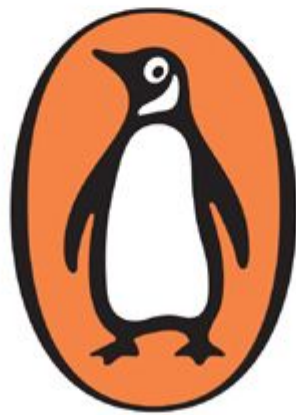


LAND *of* TWO RIVERS

✽
Nitish
Sengupta

A HISTORY OF
BENGAL FROM THE
MAHABHARATA
TO MUJIB





Penguin

NITISH SENGUPTA

Land of Two Rivers

A History of Bengal from the Mahabharata to Mujib



PENGUIN BOOKS

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LAND OF TWO RIVERS

Academician, administrator, politician and author, Nitish Sengupta studied at Presidency College, Kolkata, winning a gold medal for his master's in history. He began his career as assistant professor of history and joined the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1957. He held key posts in the Union government including revenue secretary and member-secretary, Planning Commission. After completing his doctorate in management from Delhi University, he lectured at several universities and leading management schools in the country. After his retirement, he was director-general of the International Management Institute, New Delhi.

Nitish Sengupta has represented India at various UN bodies and was elected chairman of the UN Commission on Transnational Corporations. He joined politics in 1996 and was elected to the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, where he served as member of several key committees, notably the Public Accounts Committee. He was also general secretary, All India Trinamool Congress. Currently, he holds the position of chairman, Board for Reconstruction of Public Sector Enterprises, New Delhi.

He has been a regular columnist in leading dailies and is the author of twelve books, including several related to management. As a historian, his well-known works are *History of the Bengali-speaking People*, *Dr B.C. Roy, Biography* and *Bengal Divided*. He has also authored *Unshackling of Indian Industry, Government and Business*, *Inside the Steel Frame* and *My Times—A Civil Servant Remembers*.

*Dedicated to the fond memory
of Sunanda,
my life partner who is no more*

Preface

This is by far the only book that covers the history of Bengal from the earliest times until the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 as an independent country. Bengal, or ‘Bangla Desh’, as it is called by all Bengalis in the cultural sense (as distinct from the post-1971 country of Bangladesh in the political sense), has gone through many changes across centuries. There was the first partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon which was resisted by the majority of the people. There was also the second partition in 1947 when a majority of the people called for a partition of the province into a Hindu-majority segment and the Muslim-majority segment, the former going to India and the latter going to Pakistan. From that point the two Bengals ceased to share a common political history and the Bengali-speaking people were split between the province of East Bengal (known as East Pakistan from 1956 till 1971) and the Indian state of West Bengal. In 1971 East Pakistan revolted against West Pakistan and seceded to create a new nation state known as Bangladesh.

During the last four decades I have been known as an author on management, economics and related subjects. It will surprise many friends to know that I majored in history and started my career by teaching history in Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1956–57 before I joined the Indian Administrative Services (IAS). I was then gradually sucked into the world of management science and applied economics and took a PhD in management from the University of Delhi.

I have to express my gratefulness to Sunanda, my life partner who is no more, for encouraging me to return to serious study of history. The present work was completed during the last seventeen years after I retired from government, in the midst of political and academic preoccupations. This is my ‘private sector’ effort outside my ‘public sector’ activities in management and in politics. I shall consider my labour amply rewarded if those who speak Bengali, about 250 million in number, despite being

politically separated, take an active interest in their common political history, their shared composite culture and, above all, the common language they take pride in.

The study starts with the geographical background of Bengal's history, the origin of the Bengalee race and the growth of Bengali language. The unity of language was a major factor in the emergence of Bengal as a distinct political and cultural entity. The history of Bengal is sketched right from the days of the Mahabharata, through the Maurya, Gupta, Pala and Sen dynasties, the Turkish conquest and the Turkish phase of medieval Bengal, the Mughal period and the British conquest of this province in the eighteenth century. Thereafter, it sketches the Bengal Renaissance, the growth of nationalism, the growth of Muslim separatist politics, the attempts at forging a united Bengali nation and eventually the failure of these efforts leading to Partition. It especially analyses the factors that created misunderstanding among the Muslim Bengalees and the Hindu Bengalees despite a lot of goodwill and commonality between the two which made Bengal's second partition in 1947 unavoidable.

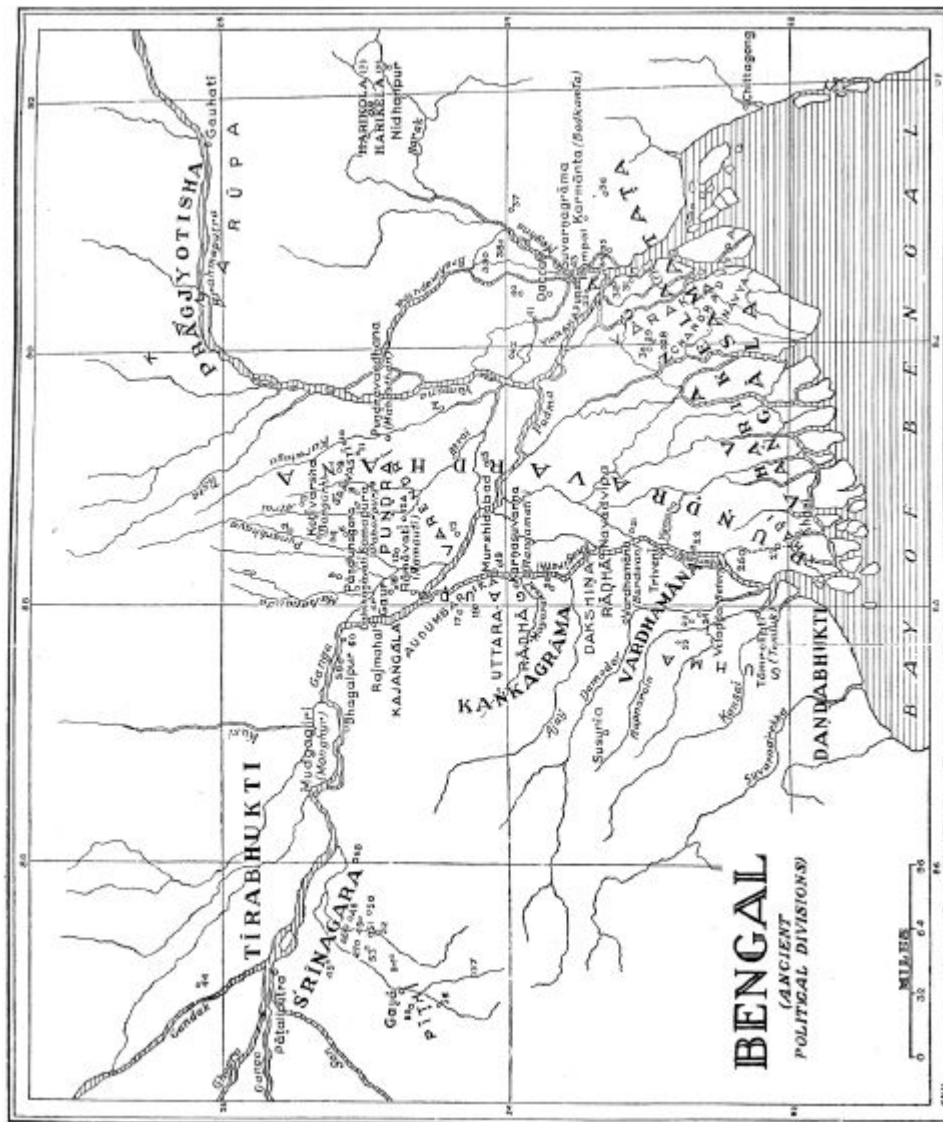
Following Partition, the study traces the history of East Bengal through various phases, in the course of which the East Bengalees felt humiliated and economically exploited under Pakistani rule. They eventually revolted against Pakistan's dictatorship, struggled for a rightful place for their mother tongue and for a fair deal, under the charismatic leadership of 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and formed an independent nation, Bangladesh. Bangladesh now occupies the driver's seat in the matters of promotion and propagation of Bengali language and culture. This was climaxed recently by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina formally seeking UN status for Bengali language in a statement before the UN General Assembly. She said, 'Bangla [Bengali language] is spoken by over 250 million people worldwide, primarily in Bangladesh and West Bengal ... Given the rich heritage of Bangla and its singular place as a symbol of people's faith in the power of languages to sustain cultures and indeed the identity of nations, I seek support of the membership of UN

General Assembly for its acceptance as an official language of the United Nations.’

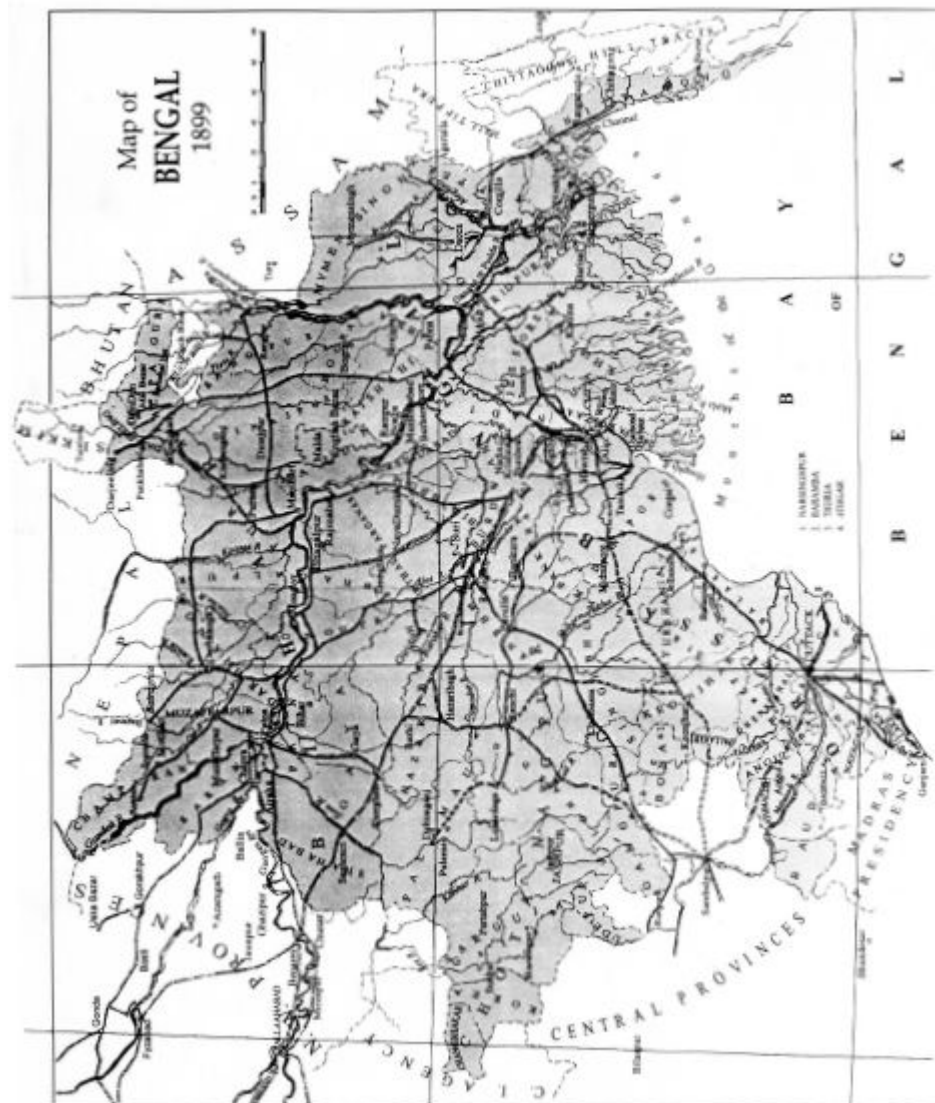
Long ago, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee expressed his sadness at the fact that the Bengalees were a nation who had forgotten their past. The credit goes to the University of Dhaka for bringing out the two-volume *History of Bengal*, with the first volume on the region’s ancient history edited by R.C. Majumdar and the second volume on the medieval period edited by J.N. Sarkar. Unfortunately, the Partition of 1947 intervened and the third volume on modern Bengal never came out. Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray’s seminal work *Bangalir Itihas* in Bengali deals with the evolution of Bengal’s culture, bringing the story up to AD 1000 when neither the name ‘Banga’ or ‘Bengal’, nor the name ‘Bengali’ had appeared in popular parlance. The only work that covers the entire story of Bengal is R.C. Majumdar’s masterly three-volume work, *History of Bengal*, but it suffers from being too subjective and shaped by prejudices brought on through personal experiences of the author.

The present study essentially centres on the political history and does not dwell upon the cultural, linguistic, literary or social aspects of Bengal’s development, except where these had a direct impact on political developments. It is based on both secondary and primary sources. The epilogue attempts to sum up the main events since 1971 in both the Bengals and give a perspective on the present and the future.

