economy. The Company was originally interested in carrying manufactures of Bengal, notably Dacca muslin, in Europe. But Napoleonic Wars gave a change in the British policy. European makers having been closed to British goods, India came to be regarded as one of the chief markets for British products. A planned effort was then made to encourage the import of British goods and discourage Bengal’s main industry, as a result that instead of Bengal supplying some of the finest cloth in the world, she became an importer of machine-made textiles from Lancashire.

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3 Ibid. p. 47
Company started ruthless exploitation of the weaves of Bengal who were forced to accept ridiculously low prices for their manufacture. The nefarious activities of the functionaries of the Company and its gomashtas were such that made the Nawab of Bengal protest in 1762 who wrote to the Company saying that the English merchants take away by force indigenous merchandise at one-fourth of the price and charge five times for their own. Mir Qasim had fought over this very issue of trade and was defeated and removed.\textsuperscript{4}

Trade did not fare much better than industry. The East India Company was not only a commercial concern but also the de-facto Government of the country. Private traders had now to compete with the State, so to say. And at least up to the passing of the Regulating Act (1773) the servants of the Company carried on private trade on a big scale. The British acquired the monopoly of all the more profitable branches of trade\textsuperscript{5} such as cloth and indigo.

When the Company seriously took up the task of establishing its monopoly over the trade of the province, its natural helpers and collaborators were the Hindus of Bengal who had previous contacts with the Company by virtue of their connection with commerce. Now as agents of the Company they started playing their own role in carrying out an oppressive commercial policy.

In these circumstances it was natural that the pressure on agriculture should increase. A balanced economy was thus transformed under the rule of East India Company in an almost purely agricultural economy. This was because avenues of employment were now more restricted and industry and trade had suffered severe setbacks. But not all was well on the agricultural front also. The loss of alternative sources of employment meant for the people in general almost total dependence on land which resulted in smaller and smaller holdings. There was no large scale development of land to absorb those who adopted agriculture not so much by choice as by force of circumstances.

The agricultural policy dealt a heavy blow both at the Muslim landed gentry and the Muslim peasants.\textsuperscript{6} Apart from its adverse effects upon the Muslims, it could not be termed enlightened in any sense of the term. Under Muslim rule land was the property of the State and there were no landlords as such, there being only rent collectors. The

\textsuperscript{4} Anisuzzaman, Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya (Dhaka: 2001) p. 28
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, p. 29
\textsuperscript{6} Majumdar, Ray Chaudhari and Dutta, p. 809
British badly needed more revenues and a class of people with vested interest in the permanence of their rule. And this was the real basis of the system of lease-gaming revenues to the highest bidders adopted by Warren Hasting and the Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1792)\(^7\) introduced by Lord Cornwallis. The assessment of revenues under the new Settlement was so great that the old revenue collectors, mostly Muslim, were ousted and their place was taken by those with ready money, the Banias and the gomashtas of the British. Thus the Muslim rent collectors were dispossessed and their lands were auctioned to unscrupulous speculators. The rent result was that the Permanent Settlement became a terrible engine of oppression. The Muslim gentry were replaced by the Hindu zamindars. They had the power of fixing rent and farming out land to others and thus numerous intermediaries came into existence in between the actual cultivators and the Government. And in the process the peasantry lost the comparatively mild and considerate rent-collector for an avaricious upstart.

Another aspect of agriculture which deserves notice consists of the activities of the Indigo Planters. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Englishmen began investing large sums of money in an indigo industry in Bengal, Bihar etc. During the first half of the nineteenth century products of indigo factories were one of the biggest items of export. Not until the chemical dyes captured the world market in the second half of the nineteenth century, the indigo industry continued with the peasantry. Since, however, these so called contracts were between the all-powerful members of the ruling class and the helpless peasantry, they were not distinguishable from forced labour. What happened was that the area was marked out for cultivation by the Planters without taking the wishes of the Raiyata into consideration. 7

The cultivators had no choice whatsoever. In the matter of payment the peasantry got very little indeed (Rs. 2/- as 8 per Bigha or half an acre) and thus, quite naturally it was averse to indigo cultivation. The rate of payment which had been made towards the end of eighteenth century remained unchanged for more than half a century. The price of paddy having raised meanwhile the peasants would normally prefer to grow paddy, but once they were caught they could not get out of the Planter’s net and such was the arrangement. Their indebtedness went on growing and they almost became the slaves of the plantation owners and the money lenders.