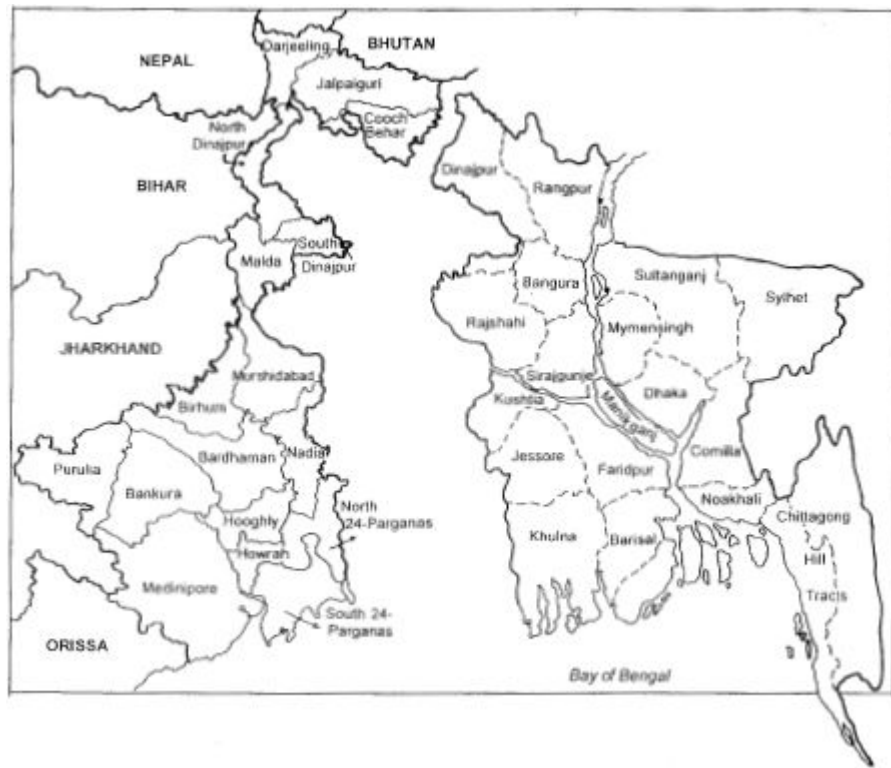
I thank all my friends in India and Bangladesh who helped me in conceptualizing my thoughts and completing this book. Thanks are also due to Penguin India, particularly Ravi Singh, who suggested that I write this book. I also deem it my pleasant duty to pay tributes to the memory of Prof. Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar, Dr Narendra Krishna Sinha, Dr Sashi Bhusan Choudhary and Prof. A.W. Mahmood, who taught me history as it should be learnt.



The unique formation of the Gangetic delta with the two rivers, Ganga and Brahmaputra, created a land that became as enviable for its richness of learning and culture as for its prosperity.



The large—according to some administrators, ‘unmanageable’—province of Bengal included Bihar and Orissa as well before its first partition in 1905.



The split of the two Bengals became formalized with the Partition in 1947, when West Bengal (on the left) became a state within the Indian Union and East Bengal, a province of Pakistan. Eventually, Bangladesh (on the right) declared its independence from Pakistan's exploitative administration in 1971.

ANCIENT BENGAL

{1}

Bengal or Bangla

Land of Two Rivers

The history of Bengal or Bangladesh or Bangadesh, which are the common expressions used by the people of Bengal to describe their homeland (as distinct from Bangladesh—the new state that came into being in 1971) can be traced to the time of the Mahabharata. But the Bengalee race and the Bengali language both emerged in history only after the tenth century AD. According to UN records, Bengali, in terms of the number of speakers claiming it to be their mother tongue, was the sixth among the spoken languages in the world, being preceded by English, Spanish, Hindi, Russian and mandarin Chinese. The total number of those who speak the language is 250 million, primarily living in Bangladesh and West Bengal state in India. The Bengali-speaking areas in the subcontinent include Bangladesh, the Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura, the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj and large parts of the districts of Goalpara and Dhubri in the Indian state of Assam, some pockets in the state of Meghalaya, the Bengali-speaking areas of the districts of Dhanbad, Singhbhum and Santhal Parganas in the state of Jharkhand, Purnea in Bihar and some pockets in Balasore and Cuttack districts in Orissa. These areas lie between latitudes 27.9° and 20.5° North and longitudes 86.35° and 92.30° East. Traditionally, poets of Bengal have conceived of their homeland as bounded by the Himalayas in the north, the Bay of Bengal in the south, the Brahmaputra River and the hill ranges of Meghalaya,

Mizoram and the Jaintia Hills in the east and the Santhal Parganas and the districts of Darbhanga and Purnea in the west. Until 1911, and more particularly until 1947, the Bengali-speaking people, by and large, shared a common geography and a common political, cultural and linguistic history. But the Bengali-speaking areas of the subcontinent have been shuffled around several times. The first example was in 1874 when the province of Assam was created with the three Bengali-speaking districts of Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara. The next such event was the partition of Bengal in 1905 when the Bengali-speaking areas were redistributed into two provinces, viz., East Bengal and Assam with Dhaka as the capital, and Bengal Presidency including Bihar and Orissa with Calcutta as the capital. In 1911 when that partition was undone and the two Bengals were reunited, a number of Bengali-speaking districts like Manbhum and Dhalbhum were kept in Bihar, while Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara were retained with Assam. In 1947 undivided Bengal was partitioned into East Pakistan and the Indian province of West Bengal, and the two Bengals stopped sharing the same political history. In 1971 East Pakistan, through a violent war of independence, seceded from Pakistan and formed the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The main issues were the treatment of Bengali language and economic exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan. In Assam, the Bengali-speaking population had to carry on a long fight to safeguard their language, especially in the Bengali-majority Barak Valley. On 19 May 1962 twelve persons sacrificed their lives to military bullets for the sake of Bengali language. The Bengali-speaking people in Jharkhand have also got Bengali accepted as the state's second language. But the problem of survival is faced by Bengalis in many states such as Uttarakhand.

THE BENGAL DELTA AND ITS RIVER SYSTEM

The Bengal Delta is essentially the result of so many rivers coming from the east, north and west and pouring their alluvial deposit into the sea. The process took many millennia and slowly and surely the delta both rose out of the sea level and also continued a southward movement, and that process still continues. Ibn Batuta, the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveller

described Bengal as a 'land with abundance' and Van Lindolan, a sixteenth-century Dutch merchant, called Bengal 'the granary of the East'. Bengal can literally be called the child of two river systems: the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The former flows majestically from the Himalayas through the north Indian plains collecting water from the Jamuna and other tributaries, and bifurcating itself after reaching Bengal into two major rivers and countless minor streams, all of them emptying into the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra (Son of Supreme God) rises in South Central Tibet, travels 700 miles to the east under the name Tsangpo, swoops down to the Indian plains through a gap in the Himalayan chain, takes a U-turn and travels from the east to the west, and enters into Bangladesh to meet the main branch of the Ganga near Sirajganj. The united river turns south, receives several tributaries including the Meghna, whose name it acquires, and pours into the Bay of Bengal. Slowly, the silt brought down from the Himalayas built up the land surface dividing the river into innumerable distributaries in middle and lower Bengal including the Sunderbans. The history of the delta is inextricably linked with these rivers and their intersecting streams. Kingdoms and cities have come and gone as these rivers changed course.

The river system has split up Bengal into four broad divisions. To the north of the main Ganga and to the west of the Brahmaputra lies the vast area known broadly as *Varendrabhumi* in medieval times, which comprises the Rajshahi division of Bangladesh, the Jalpaiguri division of West Bengal and the peripheral areas in Assam and Bihar. Part of this region also constituted the ancient land of *Pundravardhana*. To its south-west and to the west of the Bhagirathi or Hooghly lies the ancient Radha (Rar) land comprising the Burdwan (Bardhaman) division of West Bengal with peripheral areas in Orissa and Bihar. To its east, bounded by the Bhagirathi, the Padma, the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra and the Meghna, lies the region of central Bengal comprising the Presidency division in West Bengal, the Khulna division in Bangladesh and parts of Dhaka division. This included the Vanga of Kalidasa and the Kingdom of Gangaridai as known to Ptolemy and Pliny. The fourth division lies to its east and includes

all the territories between the Padma and the Meghna rivers on one side and up to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and Mizoram and Chittagong hills on the other. This roughly corresponds to the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj in Assam, Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong divisions of Bangladesh and the state of Tripura in India. This region had the ancient kingdom of Samatata.

The Ganga enters Bengal at Rajmahal through the narrow passes of Teliagarhi and Sakrigully (Sakrigali). These narrow passes provided passage to invaders in historically recent times and, therefore, constituted Bengal's first line of defence. It was only the last of the invaders, the Europeans, who came from the opposite direction sailing up from the Bay of Bengal. Naturally, all the well-known capital cities in medieval times, like Gaur, Lakshnaoti, Pandua, Tanda and Rajmahal, grew near this point. Also, these cities commanded the Ganga–Bhagirathi–Brahmaputra river system.

The course of the Ganga has changed even in historically recent times. In the sixteenth century, it was flowing much more to the north after Rajmahal than at present, perhaps alongside the city of Gaur. It shifted southwards several times since then. About 25 miles beyond ancient Gaur (modern Malda), the Ganga divides into two branches, the Bhagirathi (also called Hooghly) and the Padma flowing in a south-easterly direction. After entering Bangladesh, the Padma is the main channel of the river. Nearly five centuries ago, in 1530, when the Portuguese first entered the Bhagirathi River from the Bay of Bengal they started calling it the 'Hooghly River'. Archaeological, linguistic and historical evidences suggest that at that time, the Hooghly was the main channel of the river and the Padma a smaller stream linking the Ganga with the eastern Bengal rivers.¹ From early in the nineteenth century, the Hooghly languished on account of silting and stopped carrying Ganga water except during the monsoon months, and the Padma became the main channel of the river system. After the construction of the Farakka barrage during the 1970s, a perennial linkage was established between the main channel and the erstwhile distributory.

Both the Padma and the Hooghly have continued to change their course several times during the last four or five centuries. It seems reasonably certain that before the sixteenth century the Padma flowed through the Chalan marsh (*Bil*) in Rajshahi district through the Dhaleshwari River and the Buriganga River, bypassing Dhaka and on to the mouth of the Meghna, south of present Chandpur. There is also evidence that during the early eighteenth century, it flowed through the districts of Faridpur and Bakharganj and finally emptied into the Meghna estuary, a little to the south of Chandpur. At that time, it flowed past Rajnagar, associated with the well known Raja Rajballabh of the eighteenth century. During the early nineteenth century, the main volume of the Ganga water abandoned the southern channel of the Padma and took the present channel, in that process destroying many settlements including Rajnagar. In the process it acquired the name *Kirtinasha*, or the destroyer of man-made structures, of fame, so to say. The Padma is joined in its lower course by the main branch of the Brahmaputra which enters Bangladesh near Dhubri and then flows downwards past places like Lalmonirhat under its local name of Jamuna. Further south, the old channel of Brahmaputra joins the Padma near Sonargaon to the north of Dhaka. The Meghna joins the Padma at Chandpur and the united stream is known by the name of Meghna as it flows into the Bay of Bengal.²

The Meghna which originates in the Jaintia Hills of the Indian state of Meghalaya, initially takes the name 'Surma' in Sylhet district and flows past Sylhet town. It receives water from rivers such as the Barak, and is also known as Kushiara while entering Bangladesh at Karimganj, and the name 'Meghna' before Chandpur. From the descriptions left by some early European writers, it appears that at one time Chittagong stood much further to the north, close to the Meghna estuary. Either due to the change in the course of the river or the southward movement of the Bengal Delta, Chittagong also journeyed further south.

The great sanctity the Hindus attach to the Bhagirathi River up to the Gangasagar clearly testifies to the fact that once this was the main Ganga. No such sanctity is attached to the Padma. From the map of Bengal drawn

by Van Don Broucke (AD 1560), it is quite clear that in those days, at Triveni near Hooghly, Bhagirathi used to branch off into three streams, viz., the Saraswati in the left flowing past the ancient port of Saptagram; the Bhagirathi in the middle, corresponding more or less to the present-day river coming up to Calcutta; and the Jamuna, the easternmost of these channels. From Rennel's Atlas, a century later it appears that all these three channels had merged into one, more or less corresponding to the middle course of the Bhagirathi, flowing on to the Sagar Island. In that process of shifting, it had abandoned Satgaon or Saptagram, the famous medieval capital of south-west Bengal just as in an earlier epoch the ancient port of Tamralipta (Tamluk) had been ruined by the shifting of the course of Saraswati in the eighth century. But the process of the ruining of Satgaon also meant increase in the importance of Hooghly and Calcutta. The third stream, i.e., Jamuna gradually got silted up and became almost unidentifiable as a river bed. Periodical silting has caused fundamental consequences for human existence in riverine West Bengal and Bangladesh. This problem has haunted Calcutta port in particular since the middle of the nineteenth century.³

Another important change took place in the Hooghly River in the early eighteenth century. The main flow of the Bhagirathi was earlier along the Adiganga (Tolly's Nulla of the English writers) past Kalighat, Baruipur, Jaynagar and Raidighi and on to the sea. It now deserted the old Adiganga channel and started flowing through the lower course of Saraswati below Sankrail on to the Sagar Island and the Bay of Bengal. This took place, according to a folklore, during the reign of Alivardi Khan and is even attributed to a canal that was initially dug to connect this bed with the Saraswati. A number of small rivers rise from the hills of Chota Nagpur and Santhal Parganas and fall into the Hooghly (earlier Saraswati). The more important among them are the Damodar, the Roopnarayan, the Ajay and the Mayurakshi. Traces of prehistoric human settlements in Bengal have been discovered in their valleys which are geologically much older than the riverine alluvial Bengal.

Both the Ganga and the Brahmaputra are joined by numerous smaller rivers flowing south from the Himalayas. The most important among them is the river Teesta, originally named Trisrota (three streams). In the earliest records in Bengal, the Teesta used to trifurcate itself into three channels, namely, Karatoya in the west, Atrai in the middle and Punarbhaba in the east. The Atrai and the Karatoya join up and the united stream falls into the Padma near Jafarganj. On the banks of the Karatoya stood the famed city of Pundravardhana, which can be traced to the Maurya period. The ruins of this ancient city, now called Mahasthangarh, still stand on the bank of this river in Bogra district of Bangladesh. Punarbhaba meets with another river, the Mahananda, which merges with the Ganga near Malda. Originally, the main stream of the Teesta used to flow to the Ganga in Malda district; but in the wake of severe floods in the year 1787, it suddenly gave up this old channel and carved out a new channel, which flowed into the Brahmaputra in Rangpur district, also in Bangladesh. Another river which is notorious for changing its course is the Kosi, which earlier met the Brahmaputra, but altered its course, in a diametrically opposite movement to Teesta's eastward, shifting towards the west right across north Bengal and part of north Bihar to its present course, which flows through the district of Purnea before joining the Ganga.

The important role that these rivers have played in history and in the life of the people of Bengal can hardly be exaggerated. They made the land extremely fertile. One main paddy crop a year supplemented by plentiful fruits and vegetables and fish from the rivers and ponds was enough to sustain the people, giving them ample leisure to pursue the arts, folk music and oral literature. Frequent changes in the riverine courses have affected prosperous tracts and indeed the entire communication system. One of the most spectacular examples we find is the transformation of the present-day Sunderbans. According to archaeological evidence this was at one time a prosperous and populous tract, but got depopulated and turned into a vast estuarine forest land inhabited by tigers and crocodiles. The transformation was partly due to the ravages caused by Portuguese and Arakani marauders, and by changes in the river courses.

Many ancient cities and flourishing settlements in old Bengal have been washed off or silted over, and newer cities and settlements have come up in their place. Thus, the city of Tamralipta was followed by Saptagram, Saptagram by Hooghly, and Hooghly by Calcutta. The city of Gaur was said to have been ruined by the flooding of the river Kosi. Similarly, the Padma has destroyed many ancient towns. The shifts in the course of these rivers was responsible for the shifting of the main centre of government from Gaur to Rajmahal, Tanda, Dhaka, Murshidabad and, in more recent times, to Calcutta.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME 'BENGAL'

Like the Bengali language, the name 'Bengal' was not in common usage before the Turkish period, and is of historically recent origin. The name, which loosely applies to the entire territory where Bengali is spoken, does not appear anywhere in this form before the thirteenth century when Persian and Arabic writers started using this name in reference to the region of the lower Gangetic delta and the surrounding areas. In ancient Indian literature, different names, such as Gaur, Banga, Samatata are used to indicate different territorial divisions of this part of the South Asian subcontinent. 'Banga' referred to the eastern part of the Gangetic delta, roughly centring on Bikrampur or Dhaka. 'Harikela' referred to the Chittagong area, 'Varendra-Pundravardhana' referred to the Rajshahi division in Bangladesh and portions of the northern part of the present West Bengal. 'Radha' (Rar) referred to parts of present-day West Bengal, west of the Hooghly River. The name 'Vanga' finds mention in the epic Mahabharata and in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsam*. But clearly it was a small part of what later became Bengal. Gradually, the expressions of Gaur and Banga came to be used together, but the name Bengal did not originate from these. The Persian chronicle writers of the Delhi Sultanate in the earlier part of the thirteenth century generally referred to this area as the kingdom of Lakhnaoti (Laxmanavati) after the chief city of Lakhnaoti or Gaur. Also, we have the reference to 'Vangalam' in an inscription in the Vrihadeshwara temple at Tanjore in south India as one among the countries overrun by the Cholas. This is perhaps the earliest

reference to Bengal as such. Early Portuguese travellers also make many references to the city of 'Bengala' by which they presumably meant the port town of Chittagong, thus following the ancient practice of calling a whole region after the name of the principal city or port that stood there. The expression 'city of Bengala' occurs in a chart of 1743 in Dalrymple's collections where it is identified clearly as Chittagong. Around 1250, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* referred to the country of Bang along with Lakhnaoti, Behar and Kamrup as the countries invaded by Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji. Marco Polo in 1298 refers to Bangala as a province towards the south, which up to the year 1290 had not yet been conquered. The North African Arab traveller, Ibn Batuta, wrote in 1345 that he arrived in the country of Bengala 'which is a vast region abounding in rice after 43 days of sea journey. I have seen no country in the world where provisions are cheaper than in this country. But it is muggy and those who come from Khorasan, call it a hell full of good things'.⁴

In 1516 Barbosa refers to the Kingdom of Bangala 'which had many sea ports and which had a Moorish king with gentile subjects and where there was much trade and much shipping'. An interesting theory of the origin of the name is provided by Abu'l-Fazl in his *Ain-i-Akbari*. According to him, '[T]he original name of Bengal was Bung, and the suffix "al" came to be added to it from the fact that the ancient rajahs of this land raised mounds of earth 10 feet in height and 20 in breadth in lowlands at the foot of the hills which were called "al". From this suffix added to Bung, the name Bengal arose and gained currency.'

Thus in the light of the available historical evidence, it is easily established that the original name of Vanga referred only to East Bengal and not to the entire land loosely called Bengal. The western part of Bengal was called Gaur before the Turco-Afghan invaders came in the thirteenth century. The words 'Gaur' and 'Vanga' were at times used together, a practice that continued up to the nineteenth century. The name 'Bengal' came out of the expression 'Bangala' or 'Vangla' used for the country widely by chroniclers in Arabic and Persian from the thirteenth century onwards and gradually came to denote the entire province that stood

between Bihar on the one hand and Kamrup on the other. It was this name which was adopted by the Portuguese as 'Bangala' and subsequently by other European traders, which led to the name 'Bengal' that also gave its name to the Bay of Bengal to its south.

ORIGIN AND RACIAL AFFINITIES OF THE BENGALEE RACE

There is enough anthropological and archeological evidence to indicate that the Bengali-speaking people are a conglomerate of several racial elements with different ethnic origins who were welded together into a new ethnic entity in the course of the last thousand years of history, primarily by the impetus given by the Bengali language and by a shared lifestyle that grew out of the fertile riverine land, the salubrious climate and a common history.

Four principal racial elements came together to merge as the Bengalee ethnic entity. The original settlers in Bengal were of the Austric stock (called 'Vedic' or 'Kobli' ethnically) and were present in Bengal well before the Aryan invasions from the north-west around 2000–1500 BC. The earliest Aryan settlers referred to these tribes in Vedic literature as *kikatas*, *vratyas* or *nishada*. The racial strains of these original inhabitants of this land survive in the communities, which are known as Sabara, Dom, Chandala, Pulinda, Kola and Hadi. There were three other major racial elements which also came together to form the Bengalee race: the Dravidians, the Mongolian tribes and finally the Aryans. There was substantial intermarriage between the Dravidians from the southwest and the Mongolian races from the north-eastern Himalayas and Chittagong Hills. Later, a relatively small-scale migration of Aryans took place from the west.

All these layers combined together to form the Bengalee race. The occurrence among Bengalees of individuals who can be mistaken for European, East Asian, West Asian, Dravidians, north Indians or Africans illustrates this admixture. Most anthropologists agree that the high-caste people among Bengalees are different from the Aryans from the north. In anthropological terms, the former are *brachy-cephalic* whereas the latter are *policho-cephalic*.

In an interesting study of thirty modern castes of north India, Prof. P.C. Mahalanobis came to the following conclusions about the seven castes from Bengal, viz., Brahman, Kayastha, Sadgopa, Kaibarta, Rajbansi, Poda and Bagdi.⁵

- (a) The Brahmans in Bengal are the only group to have a clear resemblance with the upper castes of north India, but they are much closer to other Bengalee castes than to the Brahmans from north India.
- (b) There is a close relationship between a caste's social status and its resemblance with the Bengalee Brahmans. That is to say the higher the position in the social hierarchy, the greater is the resemblance with the Bengalee Brahmans.
- (c) The Kayasthas, Sadgopas and Kaibartas are the typical indigenous castes of Bengal and have some resemblance with the people of Bihar. The Kayasthas are also very close to all the middle castes of Bengal such as Sadgopas, Kaibartas and Podas (Paundra Kshatriyas).

On the whole Prof. Mahalanobis establishes the homogeneity of the upper classes of Bengal, who formed a distinct entity among the peoples of the subcontinent—in parts they resembled the upper castes of north India, in parts they were close to the middle and lower caste of Bengal. Thus the Bengalee Brahman is much closer in appearance to other Bengalee castes than the Brahmans of other parts of India. This fact proves that they were mostly indigenous people, not immigrants from elsewhere. It can be safely argued that by the early Christian centuries, an ethnically distinct race of Bengalees had come about largely through intermixture of the main elements mentioned above.

Anthropological and historical opinions at times differ strongly on the origin of the race. Herbert Risley had traced the round-headed Bengalee race to admixture of Dravidian and Mongoloid elements.⁶ His views have been opposed by R.P. Chanda who argued in favour of the Bengalee race originating from the *Homo alpinus* type of people that came from the Pamir region and spoke an Indo-European language.⁷ Without going into further details, the conclusion seems inescapable that the present race of Bengalees arose out of the admixture between several different elements; some of whom were the first settlers and others, migrants.

Those who propounded a theory of Aryan origin of Bengalees in the nineteenth century clearly erred. This is amply proved by overwhelming

anthropological and other evidences establishing a mixed origin in which Mongolians and Dravidians played much greater roles than the Aryans. The successive invaders who came from the thirteenth century onwards, first the long-nosed and long-headed Turks and Afghans (Pathans), and thereafter the Mughals with their semi-Mongoloid features, also left their imprint on the Bengalee race. They came to form part of the upper-class Bengalees. The Portuguese—who dominated riverine south-eastern Bengal for several centuries and freely intermarried with the local people and the Arakani marauders, popularly called the ‘Mugs’, who also intermarried—left their mark.

As summed up by Dr R.C. Majumdar:

The upper classes of Bengal, Hindu and Muslim, underwent only slight changes in historical times by contact with aboriginal tribes surrounding them, and the immigrants from Upper India. We may thus postulate on [an] ethnically distinct race in Bengal, which originally came of an ethnic stock that was different from the stock from which the Vedic Aryans originated. Among the Bengalees the medium or round heads predominated, and not ‘long heads’ which by and large characterise the people of the areas in the subcontinent where Vedic Aryans settled down. Thus the racial origin of Bengalees surely differed from that of the Vedic Aryans. The view held for a long time that the Bengalee high castes originated from the Aryan invaders who imposed their culture and political supremacy upon the original inhabitants of the soil is not supported by anthropological or historical evidence. On the other hand, they are closer to their lower caste neighbours than they are to the descendants of Aryans in Upper India.⁸

Thus although Bengal broadly accepted Aryan religion and culture, the fact that the non-Brahmans or so-called Sudra races were numerically much larger, meant that the orthodoxy of Brahmanism was neither widespread nor respected by the majority of the people.

Thus caste and varna-based differences and resultant discrimination did not become as strict in Bengal as in Aryavarta (north India) or in south India. Even today the Brahmans, the Kayasthas and Vaidyas are a comparatively small part of the population. The limited role of Brahmanical traditions and caste-based distinctions that exist in Bengal owe their origin primarily to import of orthodoxy from north India, such as demarcating some small sections of Brahmans as Kulins by the Sen dynasty rulers, which was reinforced periodically by influences from north India.

Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray has said that all non-Vedic or non-Puranic religions or cultures indigenous to India arose outside Aryavarta or Gangetic north India, e.g., Buddhism, Jainism as well as the knowledge of *tantra dharma*, *vajra yana*, *mantra yana*, *sahaja*, *kalachakra yana*, et al. The influence of these traditions and knowledge meant that the influence of Aryan religion, culture and social regimentation reached Bengal in comparatively later times and did not spread deeply or widely. The influence of Brahmanism was thus confined to the upper castes and the educated sections of society, while bypassing the masses almost completely.