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The deterioration in the economic condition of the Muslim peasantry was directly the result of the Company’s policy. It gave birth to several movements and convulsions.\(^8\)

The first sizeable upheavals were caused by the Faqirs and Sannyasis.\(^9\) Although not exclusively the Muslim leadership of the Faqirs and Sannyasis were usually in the hands of Muslim Faqirs, mostly the followers of Shah Madar of Makhanpur. Majnun Shah was the leading Faqir who was responsible for a good deal of trouble in the countryside and after his death in 1787,\(^10\) his relatives and lieutenants, Musa Shah, Chiragh Shah, Ali Shah, Farghul Ali Shah, Sultan Shah, Karim Shah and others carried on their activities in the nineteenth century. It was nothing short of organized looting by a class of people from whom it was least expected. Gangs of Faqirs some times of several hundred practically invaded villages and terrorized the whole populations.

The Faqirs and Sannyasis had become a nuisance for the villagers. They went about almost naked and armed with lathis and sometimes with firearms. As soon as the information reached a village of the impending arrival of Majnun Shah and his party, the village would become empty. Only the destitute would remain who had nothing to lose and who themselves very often joined the party of the Faqirs. Majnun Shah made extensive use of fire arms with which most of the villagers were not at all acquainted. He would usually approach a village in a horse back and would start firing while still at some distance to scare away the village folk. To avoid being mercilessly killed at the hands of the Faqirs, the zamindar and other well to do people had abandoned the village and flee for safety and Majnun Shah got hold of all the food and valuables from empty houses. Where resistance was offered, it was put down ruthlessly.\(^11\)

This phenomenon was very peculiar. Normally the Faqir or Sannyasis has a place of his own in Muslim and Hindu society respectively. But these activities of the Faqirs and Sannyasis were the result of extraordinary economic circumstances. Since the old order was destroyed by the Company and the peasantry was passing through really bad times, support of the Faqirs and Sannyasis had become most difficult, if not impossible. It was the reaction of the

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8 Ibid, p. 270
9 J. M. Gosh Sarryasi and Fakir’s Raiders in Bengal (Calcutta, 1927) Ch. XI
10 Ibid.ch. XI
11 J. M. Gosh Sarryasi and Fakir’s Raiders in Bengal (Calcutta, 1927) Ch. XI
have-nots to the state of affairs in which they found themselves deserted by an order that took such a vile and violent shape.\textsuperscript{12}

For a long time the Company’s administration and the zamidars were kept on tender hooks by the angry Faqirs and Sannyasis. Their actions were undoubtedly the result of the poor economic conditions of the masses. It is a different matter that their activities made the condition even more miserable.

Next to the activities of the Faqirs, which instead of bringing about any amelioration in the condition of the people caused further deterioration particularly amongst the rural masses, the most important cause was the Faraizi movement. This movement spread extensively among the peasants of what later came to be known as East Pakistan. Haji Shariatullah the founder of the Faraizi Movement was born around 1780 in a village in the district of Faridpur. Reliable details of his childhood and youth are not available. But this much is certain that when he was about twenty years of age he went to Mecca for Haj. Certain authorities mention two pilgrimages – one after the other. It is alleged that he spent about twenty years in Arabia. It is also asserted that during this long period he came in contact with the Wahhabis whose puritanic doctrines influenced Haji Shariatullah.\textsuperscript{13}

It is alleged that while he was returning to his village home from Haj he was attacked by dacoits who looted all his belongings including books. At this stage Haji decided to join the band of dacoits and actually participated in some of their efforts. But such was the charm of his life that it attracted the attention of the Dakotas who ultimately gave up their activities and became his disciples. When Haji Shariatullah returned to his village home he had already gained a reputation as a religious scholar, a pious man and an accomplished speaker. He succeeded in collecting a number of village folks around him to whom he preached the simple tenets of Islam. He required them to come back to the pristine purity of Islam, give up the Hindu customs and beliefs which had got confused with Islam and purge Muslim society of all the un-Islamic innovations. The masses were told that their plight was due to their disregard of the Islamic teachings. His clarion call for unity, equality and brotherhood had a great appeal for the masses. The movement came to be known as the Faraizi Movement because of the emphases placed on the performance of faraiz or essential duties as laid down by Islam. It is

\textsuperscript{12} L. S. O’ Malley, Bengal District Gatteers: Midra pore (Calcutta, 1911), p. 39 - 45
\textsuperscript{13} Muhsinuddin Ahmed Khan ‘Tomb Inscription of Haji Sahrit-u-llah, JPSF III, pp. 187 - 98
not easy to fight against traditional practices and beliefs and Haji Shariatullah also meet with quite a stiff resistance from those who stood for the status quo in matters of faith. The Hindu zamindars and the English planters did not like any movement that aimed at bringing about unity and organization among the downtrodden and submissive peasantry which they had been exploiting. It is significant that Haji Shariatullah did not even allow his followers to call him a Pir (spiritual guide) but only an Ustad (teacher) and themselves as his shagirds (pupils).