Prehistoric and Ancient Bengal

The early history of Bengal prior to the rise of the Gaur kingdom under Sasanka is not documented. It has to be pieced together from the archaeological sites and from passing references in Sanskrit or Pali texts, Buddhist and Jain writings and the works of foreign writers from Greece, Tibet and Sri Lanka. Each one of them is like the focus of a torchlight on a dark background. It lights a small part of the history of Bengal, based on which projections have to be made about the surrounding darkness. Another aspect is that for long stretches of its early history, Bengal was part of the Maurya and Gupta empires, although its role was secondary. During the whole of the Aryan supremacy in north India, Bengal's role was peripheral. The Aryans looked down upon the people living in the east and called them *vratyas* or *kikatas*. Such contemptuous references also recur in early Buddhist and Jain literature.

The early inhabitants must have passed through the usual cycles of early Stone, later Stone, Copper and Bronze ages although the relics by and large must be lying buried under the silt deposited by Bengal's numerous rivers.

EARLY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Some of the prehistoric archaeological finds in Bengal are located in the western fringes where the Chota Nagpur Plateau juts into alluvial Bengal at a large number of points. Pioneers like Valentine Ball and others discovered lots of 'chipped stones' in Burdwan, Bankura, Midnapore and the neighbouring districts of Jharkhand like Manbhum and Singbhum between 1865 and 1978.¹ These stone implements pointed to a remarkable convergence of different races coming from all over the subcontinent.

Subsequent archaeologists like C.W. Anderson (1917), A.D. Dani (1960), G.S. Ray (1954), Col. D.H. Gordon (1950), Lal (1958) and V.D. Krishnaswami (1959–60) came upon other monolithic sites in the West Bengal districts adjoining Chota Nagpur such as Tarafeni Valley in north-west Midnapore (1997), and led on to some Copper Age sites.² Of particular importance are the forty-nine microlithic sites discovered in the 450 sq. km Tarafeni Valley which show the evolution of a Stone Age culture covering Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Artefacts were found dispersed over wide areas including riverbeds and cultivated fields. A large number of copper objects have also been discovered at several locations, e.g. Parihati village in Midnapore district. They are estimated to belong to the Chalcolithic Age and also the period following it.³

Thus it is archaeologically established that the Bengal region had a well-developed civilization before the Aryan migration into this region. Clearly, Bengal was not in the Aryan sphere of influence up to the later Vedic period. Even as late as the early Buddhist and Jain periods, it remained outside north India. The *Baudhayana Dharmasutra* enjoins penance for those who have visited Pundra (north Bengal) or Vanga (East Bengal). The Jain *sutras* describe the people of Radha (Rar) as savage and uncultured. *Acharanga Sutra* describes Radha as a pathless country where local people troubled mendicants, including setting their dogs upon them.

Some of the archaeologically oldest sites where history goes back at least to the early first millennium BC are Paharpur on the Atrai River (now in Bangladesh); Mahasthangarh, also known as Pundravardhana on the Karatoya River (in Bogra district in Bangladesh); Mainamati in the Comilla district of Bangladesh; Mangalkot in Burdwan district, Chandraketugarh in North 24 Parganas district; Pandu Rajar Dhibi and some prehistoric sites on the Ajay River in Birbhum district; and Tarafeni Valley in West Midnapore district, all in West Bengal.

Paharpur

Paharpur, an extensive Buddhist stupa-cum-monastery complex in Rajshahi–Bogra region of Bangladesh, traces its origin from the Pala king Dharmapala (c. 770–810), although an inscription suggests that this was the site of a Jain monastery as far back as the fifth century AD. The place name is derived from a lofty tower in its main shrine which is visible as a hillock (*pahar* in Bengali) from a distance in the flat Bengal countryside. Several leading archaeologists like Alexander Cunningham, Dr Bhandarkar, R.D. Banerjee and K.N. Dikshit are associated with the discovery and excavation of this site, which started in 1923 and has continued through the Pakistani period and also after the independence of Bangladesh.⁴ These excavations have revealed not only the 22-metre-high central shrine with its impressive courtyard, but also several mandaps with rich terracotta panels depicting both Buddhist and Brahmanical deities, a temple of Tara, at least 177 monastic cells, many inscriptions showing, among other things, the Pala Empire's trading contact with West Asia, and bronze Buddhas and other gods like Ganesha, Kubera and Hara–Gauri. According to scholars such as K.N. Dikshit⁵ and Charles Duroiselle⁶ the temple plan of the Paharpur central shrine most likely influenced the temple architecture of Burma, Java and Cambodia (e.g. Ananda temple at Pagan in Burma). To sum up, 'Paharpur stands out among the Buddhist ruins of ancient Bengal. It is the largest stupa-cum-monastery of its type, considerably larger than the Salban Bihara of Mainamati. However, as a Buddhist complex Mainamati is much larger. For the architectural magnificence and artistic wealth, the scale of its monastery, its association with Dharmapala of the Pala dynasty and the rich array of names of its Buddhist monks, Paharpur will always have a special place in the history of Bengal.'⁷

Islam came to Bengal in the thirteenth century and a Turkish Sultanate came to be established with its twin capitals at Gaur (also called Lakhnau, the capital of the Sen dynasty [c. 1095–1645], or Lakhnauti) and Pandua, both in Malda district of West Bengal. Between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries a series of mausoleums and mosques were built

by the sultans which were no doubt Islamic in form but with a distinct ‘Bengalee’ character.

Mainamati

Mainamati, by far the most romantic architectural site in Bengal is located on a low hill range (Lalmái–Mainamati range) near Comilla in Bangladesh. The romantic association is on account of the innumerable ballads sung by folk singers in Bangladesh for the legendary Queen Madhavati (colloquially Manamati), consort of King Manikchandra of Chandra dynasty with not only beauty but also mysterious yogic powers. Seat of at least three Buddhist dynasties, viz., the Khadgas, the Devas and the Chandras from the seventh to the eleventh century and visited by the well-known Chinese Buddhist scholar-pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang (Xuan Zang) and at least one other Chinese pilgrim, this important and well-spread site was forgotten by history until its chance discovery in the nineteenth century. It was identified by N.K. Bhattasali in 1917 with the ancient city of Patlihara. Unfortunately, in 1943–44 Gen. William Slim, general officer commanding (GOC) of the 14th Division, commissioned to conquer Burma from the Japanese occupation, selected this site to be his headquarters. The construction of a military cantonment led to the discovery of many old structures and reuse of the ancient bricks in military buildings. But it also caused the destruction of many monuments with priceless terracotta plaques. The government had to intervene through the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which unearthed eight sites. Despite the continuation of the Comilla Cantonment through the Pakistan days and thereafter under independent Bangladesh, and the resultant ‘no entry restrictions’, both the Pakistan Archaeological Department and thereafter the Bangladesh Archaeological Department carried on extensive excavations. These led to the unearthing of many ancient brick structures such as Salban Bihara, Charpata Mura, Kutila Mura, Ranir Bungalow, Ananda Rajar Bari (King Anandadeva of the Deva dynasty) and innumerable copper plates.⁸ Clearly, the city of Devaparbata situated on the Lalmai Hills was the capital of Samatata kingdom from the

seventh to the tenth century under the Devas and thereafter the Chandra dynasty. The visit of Chinese travellers is alluded to as also a close cultural and political relationship between Burma and Pattikera.

Mahasthangarh

Mahasthangarh is located on the bank of the river Karatoya about 13 kilometres north of the district town of Bogra in Bangladesh and is one of the richest archaeological sites in Bengal. It is a fortified city about 1,370 metres from the east to the west and 1,525 metres from the north to the south, surrounded by the Karatoya on one side and a moat on three other sides. Within a radius of 8 kilometres there are around thirty-six mounds of various sizes—high embankments, brick mounds locally called ‘dhaps’ named after Hindu mythology, old tanks, temples and fragmented stone tablets, one of which has six lines of Brahmi script dating from the second or the third century BC. This is the earliest written archaeological document of Bengal. It talks about a famine and the relief measures to be undertaken by the government. It calls the city as Pundranagara or Pudamagal. Some scholars have attributed it to Emperor Ashoka (273–276 BC). Cunningham visited it in 1879 and on the basis of Hiuen-Tsang’s description identified it with Pundravardhana, the capital of the ‘bhukti’ or province of the same name under the Gupta Empire. Mahasthan also finds mention in Kalhana’s *Rajatarangini* which speaks of a Kashmiri king Jayapida (eighth century) visiting Pundravardhana and falling in love with a temple dancer of Skanda-Govinda temple. The site of this temple has been unearthed outside the main complex. A Kushan-period red sandstone torso of Kartikeya has been found here. Mahasthan has also been mentioned along with Pundravardhana in an ancient poem, the ‘Karatoya Mahatmyam’.⁹

‘Karatoya Mahatmyam’ also speaks of the river’s traditional sacredness. Both Hindus and Buddhists have venerated this site along with the river. The location of the mazar of the Muslim saint Shah Sultan Mahi Sawar Balkhi at the southern corner of the fortress (15 metres high) also makes this site an object of veneration for Muslims. The doors of this mazar were

donated, according to inscriptions, by Narasimhadasa, a local Hindu chieftain providing an illustration of the basic secular culture of Bengal. Some of the important structures are Khodar Pahar, Mankhalir Dhap, Parashuramer Bari with the well Jiyat Kundu, the Bairagir Bhita cluster of temples, Govinda Bhita, Lakhindarer Bihara, Palashwa-Raman Para, Mangalkel and Bhasu Bihara. The last named site has been identified as the grand monastery, which Hieuen-Tsang visited and called Po-Shi-Po. The Chinese traveller also saw a stupa built by Ashoka in its vicinity and a temple with a statue of Avalokiteshwara. Hundreds of antiques have been found in these sites, kept in the Bangladesh National Museum; Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi; Indian Museum and Asutosh Museum of Kolkata; and British Museum, and Victoria and Albert Museum, in London. They testify to Mahasthangarh's continuous history as a prosperous urban centre and provincial capital from the Maurya and Gupta times till the early Turkish Sultanate period.

Mangalkot

The ancient site of Mangalkot consisting of a number of high mounds (e.g. Vikramaditya Danga situated about 31 kilometres north of Burdwan town and close to Ajay Valley reveals an archaeological history dating from the first millennium BC to early medieval and almost Mughal period between the ninth and the seventeenth centuries. These excavations, largely done at the instance of the Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta, unearthed many materials such as terracotta statues and figures, including a number of copper objects, construction sites, bones of cattle and ceramics. These materials are largely to be seen in the Asutosh Museum of the Calcutta University, Department of Archaeology and Burdwan University Archaeological Museum. There are also remains of a mosque, which is locally called Hussein Shah Mosque, which indicates Hussein Shah's association with this place.

Chandraketugarh

Thanks to the archaeological discoveries in the last century, Chandraketugarh now ranks with such famous archaeological sites as Mathura or Taxila.¹⁰ Located in the Deganga police station area of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal and comprising several villages like Berachampa, Ranakhula, Ghorapota, Dhanpota, Singerati, Shanpukur, Jhikra and Ghazitala, this site contains priceless terracotta artefacts and pottery works produced between the third century BC and the third century AD. The following periods of human habitation in highly urbanized environments can be identified:

Period I:	c. 600–300 BC, pre-Maurya
Period II:	c. 300–200 BC, Maurya
Period III:	c. 200 BC–AD 5, Sunga
Period IV:	c. AD 50–300, Kushan
Period V:	c. AD 300–500, Gupta
Period VI:	c. AD 500–750, post-Gupta
Period VII:	c. AD 750–1250

Some of the locations in southern West Bengal adjacent to the Chota Nagpur Plateau reveal all the major stages of prehistoric tool traditions. The Chalcolithic settlements emerged on the fringe of these prehistoric settlements by utilizing the natural resources of the zone opened up by its Stone Age dwellers, essentially a community of hunters and gatherers. Chronological horizon of the Stone Age in West Bengal, however, remains uncertain. Chalcolithic sites, dating roughly from the middle of the second millennium BC to about 500 BC, extend westward from Burdwan to the lower slopes of the Chota Nagpur Plateau. Settled life in these West Bengal villages has its beginnings in the Chalcolithic phase. This phase is characterized by agriculture and fishing, use of diagnostic black and red earthenware and copper objects and craft activities like pottery and bead-making. Between circa fourth century BC to third century AD large settlements representing urban centres emerged in southern, western and

northern Bengal, consisting of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Mahasthan, Bangarh, Chandraketugarh, Tamluk, Mangalkot, Pokharna are some of the principal urban centres.

In Chandraketugarh we have evidence of continuous habitation over a period of about a thousand years, with developed forms of architecture evidencing an urbanized society in commercial contact with civilizations outside this subcontinent. Several efforts have been made to identify Chandraketugarh with places mentioned in Greek and Roman texts such as *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and the work of Ptolemy. The former text from an anonymous writer refers to a flourishing town called 'Gang' located on the banks of River Ganga. Ptolemy also describes 'Gange' as the capital city of the Gangaridai people situated in deltaic southern Bengal. Chandraketugarh could well fit in either of these descriptions. The excavations at various sites connected with this area have yielded a rich harvest of artefacts such as the Chandraketugarh seals depicting/representing divine and semi-divine deities; a female figure and a male figure holding a mace and wearing a skull cap; a simulated head of an elephant; copper and silver carnelian; shell, glass, roulette ware; ivory; various terracotta plaques depicting horses, toys, rattles and wheeled figurines. Terracotta depiction of a mother goddess, mythical lady with twin fists, has been found along with divine and semi-divine creatures. Some of these appear to have been worshipped. Some of the images have been identified with Hindu gods and goddesses. Images of the Hindu goddess Laxmi, and the Hindu god Ganesha and also Yakshas have been found. There are also many narrative plaques among the finds from both Chandraketugarh and Tamluk.¹¹ Many of these figures are preserved in the archaeological museum of the directorate of archaeology, government of West Bengal.