Though Haji Shariatullah was not political-minded and concentrated on religious reforms yet there was in his teachings a certain element which had clear political implications. He declared that the Friday and Id congregational prayers were not to be said by his followers. This was apparently because in his view the country had been converted into ‘Dar-Ul-Harb’.14 It was about the same time that Shah Abdul Aziz, the illustrious son of Hazrat Shah Waliullah had pronounced a Fatwa in which he had declared India to be ‘dar-ul-harb’ even though he had not pronounced in favour of suspending the Friday and Id prayers.

The Faraiz Movement became very popular during the lifetime of Haji Shariatullah and when he died in 1840 the peasantry of East Pakistan had very largely come under his spell. The campaign achieved success because it gave them hope. Though a religious movement with no pronounced political or economic aims, was successful because of political disappointments and economic frustrations of the rural masses.

Under Haji Shariatullah’s more dynamic son, Muhsinuddin Ahmad, better known as Dadu Mian, the movement took a more pronounced socioeconomic turn. Dadu Mian was born in 1819. Already in the lifetime of his father Dudu Mian had started taking an active role in his father’s movement but after his father’s death in 1840, he became the acknowledged leader of the crusade. He had the great organizational capacity. Unlike his father who was a profound scholar of Islam, Dudu Mian possessed a more practical bent of mind. Because of his exceptional talent at the organization he succeeded in making the Faraizis into a well-knit and active community. Already in 1838 he had challenged the Hindu zamindars that had imposed certain illegal cases which had undesirable religious implications such as cases in connection with ‘DurgaPuja’ or ‘KaliPuja’.15

14 Ibid. pp.152-54
15 J. N. Farquhar, Modern Religious Movements in India (New York, 1924) p. 354
meetings followed in subsequent years. He also came into conflict with the indigo planters. He was several times brought before the law courts but no serious harm came to him in spite of the support which zamindars and planters received from the Police. The main importance of the Faraizi Movement lies in its being the first movement in Muslim Bengal in which the rural masses participated on a large scale.

Another remarkable romantic personality thrown out by Muslim Bengal in the early part of the nineteenth century is Mir Nisar Ali, generally known as Titu Mir. He was a contemporary of Haji Shariatullah but he moved amongst the rural masses of the 24-Parganas and Nadia rather than in East Bengal. He is said to have come in contact with Syed Ahmad Shahid when the latter proceeded to Mecca via Calcutta in 1820 and again when he returned in 1822. Titu Mir is also reported to have entered the circle of the Syed’s disciples. His activities directed against the Hindu zamindars and English planters are sometimes described as an adjunct of the over-all movement led by the Syed. There is however no direct evidence of a definite connection between the two movements much less of a joint plan of action except that it was during the same years that while the Syed was waging a jihad against the Sikhs in the Frontier, Titu Mir was fighting against the Hindu zamindars and the English Planters and both fell fighting in the fateful year 1831. When this is said, the determination, the conditions and the mode or the struggle of the Syed and Titu Mir had little in common. It seems to be much more sensible to suggest that the local circumstances, particularly economic exploitation had given birth to the activities of Titu Mir and these were much more akin to the activities of Dudu Mian a few years later than to Syed Ahmad Shahid’s jihad on the Frontier. Be it as it may, Titu Mir has left his mark in the history of the Muslim Renaissance in Bengal.

In 1857 was fought the War of Independence. Muslim Bengal made its own contribution to the struggle. And when the struggle ended in failure, the Muslims everywhere became the objects of British retaliation. The Muslims of Bengal though far away from the chief centers of resistance had their own share of persecution at the hands of the rulers. The war also gave birth to a different type of movement for the emancipation of the Muslims.

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17 C. F. Andrew and Girija Mukharji, The rise and growth of the Congress in India (London, 1938) p. 123
18 Ibid, p. 48
After the War of Independence it occurred to some of the thinking Muslims that armed conflict with the British rule futile and Muslims must reconcile themselves to British rule which had come to stay. They also felt that the key to their future lay in taking to English education. The Hindus had gone far ahead in that respect and the Muslims were lagging behind. If they were to make a mark in public life and in the services they must, so they argued, educate themselves. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was undoubtedly the most powerful and influential advocate of these ideas. But simultaneously with Sir Syed a Muslim in Bengal Nawab Syed Abdul Latif came to similar conclusions. To begin with without knowing each other and later in cooperation with each other they preached the same gospel. The only difference was that while Sir Syed's work was not confined to any particular region, Nawab Syed Abdul Latif worked among the Muslims of Bengal. At an early point he realized that the Muslim must acquire knowledge of English and adapt themselves to the conditions of the modern age. As early as 1853 already a few years before the War of independence he put up a prize for the best essay on the advantages of English Education to the Muslims students. He also constituted an important organization in 1863 known as the Mohammedan Literary Society. This was about the same time as Sir Syed founded the Scientific Society. The inaugural meeting of the Majlis was held at the founder's home in Calcutta which was presided over by Mawlai Muhammad Wajih, a senior Professor of Calcutta Madrasah. His aim was to awaken the Muslims and direct their energies into right channels. The defined aims and objects of the Majlis were: to impart useful information through lectures, to fight against prejudices and exclusiveness and introduce modern ideas amongst the Muslims and ultimately to promote social intercourse among the various segments of the population, Muslims, Hindus and English. The lectures were delivered in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English.

In this endeavor Nawab Syed Abdul Latif received all the encouragement from Sir Syed. Actually towards the later part of the year 1863 in which the Majlis was founded, Sir Syed paid a visit to Calcutta and delivered a lecture under its auspices on Patriotism and the Necessity of Promoting Knowledge. Nawab Syed Abdul Latif was fully conscious of the importance of the English language and said on one occasion: "If any language could lead to the advancement in the life of the learner, it is English."20

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20 Hunter, A sketch of Wahhabis in India down to the death of Sayyid Ahmed in 1831, pp. 2798
20 Karamat Ali, Encyclopedia of Islam II, pp. 752 - 54
Politically also the Nawab stood very close to Sir Syed. He was especially concerned that even after the debacle of 1857. There were many people in Bengal who were devoted to the waging of jihad against the British. Some of the followers of Syed Ahmad Shahid, notably Mawlawi Inayat Ali, exercised great influence over the Muslims of Bengal with the effect that they were contributing what they could in men and money for Jihad, which still was being waged in the North-West of the Sub-continent. A number of trials held in the aftermath of the Ambela campaign in 1863 had brought to light this activities. Nawab Syed Abdul Latif worked hard to stop the Jihad movement in Bengal. In his efforts he sought and received the backing of one of the Khalifahs of Syed Ahmad Shahid, namely Mawlawi Karamat Ali of Janupur.

Malawi Karamat Ali, formerly an ardent believer in Jihad, had apparently become disillusioned after the death of his master Syed Ahmad Shahid in 1831. He had for all practical purposes settled down in Bengal in 1835 to continue the work of religious reform inaugurated by Syed Ahmad Shahid. He became extremely influential in the course of time. Nawab Syed Abdul Latif brought him to Calcutta and made him address a gathering of the Majlis, the subject of his lecture being Jihad which was pushing so many minds among the Muslims and worrying government. It was here that he presented his famous fatwa which declared India as Dar-UL-Islam and therefore jihad as not permissible. To quote him: 21

21 Anisuzzaman, Muslim Manas O’ Bangla Sahitya, (Dhaka 2001) p. 67

The success achieved by Nawab Syed Abdul Latif was limited. It took much longer for the Muslims of Bengal as compared with the Muslims of other parts of the subcontinent to reconcile them to the necessity of English education. But through the efforts of Nawab Syed Abdul Latif a beginning had been made and when he died in 1893 some change had been already noticeable in the attitude of the Muslims of Bengal towards both education and politics.

MUSLIM BENGAL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

When the twentieth century opened the state of politics in India in general and Bengal in particular was more or less as follows: 22 The Hindus were fairly well organized politically. They could make their voice heard on questions of public importance. The Indian National

21 Anisuzzaman, Muslim Manas O’ Bangla Sahitya, (Dhaka 2001) p. 67
Congress had been founded in 1886 and though it claimed to be a national and not a merely Hindu organization, in the effect Muslims as a people had kept them by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. In Bengal the same policy had been advocated by Nawab Syed Abdul Latif. Sir Syed’s efforts in the field of education had borne fruit and a considerable number of Muslim young men were receiving modern education. In Bengal, however, Muslims still seemed hesitant in this respect and the number of those who had an English education was much too small in proportion to their numbers in the population of the province. Consequently it was seldom that one came across a Muslim in the professions of Law, Medicine, Engineering, Journalism etc. or in the higher and middle grades of government service in Bengal. In course of time, Muslims of Bengal had been converted into the proverbial hewers of wood and drawers of water. They had no political organization of their own, again tracing the line fed to them by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Their case, therefore, usually went by default.

How long was this state of affairs to continue? Even if modern education had not made much headway among the Muslims of Bengal, elsewhere a considerable number of Muslims were coming out of educational institutions, notably out of Aligarh and they could not for ever remain satisfied with Sir Syed’s precept of non-participation in politics. In the United Provinces at the turn of the century the Hindi-Urdu controversy had taken an acute turn in which Muhsinul Mulk, the successor of Sir Syed at Aligarh had become involved. This had affected the relations of the Hindus and Muslims which were far from satisfactory.