Tamralipta

Another site almost as ancient as Chandraketugarh is Tamluk or Tamralipta. Ptolemy describes a famous port town called 'Tamilitis', a flourishing port

town on the Ganga in the second century, which was a gateway for voyages to countries like Indonesia and was the port to go to Sri Lanka. Tamilitis has also been mentioned in the Mahabharata. Its ruler was among those who were present at Draupadi's *swayamvara* ceremony. This ruler also figures as among those of the Eastern kings defeated by Bhima and accepting the sovereignty of Yudhishtira. Tamralipta also figured in the accounts of Chinese travellers I-Tsing, Fa-Hien and Hiuen-Tsang. Rich archeological finds have been made from the area all around Tamluk by excavating tanks, although the numerous changes in the course of the rivers Ganga and Roopnarayan appear to have played havoc with many of the ancient ruins. Vast geographical changes had in fact occurred in between the visits of Fa-Hien and Hiuen-Tsang. While Fa-Hien describes Tamralipta as situated on the seaboard, by the time Hiuen-Tsang came to Bengal, he noticed that it was situated on a creek somewhat away from the main Bay of Bengal. According to Hiuen-Tsang this port town spread over about 250 miles and was the point of convergence of the land and the sea trade-route. Comparison between the Chandraketugarh terracottas and those recovered from Tamluk would indicate that the former had much more of indigenous motifs while at the latter site many non-indigenous forms and motifs have been discovered. The presence of Kharoshthi script in some of the inscriptions of Chandraketugarh suggests close contact with the north-western part of the subcontinent where this script was prevalent.

The Bengal terracottas have also been analysed by scholars like C.C. Dasgupta, Nihar Ranjan Roy and Devangana Desai.¹² These, along with the sites in the Varendra region of present-day Bangladesh, like Paharpur and Mahasthangarh, do bring out a very ancient archaeological heritage for Bengal consisting of both well-developed urban centres and surrounding 'rural' settlements often forming parts of agglomerations. In a special study of settlements in *Pratna Samiksha* dating from early medieval times in northern Bengal consisting of Malda, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur districts in India, and Bogra, Naogaon, Dinajpur, Joypurhat and Rajshahi districts of Bangladesh—the region that has a common name Varendra—

Sheena Panja focuses on a continuing archaeological history from the Buddhist Pala dynasty through the Sen dynasty for several centuries.

Pandu Rajar Dhibi

Archaeological excavations carried on during the 1960s mainly at Pandu Rajar Dhibi in the valley of the Ajay (near Bolpur) in Birbhum district, several other sites on the Kopai and Kunur rivers and Chandraketurgarh (Borachapa) near Barasat in North 24 Parganas district have furnished evidence of a high level of civilization in some parts of Bengal around the second millennium BC, long before the coming of the Aryans which was then regarded as the beginning of civilization in the subcontinent.¹³

The following extract from a report of the archaeological directorate of the government of West Bengal gives an idea of the state of civilization that existed at Pandu Rajar Dhibi around the first millennium BC:

Excavations at Pandu Rajar Dhibi by the Archaeological Survey of India have revealed that the people who inhabited ancient Bengal had built well-planned towns with pavements and streets. The buildings were created from unfired clay reinforced with reeds, and walls and floors were plastered with beaten laterite pelley. The people knew the use of copper. Agriculture and trade were the mainstay of their economy. They cultivated rice and other crops. They kept domestic animals and livestock, and also turned out fine potteries. They buried their dead in an east-west orientation, and their religion mainly centred around the worship of the mother goddess. The potteries they used consisted of bowls, shallow bowls, basins, channel-spouted bowls or basins (in black-and-red ware, often painted in the inside with white or cream), trumpet-or tulip-shaped vases often perforated at the bottom (in black-and-red ware), dishes-on-stand, bowls-on-stand (generally in red ware, sometimes painted and sometimes in black-slipped ware), perforated vases or bowls, thick storage jars, ordinary jars and *lotas* (generally in red ware), high-necked jars with a flaring rim and funnel-shaped narrow mouth (in black-and-red and black-slipped wares), lids and dishes ...

Regarding house plans of this period it may be observed that they lived in rectangular to square or round houses or huts framed with thick wooden or bamboo posts around which were put reeds plastered with mud both from inside and outside. Sometimes, the roof tiles were made of terracotta. Floors of these huts or houses were either made of rammed murrum or lateritic pellets or of terracotta modules or of clay mixed with cow dung (cf. central Indian sites) or were plastered with lime. The people of Pandu Rajar Dhibi probably ate rice, and the dietary seems to have included, in some cases, meats of 'nilgai', deer and pig (evidence from almost all the levels), besides fish. The animals were

also domesticated by the people. In thirteen burials of these different classes, extended, fractional or secondary and urn burials were found.

It has been suggested that Pandu Rajar Dhibi represents the ruins of a trading township. The people 'carried on trade not only with the interior regions of India, but also with the countries overseas. They were predominantly a sea-faring people, and in ships made by themselves they could traverse the seven seas of the world'.

The excavations at Pandu Rajar Dhibi have revealed the existence of a Copper Age civilization in eastern India which had once a close relation with the Chalcolithic civilization of central India and Rajasthan, as illuminated by a comparison of cultural assemblages of these regions. During the excavation of 1964 it was decisively proved that iron was known and probably smelted at this site side by side with the use of copper and microliths in Period III in a chronological horizon of around 1000 BC. The seal and engraving conclusively reveal that there was once a method of writing of sharp linear pattern in the Ajay Valley somewhere in the second millennium BC. A careful study of all these relics had revealed that the Chalcolithic habitation of Pandu Rajar Dhibi began in the latter half of the second millennium BC and continued to flourish in spite of recognizable changes down to the beginning of first millennium BC. Recently, a radiocarbon analysis of an excavated charcoal sample from the cemetery level of Period III of Pandu Rajar Dhibi as conducted by Dr Shyamadas Chatterjee, head of the Department of Physics, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, has confirmed the expectation by dating the Chalcolithic phase to 1120–1012 BC. It is obvious that Period I belonged to earlier times.¹⁴

The recent discovery of inscriptions in Kharoshthi script at Chandraketugarh at village Berachampa in 24 Parganas district along with terracotta figures also provides interesting insights into the social and cultural history of ancient Bengal, showing Bengal's links with present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan in the early Buddhist era.

However, by the time of the epics, the Aryanization process had gone considerably ahead. The Ramayana includes Vanga as a part of Dasharatha's empire and also refers to Suhma (West Bengal) and Pundra (north Bengal). The Mahabharata indicates further advance of Aryan settlements towards the east. Among the kings who were present in Draupadi's *swayamvara sabha* as suitors was the ruler of Vanga. We come across a king of Vanga and Pundra named Paundraka Vasudeva who incurred the wrath of Lord Krishna who destroyed him. This false Vasudeva is described as having an alliance with the great King Jarasandha of Magadha who was obviously an Aryan king whose power and position have been described in great detail in the epic. The Mahabharata describes how Krishna, Karna and Bhima undertook campaigns in the east. Krishna vanquished both the Vangas and the Pundras. Karna, as ruler of Anga, is said to have defeated the Vangas, the Suhmas and the Pundras. Bhima subjugated Samudrasena of Vanga and his son, Chandrasena, and the lord of the Pundras. The ruler of the Vangas took part in the epic battle of Kurukshetra as an ally of the Kauravas. The following account of a battle scene involving the mighty ruler of Vanga is given in the Mahabharata.

Beholding that lance levelled at Duryodhana, the lord of Vanga quickly arrived on the scene with his elephant that towered like a mountain. He covered the Kuru king's chariot with the body of the animal. Ghatotkacha, with eyes reddened with rage, flung his upraised missile at the beast. Struck with the dart the elephant bled profusely and fell down dead. The rider quickly jumped down from the falling animal and Duryodhana rushed to his rescue.¹⁵

The Mahabharata also describes a number of pilgrimage centres such as Ganga-Sangama, i.e., the mouth of the Ganga, and other holy rivers such as Karatoya and the Lauhitya, indicating a familiarity of the Aryans with the geography and the political set-up of Bengal that was absent during the age of the Vedas, the *Brahmasutras* and the early Buddhist and Jain literature. Also, the earlier derogatory references to the region of Bengal and the east was absent. The intermixing of the Aryans and non-Aryans is illustrated by some legendary references such as the queen of the Asura king, Bali, having five sons by the Rishi Dirghatamas. These sons were named Anga,

Vanga, Kalinga, Suhma and Pundra who founded the five respective kingdoms named after them. As summed up by R.C. Majumdar, the process of Aryanization of eastern India took place between fifth century BC when the *Baudhayana Dharmasutra* was compiled and the fourth century AD when the Mahabharata was compiled in its present form.¹⁶

RISE OF MAGADHA: THE MAURYA DYNASTY

In the process of Aryanization and the incorporation of Bengal in the north Indian political system, the rise of the Magadha Empire—first under the Nanda dynasty and then under the Mauryas in the third century BC—played an important role. In the wake of Alexander's invasion of north-western India (now Pakistan), the Greek writers repeatedly speak of two mighty powers in the East, the Gangaridai and the Prasii. They are somewhat vague about the precise location of the centres of these two powers or their interrelationship. At times, the two names are used synonymously. As these writers largely based their accounts on hearsay, it is even possible that these were two different names of the same people. Presumably, the Gangaridai ruled the whole of north India from the Beas to the western parts of Bengal beyond the Ganga. Diodorus, for example, states that the 'Ganges which is 30 stadia broad, flows from north to south forming the boundary towards the east of the tribe of the Gangaridai'.

This would make Radha (Rar) the home of the Gangaridai. Other writers such as Plutarch, Curtius and Solinus place the Gangaridai and the Prasii on the eastern banks of the Ganga. Analysing these different statements, R.C. Majumdar has come to the conclusion that when the classical writers used the word 'Ganga', they meant not the western branch, i.e., the Bhagirathi, but the eastern branch, i.e., the Padma.¹⁷ It does not seem certain that the Gangaridai and the Prasii were closely allied to each other, if not one and the same. Curtius describes them as 'two nations under one king'. Diodorus refers to them as 'one nation whose king was Xandramas'. Obviously then, the Gangaridai and the Prasii were closely related and under a common monarchy which, according to Greek writers, had gathered 2,00,000

soldiers, 8,000 chariots and 80,000 horses to resist Alexander's mighty army, and the Greek army withdrew from India rather than face the Eastern power. After Alexander's departure this formidable Eastern army under Chandragupta Maurya, called Sandrokottas by the Greeks, successfully challenged his general Saleukas Nikotor and seized vast dominions in present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan from the Greeks. The period of Magadhan ascendancy marked an important watershed in Bengal's history. Aryanized Bengal together with Aryanized Bihar created the first great empire in the subcontinent, although Bengal did not have a separate identity during the Maurya Empire. Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by his son, Bindusara, and the latter by his son Ashoka, one of the greatest emperors in the history of the world—one who after his initial spell of military successes chose to pursue a policy of conquest by dharma (morals) rather than by physical force. No Ashokan inscription has been found in Bengal. But an inscription in Brahmi script and Prakrit language, perhaps from the third century BC, has been found in the Mahasthangarh ruins in Bogra district of Bangladesh. Another inscription in Brahmi script and Prakrit language on a stone figure found at Silua in Noakhali district of Bangladesh (second century BC) also testifies to the ongoing process of Aryanization. A symbolical illustration of the process of Aryanization is provided by the legend of Vijaya, the son of the king of Vanga, Sinhabahu, as contained in the Pali chronicles of Sri Lanka. He was exiled by his father for his misdeeds. He set sail with 700 followers and landed in Lanka in the region called Tambapani in the year of Lord Budha's *parinirvana* (544 BC). This was the beginning of the Sinhala nation, named after Vijaya and his 'lionmen' (Sinhala). This legend, apart from alluding to some early political relationship between Sri Lanka and Bengal and the maritime tradition of Bengal, also shows the extent of Aryanization. The region of Bengal must have slipped out of Magadhan Empire following the disintegration of the Maurya Empire in the second century BC.

By the time we come to the fourth century AD and get to the Susunia rock inscription of Bankura district this process of Aryanization was nearly complete.¹⁸ This inscription is in classical Sanskrit and in Brahmi script

and refers to a king called Chandra who made donation to the god Vishnu. Chandra was one of the kings subjugated by the Gupta emperor Samudragupta, as recorded in the Allahabad pillar inscription. Thus by the time the Gupta Empire arose, i.e., the fourth century AD, the whole of Bengal had definitely been Aryanized.

THE GUPTA EMPIRE

Between the fall of the Maurya Empire (end of the third century BC) and the rise of the Gupta Empire (around AD 350) Bengal once again disappeared from the main stage and moved to the wings, and we do not have any definite information on its political history during these centuries. All that can be surmised is that trade and commerce flourished with the port Tamralipta as the hub. There are stray references in classical literature. The great Roman poet, Virgil, referred to Gangaridai in his *Georgics* (30 BC). The unknown Greek author of the well-known travelogue *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (first century BC), referred to Ganga River and the city called Ganga on its banks. Ptolemy, the famous geographer, referred to the five mouths of the Ganga being occupied by the Gangaridai and of the city of Ganga where their king lived (second century AD). Pliny, the great Roman historian (first century AD), also talks about the Gangaridai through which flows the Ganga in the final course and its royal city called Parthides Thales where 60,000 foot soldiers, 1,000 horsemen and 700 elephants protected the king. Coins bearing the names of the Kushan emperors who ruled over the north-western part of India, Pakistan and vast parts of Central Asia have been discovered in various parts of Bengal; but clearly they only provide evidence of extensive commercial contacts between Bengal and the Kushan Empire and not of the Kushan emperor's sovereignty over Bengal. It was the founding of the Gupta Empire with Pataliputra as its capital which really marked the return of Bengal once again to the centre stage. Unlike in the case of the Maurya Empire, the inclusion of Bengal in the Gupta Empire is not a matter of assumption but is grounded on firm historical evidence. There is a view supported by the well-known archaeologist Dr D.C. Ganguly that 'the early home of the imperial Guptas

is to be located in Murshidabad in Bengal, and not in Magadha'. This is, according to some indirect evidence given by the Chinese traveller, I-Tsing, about the location of a temple built by Srigupta, said to be the founder of the dynasty, at a place about forty *yojanas* to the east of Nalanda following the course of the Ganga. This temple, called the temple of China, was built for Chinese priests. Whether this was in present-day Murshidabad or, as argued by another scholar, in Malda, is a matter of debate but clearly there was close association between Bengal and the early Guptas.¹⁹

It can also be presumed that at least some part of north Bengal was included in the territory directly ruled by the Gupta dynasty. On the whole, there is no doubt that Bengal together with Bihar formed the home ground of the imperial Guptas. Bengal, therefore, rose to the height of political glory under the first three imperial Guptas, viz., Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II, also called Vikramaditya, when the Gupta Empire covered the largest part of the subcontinent since the Mauryas. Among the kingdoms which were conquered by Samudragupta, as given in the Allahabad pillar inscription written by Samudragupta's court poet Harisen, are Samatata, comprising portions of southern Bengal — also described by the ancient name of Dhaka (according to certain historians) — and Pushkarna ruled by a King Chandravarmana who is identified as Chandravarmana of Susunia Hills in Bankura district of West Bengal. According to the epigraphic records of Kumaragupta, who followed Chandragupta II, north Bengal, described as Pundravardhana Bhukti, was an important province of the empire. It was under the charge of a governor appointed by the emperor, and the governor in his turn appointed officers in charge of various districts into which the province was divided. The Damodarpur plate of Budhagupta also supported this view that north Bengal formed an important part of the Gupta Empire. Samatata appears to have been a semi-feudatory state during Samudragupta's rule. In the years AD 507–08 this was ruled by Maharaja Vijayagupta who granted land in Tippera district of Bangladesh and also issued coins under the name of Dawaditya. He might well have been a member of the imperial family who was holding charge of the province of eastern Bengal under the title of

Maharaja. We do not have any direct evidence of the inclusion of any other part of what later on became Bengal in the empire of the Guptas. It can be safely assumed that the Gupta Empire collapsed in the sixth century AD under the impact of the continuous invasion by the Hunas and also the weakening of the central power. This led to another phase of political disintegration in north India. Bengal also must have taken advantage of the collapse of the Gupta Empire to wrest sovereign power and so we come across two powerful kingdoms, Gaur and Banga in the sixth century AD.

One highlight of the Gupta era was the visit of the great Chinese Buddhist traveller Fa-Hien at the beginning of the fifth century AD, possibly during the reign of Chandragupta II. Fa-Hien's travelogue contains graphic description of the territories under the sovereignty of the imperial Guptas including Bengal. He stayed several years in the Gupta Empire visiting centres of learning and sailed for home from the port of Tamralipta (Tamluk), which he found to be an important trading centre. The region of Bengal according to his description must have been a prosperous one where trade and agriculture flourished. Fa-Hien found the city of Nalanda an important seat of learning and spent two years there copying Buddhist manuscripts and painting images.²⁰ Clearly, Sanskritic learning and culture dominated the Bengal region at that time.

First Gaur Kingdom under Sasanka

During the political confusion that followed the end of the Gupta Empire, we can notice the emergence of two independent kingdoms in the east, viz., Gaur and Banga. Both of them arose around the sixth and the seventh centuries AD. Three rulers of Banga can be traced, viz., Gopachandra, Dharmaditya and Samachardev. Each of them assumed the title Maharajadhiraja. There are three inscriptions discovered around Kotalipara in the district of Faridpur in Bangladesh and one in Burdwan district of West Bengal, which refer to these three kings. The gold coins of Samachardev have been discovered in the ruins of Nalanda in Bihar. His gold coins have also been discovered at a number of places in East Bengal, notably at Savar in Dhaka and Kotalipara in Faridpur district. When precisely did this kingdom of Banga cease to exist is not known. On the basis of Chalukya records (*Prasastis*) Dr R.C. Majumdar came to the conclusion that it was the Chalukya king, Kirti Varman, who destroyed this kingdom in the latter half of the sixth century. But what is more certain is that it was the rise of the kingdom centring on Gaur under King Sasanka which eventually destroyed the Banga kingdom. During this confusing period there are references to the Gaur kingdom attacking Kamrup and also an invasion of Gaur by a Tibetan ruler. It was during this period that one King Adisur, famous in the folklore of Bengal, ruled. But the legends of Adisur do not have any historical authenticity. Adisur is no doubt a legendary figure like King Arthur of England whose historical authenticity is very doubtful.

In the evolution of Bengal as a distinct political and ethnic entity, the rule of Sasanka (c. 606–37) is a major landmark. Sasanka was the first historically known ruler of what came to be called Bengal later, although he

was described in his time only as the king of Gaur. Also he was the first known king of Bengal who extended his political sovereignty over territories well beyond the normal geographical boundary of Bengal.

Sasanka might have started as a vassal of the Maukhary king Avantivarman, as claimed by some historians. Also, he might have been a subordinate ruler under the later Guptas. What we definitely know is that around AD 606, Sasanka became the king of Gaur with his capital at Karnasuvarna which is identified as the village Kansona near Baharampur town of Murshidabad district. From two copper plate grants of Sasanka, around *samvat* 230 or 330, it is quite clear that his rule extended to Danda, and Utkala, or Orissa.

He must also have been in possession of the whole of south Bengal. In an inscription of the year AD 619, Sri Madhavarajan, a king ruling over Kongada on the Chilka Lake of Orissa, invokes the name of Sasanka as his protector. This shows that Sasanka was definitely exercising sovereignty up to Chilka Lake, after he launched his campaign in these areas. But his campaign in north India in the course of which he came in conflict with the great emperor Harshavardhana of Kanauj was not successful. There is ample evidence to this effect from the account of both Banabhatta, Harsha's court poet, and Hiuen-Tsang, the great Chinese pilgrim who visited the empire of Harshavardhana.

In the course of his campaign, Sasanka defeated the Maukhary king Grahavarman, the son of Avantivarman who had married Rajyasri, the daughter of Prabhakaravardhana, the ruler of Thaneswar. It seems that a triangular pattern of interaction had developed at that time among the Pushyabhuti dynasty of Thaneswar, the Maukhary dynasty of Kanauj and the later Guptas from Malava. By a dynastic alliance through the marriage of Rajyasri, daughter of Prabhakaravardhana of Thaneswar, with Grahavarman, the Maukhary king had brought these two powers together against the king of Malava. Sasanka, who had gradually extended his authority over Magadha and up to Benares, now intervened in this triangle on the side of the king of Malava, making it a quadrangular affair. The Malava king defeated and killed Grahavarman, imprisoning his queen Rajyasri, sister of Rajyavardhana. Rajyavardhana, who had ascended the

throne of Thaneswar on his father's death, marched against Devagupta of Malava with a hastily organized cavalry of 10,000, leaving the kingdom in charge of his younger brother, Harshavardhana. He defeated the Malava king and captured a large part of his army. But before he could conquer Kanauj or establish contact with his sister, Rajyasri, he was killed by Sasanka. Both Banabhatta and Hiuen-Tsang had described this as a treacherous murder under orders of Sasanka, although their versions somewhat differ. From Harshavardhana's own inscriptions, it is learnt that Rajyavardhana met with his death in the house of his enemy trying to fulfil a promise (*satyanirodhana*). Many scholars do not accept this charge of treacherous murder by Sasanka, since both Banabhatta and Hiuen-Tsang had personal prejudice against Sasanka. But whether or not Rajyavardhana was treacherously murdered, there is no denying the fact that Rajyavardhana was eliminated from the political scene in AD 606 and left Sasanka as the dominant power in that region. Sasanka did not pursue his victory by proceeding to Kanauj or Thaneswar but presumably decided to consolidate his existing gains. On hearing of Rajyavardhana's death, Harshavardhana with his vast army marched on for taking vengeance on the king of Gaur. And then a fifth power stepped in.

Bhaskaravarman, king of Kamrup, must have found in this situation an opportunity to settle scores with his neighbour Sasanka. He entered into a military alliance with Harshavardhana. The combined army then proceeded against their common enemy after Harsha had rescued his sister Rajyasri from the Vindhya forest. We have no further information on the results of the joint military campaign of Thaneswar and Kamrup against Bengal. The later Buddhist work, *Arya Manjusri Mula-kalpa*, speaks of a conflict between Sasanka and Harsha, but this cannot be taken as historically accurate. It does seem probable that Sasanka had to fall back on his capital when he was attacked on both sides. But soon the enemy withdrew, leaving him the master of his kingdom. There is a reference by Hiuen-Tsang to an ineffectual military campaign by Harsha. It is certain that Harshavardhana's campaign was a short-lived episode without any major effect on Bengal, and Sasanka remained in possession of Gaur, Magadha and Utkala long

after AD 606. He held his own empire against the powerful combine of the north Indian ruler and his eastern friend until his death, which took place sometime after AD 616 and probably before AD 637. The significance of the latter date was that around the time Hiuen-Tsang visited Magadha, he found that Sasanka had cut down a bodhi tree at Gaya and ordered the removal of the statue of Buddha from the temple. After his orders were executed, the king was seized with remorse and was affected by some incurable disease that caused his death. Hiuen-Tsang had also recorded many other acts of oppression by Sasanka against the Buddhists. According to him, one of the reasons why Harsha was induced to ascend the throne was to avenge the wrongs done by the king of Karnasuvarna. Both Banabhatta and Hiuen-Tsang accused Sasanka of having an anti-Buddhist bias; but, in fairness to Sasanka, it needs to be emphasized that his so-called anti-Buddhist stance was clearly more political than religious. He had to fight against two powerful Buddhist kings and, therefore, some Buddhists in his own dominion had to bear the brunt of his hostility. But he should not be made to suffer in the eyes of posterity for not having had emotionally motivated chroniclers like Banabhatta and Hiuen-Tsang to write in his favour.

HIUEN-TSANG'S ACCOUNT OF BENGAL

This intrepid Chinese pilgrim, a friend of Harshavardhana, visited Bengal during the first half of seventh century AD. He crossed the Ganga from north Bihar and studied in Nalanda University for several years. He reached Pundravardhana in north Bengal. He found the country thickly populated where both Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism were flourishing along with Brahmanism and Jainism. From Pundravardhana Hiuen-Tsang journeyed to Kamrup where the people were dark yellow in colour and of small stature. They were honest and simple in manners, but somewhat impetuous. Their language differed 'a little' from the language of mid-India. They were serious in study and their memories were retentive. Their king Bhaskaravarman was a Brahman, and the people also followed Brahmanical rituals. From Kamrup Hiuen-Tsang went to Samatata or

eastern Bengal which bordered the sea. This was a country of rich lowlands. The people were black-complexioned, hardy and small-statured. They were serious in learning. As in Pundravardhana, Brahmanism and Jainism existed side by side. From Samatata he moved to Karnasuvarna (Kanasona) in Murshidabad district. Here, the men were both believers and heretics. They were brave and hardy, but of hasty temperament. The next place on his itinerary was Tamralipta where the people were honest, amiable and keen seekers of knowledge. They were both Buddhist and Brahmanical. Thereafter he proceeded to Odra, which was presumably in south-western Midnapore and moved on to Kalinga and Orissa. One thing which is clear from Hiuen-Tsang's travelogue is that by the seventh century AD upper-class people all over Bengal had accepted the Aryan language and the Aryan way of life, but these had not yet spread among the masses.¹

DARK AGE

The period from Sasanka's death (637) to the rise of the Pala imperial dynasty in the middle of the eighth century is another Dark Age in Bengal's history when there is no political continuity. There are only stray references to Bengal in the few historical documents available with us, and thereafter we are left to guesswork. It seems reasonably certain that after Sasanka, Bengal was split between Bhaskaravarman, the Kamrup king, and his ally, Harshavardhana of Kanauj. The former occupied most of Sasanka's kingdom including the capital Karnasuvarna, where he made a land grant that survives. Hiuen-Tsang who visited Bengal around AD 638 refers to four principalities, which were presumably under Harsha's sovereignty, viz., Pundravardhana, Karnasuvarna, Samatata and Tamralipta. According to Hiuen-Tsang, around AD 642, Bhaskaravarman marched to Kanjangala near Rajmahal with 30,000 boats which sailed along the Ganga and had a meeting with Harshavardhana. The political situation got further confounded after the death of Harsha (AD 646 or 647) and there was the bizarre episode of the clash between Harsha's successor and the Chinese envoy Wang-hiuen-tse, which led to a Chinese invasion of Harsha's empire.