It was in these circumstances that an event of great importance occurred, which was destined to have a far-reaching effect upon the shape of things to come. This event of Partition of Bengal in 1905 was one of the outcomes.23

Without doubt, the question of redrawing the boundaries of Bengal had occupied the minds of the British administrators for a long time. As early as 1853 the idea of dividing the Presidency of Fort William into two provinces was mooted by Sir Charles Grant because it was considered unwieldy. In 1854 Dalhousi also played with the idea. After 1857, several Secretaries of State for India as well as Lieutenant-Governors of Bengal thought of readjustment of boundaries of the Provinces because it was too large and actually in

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23 Ibid, pp. 86 - 87
1974 the creation of Assam as a Chief Commissioner's province to which were attached the Bengal-speaking districts of Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara was intended to reduce the size of Bengal to comparatively manageable proportions.

Since the formation of Assam as a separate entity suggestions were made time to time that Dacca, Mymensingh and Chittagong districts might also be incorporated in Assam. One such proposal was made in 1896 and it was opposed on the basis that this would be tantamount to taking away certain districts from a, more advanced province and attaching them to a comparatively backward province which will adversely affect the growth and development of these territories. People spoke against their being placed under an "inferior administration" and expressed their fear of being deprived of the benefits of the electoral system and advanced institutions such as the Calcutta High Court and Bengal Council. Some Muslims also joined in these protests. Nothing therefore came out of this proposal.

At the beginning of the century Bengal constituted the largest province of India an area of 189,000 miles and a population of 78,000,000. Due to its distance from Calcutta and the inadequate means of communication East Bengal with its large Muslim population remained undeveloped and all the good things of life seemed to be reserved for Calcutta whose entire economic and cultural life was controlled by the British and Hindus. However, it was not because of the position of the Muslims of East Bengal that the British came to favour Partition but it was because the province was too large to be governed satisfactorily and because Lord Curzon who had come to India as Viceroy and Governor-General towards the end of 1898 was all in favour of efficiency and he could not visualize an enormous province like Bengal being governed efficiently as a single unit and through a single Lieutenant-Governor. However, in reality it was a connection with the formation of a province for the Oriya speaking people – Oriyas being divided into various provinces – which the question of readjustments of the boundaries of Bengal came up before the Government of India. In 1903 a rudimentary scheme of the Partition of Bengal was made public.25

As soon as the scheme became known, protests started. The Indian National Congress took the lead in these protests and considered it an attack on Bengali nationalism. Lord Curzon himself undertook a

24 Ibid, p. 87

25 Syed Ali Ashraf (Edt.) Bengali Literature Review (University of Karachi, 1973), p. 15
tour of Eastern Bengal to canvass support for the scheme and ultimately came out with a more comprehensive plan of Partition which would bring into existence a full-fledged province of East Bengal and Assam with its capital at Dacca. It was this scheme of Partition which was finally accepted by the Secretary of State and the Province came into existence in October 1905.\(^{26}\) The new province was to have an area of 106,540 sq. miles and a population according to the Census of 1901 of 31 million – 18 million Muslims, 12 million Hindus and 1 million others, in round figures.\(^{27}\) It was to be expected that Hindus would fight tooth and nail against the Partition of Bengal which they did. The Hindu dominated Calcutta bar, the Calcutta University, the Calcutta newspapers including the British owned The Statesman and The Englishmen all came forward with vehement opposition to Partition. Hindu nationalists considered it an attack on the prominent position which they had occupied in Bengal as a whole. "We shall be strangers in our own land", said Maharaja Mahindra Chandra Nandi of Qasim Bazar. "I read", he continued, "The prospect and the outlook fill me with anxiety as to the future of our race."\(^{28}\) Curzon became the most unpopular of Viceroy amongst the Hindus. He was called another Aurangzeb which was perhaps the most scathing censure that could come for an administrator from the Hindus.

Barring one or two voices to the contrary, the Muslims welcomed the Partition. Among the leading Muslims who were enthusiastic about it was Nawab Salimullah Bahadur of Dacca. Even the Muslims of Calcutta welcomed the decision of the Government. The Mohammadan Literary Society of Calcutta came out openly in its favour. However the Hindus carried incessant agitation against the Partition and the Indian National Congress was foremost among them. In fact the Indian National Congress acquired a new political importance among the Hindus as a result of the lead given by it on this issue. It started the Swadeshi Movement in 1905 which in some shapes or form continued to be one of the main weapons in its armory employed against the British. But aside from the Swadeshi Movement which was formally supported by the Congress to bring pressure on the British, it indirectly created conditions in which terrorism and the cult of the bomb became popular amongst the Hindu youth of Bengal.\(^{29}\)

\(^{26}\) Ibid, p. 15  
\(^{27}\) Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur, A short Account of Public Life (Calcutta 1885), p.14  
\(^{29}\) Ibid, p. 16
Hindu agitation and violence over the emergence of the Partition caused a good deal of Hindu Muslim tension and even led to communal riots. The Muslims of East Bengal had for the first time got certain opportunities which had been denied to them for generations as a result of the dual exploitation at the hands of the British and the Hindus. The Muslims now felt that even small improvements in their status and condition were not acceptable to the Hindus.