There are three references to military invasion of Bengal, one by the powerful Tibetan king Starong-Tsan Gampo (AD 700),² another by the powerful king of Kanauj, Yasovarman (AD 725–35), who conquered both Gaur and Banga killing the Gaur king,³ and the third by Lalitaditya, king of Kashmir who defeated Yasovarman around AD 736 and undertook a *digvijaya* or a campaign of conquest to assert his supremacy over all those territories that owed allegiance to Yasovarman. In Kalhan's *Rajatarangini*, there are at least two references to Gaur, which indirectly suggest Gaur's acceptance of the Kashmir king's sovereignty. First, a troupe of elephants from Gaudamandala joined Lalitaditya's expeditions. Second, there was the visit of the Gaur king to the Kashmir court where he was assassinated in a temple at Lalitaditya's behest. This was followed by a heroic but suicidal mission of some followers of the Gaur king who journeyed to Kashmir to seek revenge. 'Even the Creator,' says Kalhan, 'cannot achieve what the Gauras did on that occasion and to this day the world is filled with the fame of the Gaur heroes.' There are also some copper plates of this period alluding to a certain Kharga dynasty in Dhaka–Tippera area of East Bengal. The Tibetan monk, Taranath, vaguely refers to a Chandra dynasty ruling in East Bengal. But all these do not add up to any history as such. What is most certain is that Bengal was in a state of political disintegration and passed through one invasion after another until the rise of the Pala dynasty around the middle of the eighth century.

The Imperial Palas

As we come to the age of the imperial Pala dynasty (c. eighth to tenth century) we move from the grey area in Bengal's history to the age of historical certainty. To quote R.C. Majumdar:

For the first time the historian has the advantage of being able to follow, in the main, the fortunes of a single ruling dynasty, the order of succession of whose long line of kings is precisely known and whose chronology may be fixed with a tolerable degree of certainty. The advantage does not forsake him in spite of occasional political disintegration and the rise of local dynasties in various parts of the province.

The Pala dynasty, firmly based in Bengal, but with imperial ambitions over north India, had an origin unique in world history. The people of the land, tired of chronic anarchy and lawlessness that had inflicted endless suffering on them, chose one amongst themselves, Gopal, as their king, because they felt that the end of the prevailing anarchy could be brought about only by the establishment of a strong central authority to whom all petty chieftains subordinated themselves. The political situation of Bengal immediately before the Palas is picturesquely described by the Khalimpur copper plate used during the thirty-second year of the reign of the second Pala king Dharmapal. The expression *matsya nyaya*, sometimes used in Sanskrit treatises on politics to express a state of anarchy caused by the absence of a central authority, is also a typical Bengali way of describing the state of affairs with the imagery of a tank where big fishes are forever preying on smaller ones. This copper plate alludes to the unique event of Gopal's election in the following stanza:

Matsyanyayam apakitum prakritibhir Lakshmiya karam grahitah Sri Gopal iti kshitisa-sirsam chudamani-tatubha

To put an end to the state of affairs similar to what happens among fishes, people made the glorious Gopal, the crest jewel of the heads of kings, take the hand of Lakshmi, the

goddess of fortune.

Whether this means a democratic process of election by the people or whether it was a case of powerful feudal landlords selecting one amongst themselves as king, this was a unique event where the society, as it was at that time, chose a king — almost providing a copybook illustration of Locke's theory of social contract creating the state. The Sanskrit word '*prakritis*' meaning 'subjects' is more suggestive of people in general. In reality, the selection must have been made by a group of chieftains, which was subsequently endorsed by the general people. We have very little information about Gopal's ancestors. There are stray references in official records to his father, Vapyata and his grandfather, Dayitavishnu, who were clearly ordinary officials under some nondescript local chief.

There are casual statements in subsequent literature of the Pala period such as *Ramcharita* that they were Kshatriyas or they descended from the solar dynasty, but these lack credibility and were clearly attempts to cover up the relatively humble origins of this dynasty by an imagined ancient lineage. Abu'l-Fazl described them as Kayasthas. The Palas were devout Buddhists, and perhaps this explains why in their own records they never allude to Brahmanical institutions like caste. Gopal's accession must have taken place around AD 750, and according to R.C. Majumdar, his reign ended around AD 770. Much of his reign must have been devoted to consolidating his authority over the whole of Bengal including Gaur, Varendra and Banga. It must also have included parts of Magadha. According to his grandson Devapal's Monghyr copper plate, he conquered the whole country as far as the sea. This implies his conquest of lower Bengal. Another expression in his plate, of his releasing the war elephants, hints at his ending the military campaign. Thus, the only conclusion one can draw is that Gopal's main achievement was the establishment of durable peace in Bengal by bringing under his control the turbulent chiefs from outlying areas and unifying Gaur, Varendra, Banga and Magadha in one kingdom.

It was Gopal's son and successor, Dharmapal, who built on the foundations laid by Gopal and took Pala rule to imperial glory.

Dharmapal's imperial ambitions took him outside the limits of Gaur and Magadha on to the political horizons of north India where a triangular struggle developed between the Palas, the Rashtrakutas from the south and the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Malava in the west. All the three powers tried to take advantage of the power vacuum in north India to extend their own hold. As both Dharmapal from the east and King Vatsaraja of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty from the west marched to the north to capture the declining Kanauj empire, there was an inevitable clash that took place in the Doab. Dharmapal suffered defeat, but there was providential intervention. Even before the Pratihara victor could press home his political advantages over the Bengal king's defeat, he was himself defeated by the Rashtrakuta king Dhruva who had chosen to make a quick military sortie to north India. Dhruva proceeded to occupy the Doab, and in that process he met and defeated Dharmapal's army; but once again providence favoured Dharmapal as the Rashtrakuta victor, already far away from his southern kingdom, chose to return to the Deccan. With Vatsaraja driven out as a fugitive in the trackless desert and Dhruva having withdrawn to the south, Dharmapal quickly proceeded to occupy north India. Although the details of his campaign are not known and there are only stray references in copper plates (e.g. Khalimpur, Bhagalpur, Monghyr) it seems certain that he defeated Indraraja, the ruler of Kanauj, and gave the throne to his own protégé, Chakrayudh. Thereafter, he held an imperial durbar at Kanauj where the vassal chiefs from all over north India were present to acknowledge his supremacy. From the place names found in the Khalimpur copper plate which came under Dharmapal's military occupation, it seems certain that his empire extended from Bengal and Bihar to the north-west, including Punjab and Rajasthan.

According to the Khalimpur copper plate, the durbar at Kanauj was attended by the rulers of Bhoja, Matsya, Madra, Kuru, Yadu, Yavana, Awanti, Gandhara and Kira. These names more or less represent the whole of present-day north India and Pakistan even if we were to discount

substantially from them. According to the Monghyr copper plate, Dharmapal offered prayers at Kedar, possibly Kedarnath in the middle Himalayas and Gokarna in the south, and these descriptions clearly indicate that, by and large, his position as sovereign in the whole of north India was accepted by most of the rulers, although this was a loose arrangement unlike the empire of the Mauryas or the Guptas. It was more like the standard pattern characteristic of the Asian feudalistic system where all these rulers, while maintaining their positions, acknowledged the overall military and political supremacy of the imperial Palas. But history has a tendency to sometimes repeat itself. Thus the Pratihara king, Vatsaraja's son and successor Nagabhatta II, renewed his northern imperial pretensions. He organized a combination of all those rulers who were against Dharmapal, marched to Kanauj and defeated Dharmapal's protégé, Chakrayudha. Inevitably, there was a great battle between Nagabhatta and Dharmapal, possibly fought somewhere near Monghyr. According to Pratihara records, Nagabhatta too defeated Dharmapal, thereby repeating his father's feat. But once again their traditional enemies from the south, the Rashtrakutas, attacked the Pratiharas. The Rashtrakuta king Govinda III decisively defeated the Pratihara army and proceeded up to the Ganga–Jamuna Doab. According to Rashtrakuta sources, Govinda also defeated Dharmapal of Bengal and carried away images of the goddess Tara, but once again Govinda returned to the Deccan and Dharmapal was left free to regain his strength and re-establish his authority.

According to R.C. Majumdar, Dharmapal's empire did not suffer much diminution during the rest of his life and he spent his final days in peace. This is supported by the Monghyr copper plate of Devapal stating that there was no disturbance in the domains when he succeeded his father, Dharmapal. Thus ended Dharmapal's remarkable and long rule during which time he had transformed his small inherited kingdom into a powerful imperial regime. His reign was also a great age of Buddhism. However, though he was a Buddhist king he was not hostile to other religions. In fact, his minister was a Brahman named Garga.

DEVAPAL

Dharmapal was succeeded by his son, Devapal (c. 810–50), under whom the Pala dynasty reached the zenith of its glory. According to the highly exaggerated information given by the Badal inscription left by a family of hereditary ministers who served the Palas, Devapal, assisted by Minister Darbhapani, received tributes from the entire north India, from the Himalayas to the Vindhya and from the eastern to the western seas. The same inscription says that Devapal exterminated the Utkalas and the king of Pragjyotisha (Assam) and curbed the rise of the Hunas, Dravidas and Gurjaras. Devapal's own land grant shows that his career of victory took him to Kamboja in the west and Vindhya Mountains in the south.

According to the Bhagalpur copper plate, the rulers of both Assam and Utkala accepted Devapal's sovereignty. The reference to the Hunas probably refers to a Huna principality in north-western India. Similarly, the Kamboja principality was also in the north-west of the present-day Punjab. The Gurjaras were undoubtedly the Pratiharas, the traditional enemies of the Palas. Similarly, the reference to the Dravidas presumably implied the Rashtrakutas, another traditional rival of the Palas, though according to R.C. Majumdar, the Dravida king whose pride was curbed by Devapal was presumably the Pandya ruler, Srimara-Sriballabha. Clearly, Devapal became the sovereign ruler of the whole of north India and extensive parts of southern India. That his hold crossed beyond the seas is proved by the famous inscription in Nalanda University according to which King Balaputradeva of the Silendra dynasty ruling in modern Indonesia and Malaysia sent an ambassador to his court seeking the grant of five villages to maintain a monastery built by him at Nalanda. It also shows Devapal as assuming the role of the patron and the guardian of the Nalanda University. The role of Devapal is also supported by the Ghosrava inscription, which records that Veeradeva, a learned Buddhist and a Brahman, was appointed as the head of the Nalanda University by Emperor Devapal.

The formal position of patronship of the Nalanda University, a premier seat of learning in the Buddhist world, must have given considerable international status to the Pala emperors. All Pala copper plates start with an

invocation to Lord Buddha. As summed up by R.C. Majumdar: 'For nearly four hundred years their court persevered to be the last stronghold of that dying faith in India. For this reason the Pala kings enjoyed an important position in the international Buddhist world, and they maintained intact the fountainhead of later Buddhism from which streams flowed to Tibet in the north, and the Indian archipelago in the south-east.'

Among the adversaries whom Devapal humbled were Bhoja I, the king of the Gurjaras, the traditional rival of the Palas and of the Pandya ruler Srimara-Sriballabha, who has been referred to in the inscription as the king of Dravidas. There is enough indirect evidence to suggest a victorious campaign by Devapal in the extremely southern part of south India and other nations. They were staunch Buddhists, but extended patronage to other religions. They also patronized Sanskrit literature, which was the general language of the educated people those days. However, inscriptions of the Palas are not in Devanagari script but a script that is the forerunner of the Bengali script. Sulaiman, an Arabic traveller who visited the Pala kingdom towards the end of Devapal's reign refers several times to the conflict with the Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas and to the 50,000 elephants that always accompanied the Pala army. The two universities which the Palas patronized, viz., Nalanda and Vikramasila, acquired international recognition. In the contemporary records, there is reference to one Yuvaraj Haravarsha who ruled Bihar and parts of Bengal on behalf of the imperial Palas. Tibetan records of this period referred to the invasion of north India during this period by two successive Tibetan kings. They speak of the Tibetans conquering India as far as Gangasagar, but there is no corroborative evidence, nor any reference to this in the contemporary literature of Bengal. It is, however, possible that Tibetans did come to north India and caused some anxiety to the Palas. The empire steadily declined after the rule of Devapal disintegrated and virtually vanished in about half a century. There are references to shadowy kings like Vighrahapal, Surapal II, Narayanapal, Rajyapal, Gopal II and Vighrahapal II; but none of them had the competence or the pretensions of Dharmapal and Devapal. Taking advantage of their weakness, both their traditional enemies, the Pratiharas

from the west and the Rashtrakutas from the south, again made incursions into Bengal. Both Assam and Orissa threw off Pala sovereignty and became independent. After them, the great Chandela king Yasovarman and his son Dhanga invaded Bengal. So also did the newly established Kalachuri dynasty. For some time, in the tenth century, a usurper claiming to belong to one Kamboj family took possession of the truncated Pala kingdom, including the capital, and issued land grants in his own name. Perhaps the empire was also split up into a number of principalities controlled by former feudatories.