The first Lieutenant-Governor of the province of East Bengal and Assam, Bampfylde Fuller had taken his assignment with every intention of making it a success. He was in genuine sympathy with the aims of the Partition and wanted to give a fair deal to everyone, but this did not suit the Hindus who till then had everything their own way. They carried on an unending propaganda against him in the Press. The measures he adopted against unlawful actions were regarded by them as came in conflict with the University of Calcutta which in its turn was backed by the Government of India. And so he resigned. The Government promptly and unceremoniously accepted his resignation. This was the first serious disappointment for the Muslims since Partition. They reacted rather sharply and at a meeting held at Dacca in August 1906 and presided over by Nawab Salimullah they recorded their "disapproval of the system of Government which maintains so continuity of policy." 30 The Hindus were naturally jubilant. It gave them confidence in themselves. They felt that if only they could stay with their agitation they would achieve their goal of undoing the Partition. However, the Government of India and the Secretary of State both announced their intention of abiding the decision of Partition. Morley described it as a 'settle fact.'31

The five to six years that the Partition lasted was too short a period for any spectacular changes to occur in the condition of Muslims of East Bengal. But there is no doubt that from every point of view the Partition proved beneficial for the Muslims. Their number in educational institutions increased. Dacca which had been overlooked so far began to assume a fresh appearance. Trade and commercial activities were expended. Muslims appeared to be happy over the new system. But the Hindus went on with their efforts to annul the Partition and in 1911 their efforts began to bear fruit. It is now known that not only the Government of India had come to favour annulment but in the British Parliament also there was created an influential Congress lobby. In fact even King George V, who was to

30 Nawab Abdool Latif Khan Bahadur, A short Account of Public Life (Calcutta, 1885), p.15
come to India and hold a Durbar worked behind the scene to bring about the unsettling of the settled fact.\footnote{Ibid, p. 16}

At last on December 1900 at the Durbar at Delhi the annulment of the Partition was announced by the King-Emperor. Hindu agitation had succeeded in attaining its objectives. The Muslims were led astray. Vaqar-ul-Mulk on whom had fallen the mantle of central Muslim leadership expressed himself in these words: "In the face of the assurance repeatedly given by successive ministers of the Crown as to the Partition being a \textit{settled fact} the amalgamation betrays the weakness of the Government and will, in future, be regarded as one of the reasons for placing no trust in its utterance and actions."\footnote{Ibid, p. 16} This event was destined to have far-reaching effects on Muslim politics as we shall presently observe.

It was incidentally the proposal for Partition which had originally induced Nawab Salimullah Bahadur to organize the Muslims of Bengal into an association which would serve as their mouthpiece on political and social questions. It was called the "The Mohammadan Provincial Union."\footnote{Ibid, p. 17} Nawab Salimullah Bahadur became its patron. Its aim was "the consolidation and conservation of the strength of the Muhammadans of the new province as a whole for all public purposes."\footnote{Ibid, p. 17} This organization was founded exactly on the day on which the new Province came into existence-16 October 1905. Thus it is significant that even before Nawab Salimullah Bahadur became instrumental in instituting a much bigger organization, the All India Muslim League, he had brought into being the Mohammadan Provincial Union.

The Partition and the Hindu agitation that followed in the wake it became necessary for the Muslims of the Sub-continent to organize them. There were indeed numerous other factors which were leading the Muslims in the same direction;\footnote{Ibid, p. 17} Particular mention may be made of the impending constitutional reforms and the desire of the Muslims educated class to create a political platform for the propagation of its views, but the timing and the place of the foundation of All India Muslim League strongly suggest its connection with the events in Bengal. The Partition had a direct bearing on it.
After the famous Simla Deputation of October 1906, led by the Aga Khan which put forward the demand for separate electorates, the members held consultations among themselves regarding the desirability of forming a political organization. Nawab Salimullah had apparently made a great deal of thought to the problem. He published his thoughts on what he termed as All-India Muslim Confederacy, Finally at the conclusion of the Muslim Educational Conference at Dacca, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Nawab Vaqar-UL-Mulk on 30 December 1906. It was at this meeting that a resolution was moved by Nawab Salimullah that a political association be formed to be called the All-India Muslim League.

Its aims were defined as follows:

a) "To promote among the Mussalmans of India feelings of allegiance to the British Government.

b) To protect and advance the political rights and interest of the Mussalamans of India and to respectfully present their needs and aspirations to the Government;

c) To prevent the rise among the Musslamans of India any feeling of ill will towards other communities."

From the above mentioned leaders of Muslim Bengal who had actively worked in connection with the formation of the League Nawab Salimyullah of Dacca and Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhri of Bogra were prominent. Mr. A. K. Fazlul Haq worked behind the scene. Nawab Salimullah had played host to the Conference and the historic meeting at which the League was founded was held at Shahbagh the Nawabs's retreat, then on the outskirts of Dacca. Thus Muslim Bengal was actively associated with the efforts at bringing the Muslim League into being.

The Muslim League had a chequered career. It started out as a loyalist organization but it did not take long before it started speaking a different language. The new generation of Muslims, which was coming out of educational institutions, could not long remain satisfied with the kind of inactive role in politics prescribed for them by Sir Syed. Aligarh itself was now turning out graduates who were much more politically minded than earlier scholars. Mawlana Mohammad Ali symbolized this new type. Various developments within the Sub-continent as well as outside, particularly in the world of Islam were having their own influence on Indo-Muslim politics.

\[\text{Ibid, p. 18}\]
The annulment of the Partition of Bengal was, however, the important event which brought home to the Muslims that their loyalty to British did not pay. They understood how the Hindus with their educational technique and the cult of violence had obtained their objective and the Muslims who had remained loyal and been let down by the British.38

A pan-Islamic element was also entering into Indo-Muslim politics at this point and some Muslims came under the spell of Syed Jamaluddin Afghani. Born in Afghanistan he regarded himself as a citizen of the Muslim World. No wonder his political activities were not confined to a single country but extended to Afghanistan, Iran, Egypt, Turkey and the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent. Among the places in India in which he spent his time was Calcutta where he is said to have resided at the house of Haji Abdul Karim. His primary concern in the field of politics was to bring closer relations among the Muslims of the World as he believed that this unity they would enable to withstand the power of the imperialist West. Because of his anti-British stance he came in conflict with Sir Syed and his influence in India remained limited.39 However, there were younger men among Indian Muslims who in the early twentieth century took up the thread and preached the idea of Pan-Islam with renewed vigour. It is significant that Calcutta attracted some of the most energetic Pan-Islamists. Al-Hilal and later al-Balagh of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and Comrade of Mawlana Mohammad Ali stated publication from Calcutta and although Comrade was later shifted to Delhi, Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad made Calcutta his permanent abode. Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad was the first important Indian religious scholar and politician to have come under the direct influence of Afghani although Shibli before him was also his admirer. Among the Muslims educated in the modern schools, Iqbal and Mawlana Mohammad Ali may be said to be the most outstanding leaders who imbibed his spirit. The above journals were powerful media for the propagation of the Pan-Islamic ideal. Another pan-Islamic journal published from Calcutta was Habl-ul-Matin which was completely devoted to the cause Abdullah Suhrawardy, a member of the famous Suhrawardy family of Midnapore Calcutta founded in London a society known as the Pan-Islamic Society and a journal called Pan-Islam to propagate the doctrine of Muslim solidarity.40

39 Ibid, p. 13
40 Ibid, p. 13
It was in this setting that a reorientation of Muslim politics took place. In 1913 the All-India Muslim League changed its creed and adopted self-government as its target. Political meetings were held and resolutions taken against British policy both with regard to India and the Muslim world, particularly Turkey. Muslims showed great concern for the Turkish cause on the occasion of the Italian invasion of Tripoli. Syed Amir Ali an eminent lawyer and writer from Bengal, the author of the Spirit of Islam (1900) published an appeal on behalf of the British Red Crescent Society to come forward with funds to help the Turks in the Balkan Wars. He was responsible for organizing the London Branch of the Muslim League also.\textsuperscript{41}

During World War I Turkey joined the Central Powers. The Government of India promptly put the Muslim leaders with pan-Islamic sympathies behind the bars. However to satisfy Muslim opinion certain commitments were established during the war regarding the treatment to be meted out to Turkey at the end of the war. But when the war ended in the victory of the Allies, the Turks found themselves in a hopeless situation. Not only were they deprived of the non-Turkish parts of the Ottoman Empire, but they found their own homeland under foreign occupation.\textsuperscript{42}

In their misfortunes the Turkey found many friends in India. A regular movement known as the Khilafat Movement (1918-22), an unusual mixture of pan-Islamism and nationalism was organized and an organization known as the Khilafat Committee came into being which eclipsed the Muslim League. Mawlana Mohammad Ali, Mawlana Shaukat Ali, Mowlana Abdul Kalam Azad, Mawlana Zaffar Ali Khan may be cited as the most prominent leaders of the movement. But Muslim Bengal made its own contribution to the cause. Mawlana Akram Khan, Mr. A. K. Fazlul Haq, Mawlawi Tamizuddin Khan, Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani actively participated and suffered hardships for the cause.

The Khilafat Movement had brought about a change in the relations of the Hindus and Muslims. Mahatma Gandhi had joined hands with the Muslim League and gave his support to the 'Khilafat Movement'\textsuperscript{43} and Muslim leaders had given their wholehearted support to the Indian National Congress. Nevertheless, this Hindu-Muslim

\textsuperscript{41} Smith, Modern Islam in India (2\textsuperscript{nd} Edition: London 1945), pp. 246 – 47.
\textsuperscript{42} Op. cit., Desai, pp. 300 - 301
\textsuperscript{43} Op. cit., Surendranath Banerjea, p. 338
rapprochement was short lived. Soon fissures appeared in the edifice of Hindu-Muslim Unity. The years following 1922 were years of misunderstanding between the Hindus and Muslims. Attempts were made during the period to bring about reconciliation also. But with the anticipation of a democratic order in India the Hindus with their overwhelming majority were convinced that the future belonged to them. The same anticipation with regard to constitutional developments in India created anxiety among the Muslims as to their future. The relation between them went on deteriorating. Muslims wanted to be assured of a reasonably secure position in any future set-up. The Hindus would not listen to them or would show their willingness to give too little and too late. Even the N.W.F.P., the separation of Sindh from Bombay, the improvement in the representation of Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab where they happened to be in a clear majority and above all the right of the Muslims to retain Separate Electorate was contested. The upshot was that the conflict between them went on increasing and relations went on deteriorating.

The Muslim League which had been dormant since the World War I now came into its own under the exceptional leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. But since Mr. Jinnah's own past was nationalist and he had been a prominent Congress leader for many years, he continued his efforts to come to an understanding with the Congress. When many other Muslim leaders had become thoroughly disillusioned, he still hoped that a compromise with the Hindus and the Congress would be possible. He therefore continued in his efforts to secure safeguard for the Muslims in the future constitutional set-up. It was the establishment of Congress Government in several provinces in 1937 under the Reform Scheme of 1935 which established the futility of safeguarding and which finally fixed his position. He gradually came to the conclusion that the answer to the needs of the Muslims was not to secure safeguards but to secure a homeland for them—an idea which had been already propounded by Iqbal and Chaudhri Rahmat Ali.44

When the Quaid-e-Azam undertook the reorganization of the Muslim League in 1935 he unsurprisingly turned his attention to the largest single concentration of Muslim population in Bengal. He undertook a tour of Bengal and not only tried to win over politicians to the policy and programme of the League but he also addressed numerous meetings of students at Dacca and Calcutta. The student of the

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University of Dacca and the Islamia College, Calcutta responded whole heartedly and whatever success the League achieved in the elections of 1937 was very largely due to the financial backing of the student community. In the political emancipation of the Muslims of Bengal the role of the students of Dacca University was indeed outstanding. Much of awakening in Muslim Bengal was due to these students. Although at the election under the Reform of 1935 the Muslim League did not do particularly well in the Muslim majority provinces and did miserably in the Punjab, it was a different story in Bengal. Considerable success was achieved by the League. What was important was that Mr. A. K. Fazlul Haq who usually kept his finger on the pulse of the public and who had opposed the League at the elections and who 35 seats for his Krishak Proja Party saw it fit to join the Muslim League. This was largely because of the students who had been won over by the League. His entry in the League was an important event in its own right.45

But when in 1940 Pakistan became the goal of the Muslim League it is well known that Mr. A. K. Fazlul Haq moved the famous Pakistan Resolution at the Lahore session of the League. Muslim Bengal came into the movement with unprecedented enthusiasm. Their leaders Khawaja Nazimuddin and Mr. H.S. Suhrwardy were in the vanguard of the movement. In the Muslim Legislators Convention of 1946 in Delhi where a resolution for one single Pakistan was adopted, it was again a leader from Bengal Mr. H.S. Suhrawardy, who moved his resolution. The elections of 1946 proved how powerful the League had become in the meantime. In the elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly the Muslim League, by capturing 113 out of 119 Muslim seats created a record. This election was sort of a referendum on the question of Pakistan and the Muslims of Bengal had given their unequivocal verdict in favour of Pakistan. The idea of the Muslim solidarity was uppermost in their mind at this time. The election of 1946 led directly to Pakistan. Other provinces by themselves could not have brought Pakistan into existences had not Muslim Bengal given such an overwhelming support to this campaign. This is one of the truths which are not always remembered.46

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