MAHIPAL I

This phase of decline was temporarily halted by Mahipal I (988–1038). Mahipal recovered much of his ancestral kingdom, which had disappeared through non-occupation (*anadhikrita-vilupta*). On the basis of a study of the contemporary inscriptions, R.C. Majumdar came to the conclusion that Mahipal reoccupied East Bengal and that he could have done this only after gaining control over either Varendra (north Bengal) or Rar (western Bengal). But Bengal continued to attract invaders from outside. The most important of the invasions was the one by the southern emperor, Rajendra Chola from 1021 to 1023. This invasion is well documented in Chola inscriptions. According to these inscriptions Rajendra Chola's ostensible pretext for invading Bengal was to bring the sacred Ganga water, but in that process he clearly humbled the then rulers of West Bengal and returned home not only with the Ganga water, but with considerable booty. It is not sure whether the ruler in West Bengal whom he humbled was a Pala feudatory, but even if he was defeated he must have recovered his kingdom in a short while. According to K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, the Chola invasion was nothing more than 'a hurried raid across the vast stretch of the country and did not leave any imprint'.¹ The rulers in Rar region who were humbled by the Chola conqueror, viz., Dharmapal, Ranasur and Govindachandra, might have been feudatories under Mahipal. During Mahipal's reign a new invader appeared on the western horizon of the

subcontinent, viz., Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni, who carried out many raids over north India. Mahipal did not join the confederacy of north Indian princes on the side of the Shahi dynasty of Udbhandapur against Mahmood, presumably because he did not perceive any direct threat. Mahipal restored the Bodhi temple at Bodhgaya and constructed and renovated some temples at Sarnath. This definitely indicates that his influence extended in the west up to Varanasi. He also repaired and restored the Nalanda University. Local traditions have preserved the name of Mahipal with the construction of a large number of tanks and towns in north Bengal, among them the magnificent buildings at Paharpur in Rajshahi district. Also, his name still figures in popular ballads current in Bengal, even as the names of great emperors like Dharmapal and Devpal have been forgotten in popular memory.

THE KAIBARTA REBELLION

After Mahipal I the process of disintegration of the Pala Empire resumed. His successor Nayapal ruled over a vastly reduced kingdom. Old rivals like Kalachuris took advantage of the weakness to attack the Palas repeatedly. But one highlight of this period was that the famous Buddhist monk Dipankar Srijnana Atisha lived during this troubled time. He hailed from Dhaka and spent many years in Magadha. Interestingly, he intervened in a conflict between Nayapal and the Kalachuri king Karna and tried to bring about peace, and a treaty was concluded between the two hostile kings. Shortly after this, around AD 1040, Dipankar left for Tibet at the age of forty-nine. He spent the last thirteen years of his life in Tibet reforming and reviving Buddhism in that kingdom. It appears that during the shadowy rulers after Nayapal, Banga or eastern Bengal slipped out of the Pala Empire and possibly became an independent kingdom—first under the Chandras and then under the Varmans. Apart from the intermittent military forays by the Kalachuris, there was also an invasion by the king of Orissa named Mahasivagupta Yayati around the middle of the eleventh century and one by Vikramaditya, the Chalukya king from Karnataka (c. 1068). A new

power, Varmans, occupied parts of eastern Bengal. According to the copper plate of Ratnapal, Kamrup had also defied Pala sovereignty.

There were several shadowy figures until Mahipala II ascended the throne (c. 1072) and brought about yet another short-lived phase of military glory. Fortunately, we have a fairly detailed contemporary account of Bengal's history during the next half-century (1070–1120) in the form of *Ramcharita*, a Sanskrit poetic work written by Sandhyakar Nandi, the court poet of the next Pala ruler Rampal. It is a unique work, which both describes the life of Rampal and pretends to tell the story of Rama, the hero of the epic *Ramayana*. Although it is a eulogy of Rampal it is of considerable historical value. Mahipal II was an oppressive ruler and threw his brothers Rampal and Surpal into prison, accusing them of plotting to seize the kingdom. The common people were also oppressed under his tyrannical rule.

There was very soon a well-organized rebellion by a confederation of lower castes led by Divya, an official of the Kaibarta (fisherman) caste. Divya defeated and killed Mahipal, and occupied Varendra or north Bengal. There followed about half a century of rule of Varendra region by the Kaibarta chiefs, Divya, Rudak and Bhim, in succession. Divya's rule over Varendra was stable and in some ways distinguished despite Sandhyakar Nandi's uncomplimentary adjectives about him such as a brigand (*dasyu*), evildoer and a hypocrite. In many respects the Kaibarta rebellion is comparable to the well-known struggle of orders between patricians and plebeians in early Roman history. From *Ramcharita* and other scattered documentary references, what can be concluded with reasonable accuracy is that around the time Mahipal II was defeated by the confederation of lower castes, his two brothers Surpal and Rampal fled from prison with the help of their friends and proceeded to the eastern part of Bengal where they ruled one after another.

All this time the major part of the Pala kingdom, including Varendra's capital city, was under the occupation of Divya and his two successors. A running battle must have gone on during the time between the Kaibartas and the two Pala princes. Eventually Rampal, who succeeded Surpal, could

organize a confederacy of powerful chiefs by lavish offer of land and wealth and led the confederate army against the usurpers. The most important of Rampal's allies was his maternal uncle, the Rashtrakuta chief, Mahana. Initially a reconnaissance force, led by Mahana's son Shivaraja, crossed the Padma and established a foothold in Varendra. Thereafter the main force crossed the river by means of a flotilla of boats to the northern bank. The great battle that took place is described in nine verses of the *Ramcharita*. Both Bhim and Rampal personally fought in this battle. The *Ramcharita* showers praise on Bhim's bravery. But by a cruel turn of destiny, Bhim was captured. This settled the fate of the battle, as Bhim's soldiers, when they did not see their leader, fled despite a determined rearguard action by Bhim's general, Hari. Eventually, Hari was also won over, and this led to Rampal's overwhelming victory. Bhim was killed in public by means of a shower of arrows as if to make an example of the retribution that can befall lower-caste people if they defy the upper castes.

Rampal must have been quite advanced in age when he reoccupied his dearly beloved land of Varendra. He devoted himself to the task of restoration of peace and order. His great achievements were reducing taxes, promoting agriculture, constructing great works of public utility and reintroducing regular administration. He established his capital at Ramavati, which could either have been a new city or a new name given to the old capital city. According to *Ramcharita*, this was a beautiful and splendid capital of the Palas till their end. Rampal gave the day-to-day charge of the government to his son. He also expanded his possessions by conquering Kamrup, Rar and Kalinga. *Ramcharita* states that Rampal ruled up to Kalinga by destroying the *nishachars*, or nocturnal operators, which could have meant bandits. It also describes him as defending Varendra from attacks made by soldiers of what is now known as Karnataka. This perhaps refers to an early unsuccessful attempt made by the Chalukyas of Karnataka to conquer Bengal. This could have also been the beginning of the process which eventually led to the replacement of the Pala dynasty by the Sen dynasty of Karnataka origin. There is also some documentary evidence that Rampal came into conflict with Gahadwal dynasty of Kanauj.

According to *Ramcharita*, Rampal was struck with overwhelming sorrow when he heard of the death of his maternal uncle Mahana and ended his own life by throwing himself in the Ganga at Monghyr. Thus ended the great career of the hero of Sandhyakar Nandi's modern 'Ramayana'. It was a life of great achievement and also great reverses. The reverses in fortunes in the earlier part of his life were followed by remarkable recovery in the later part, leading to the reunification of nearly all the parts of Bengal—though for a brief period—and also several conquests outside.

THE FALL OF PALA EMPIRE

The reign of Rampal was the last great episode in the history of the Palas, almost the last flickering of the lamp before it finally got extinguished.

Ramcharita describes the exploits of Rampal's son Gopal III and then of Madanpal. The period of these rulers, AD 1130–61, saw the extinction of the Pala kingdom through invasions from outside and revolts from within.

Kamrup and south Bengal came to be ruled by new rulers and an independent dynasty, Barman, is seen ruling East Bengal from Bikrampur.

Taking advantage of the kingdom's weakness, the Eastern Ganges from Orissa, the Chalukyas from the south and Gahadwals from the west pushed their conquests into Bengal, of which there are enough inscriptional evidences. There is also evidence to indicate that a new power, namely, the Sens, were in the process of establishing their possession in south Bengal by taking advantage of the chronic rivalry between the Palas and Eastern Ganges. In Deopara inscriptions, Vijayasen, founder of Sen dynasty, claims that he drove away the lord of Gaur, possibly Madanpal, at about the same time. According to an inscription, Madanpal was still exercising his authority over north Bengal during the eighth year of his reign and over Monghyr district in Bihar in the fourteenth. But after him there is no trace of any other king of the imperial Pala dynasty. There are stray references to local chieftains, e.g. Govindapal in Gaya region in Bihar, a contemporary of Madanpal, but there is no evidence of any ruler claiming to belong to the

imperial Palas. It may, therefore, be safe to assume that the Pala Empire evaporated around AD 1160 leaving the stage for the Sen dynasty.²

The Sen Dynasty

The Sen dynasty, as clearly explained in the Deopara inscriptions and supported by other relevant archaeological evidence, came from the south. Two of its early chieftains, viz., Samanta Sen and his successor Hemanta Sen, described themselves as Kshatriyas from Karnataka. Either they came as mercenaries under the Palas and then established themselves as local chieftains in western Bengal, or they might have been part of the army of an invader from the south who stayed on. Vijayasen (c. 1095–1158) was a contemporary of Rampal and established his hold in Radha (Rar) area, i.e., West Bengal. His marriage with a princess of the Sura family must have enhanced his power to a large extent, as borne out by the combined evidence of the Deopara inscription ‘Prasasti’, composed by his court poet Umapatidhar, and the Barrackpore copper plate which describes him as Maharajadhiraja. It seems certain that he defeated a number of chieftains like Nanya, Veera, Raghav, Vardhan and, eventually, the sovereigns of Gaur, Kamrup and Kalinga. Nanya was the Karnataka chieftain who conquered Mithila around AD 1097 and thereafter submitted to Vijayasen.

The lord of Gaur, who according to the Deopara inscription fled before Vijaya, was probably Madanpal I, the last ruler of the Pala dynasty—by that time confined only to parts of north Bengal. Vijayasen could not complete the process of conquest of Gaur and left it to his son and successor Ballalsen to complete this task and assume the title Gaureshwara. But there is evidence that some pretenders to the Pala throne continued to linger on in south Bihar. That Vijayasen eventually established his rule in East Bengal is proved by the fact that some of his land grants were issued from Bikrampur, the capital city of Banga, and it was here that the queen of Vijayasen performed a sacrifice called *tulapurusha mahadana*. The Deopara

inscription also speaks of Vijayasen's military success against the king of Kamrup, although it does not necessarily show that he conquered Kamrup. Probably he repulsed an invasion of Bengal by the Kamrup king. The inscription also claims Vijayasen's conquest of Kalinga, although some historians have doubted this. The Deopara inscription also speaks of the advance of Vijayasen's fleet to the west along the Ganga, although this could not have been a campaign of much consequence. Vijayasen's long rule of nearly sixty years restored peace and prosperity to Bengal and made a deep impression among its people. The tributes paid to him in the beautiful poem of Umapatidhar in Deopara stone slab and the reference to him in poet Sriharsha's *Vijay Prasasti* (Eulogy of Vijay) no doubt reflected the common people's feelings in relation to him.

His son and successor, Ballalsen, the best known Sen ruler (AD 1158–79) consolidated his kingdom. He might have completed the conquest of north Bengal and also conquered Magadha and Mithila. According to a tradition of Bengal, Ballalsen's kingdom consisted of five provinces, viz. Banga, Varendra, Rar, Bagri (possibly a portion of lower Bengal) and Mithila. But neither the two inscriptions that survive from this region, nor the two great literary works, which were attributed to him, viz., *Dan Sagar* and *Adbhut Sagar*, allude to his military victories. On the other hand, these refer to his scholastic activities and social reforms. Ballalsen is associated with the revival of orthodox Hindu practices in Bengal, in particular with the establishment of the reactionary and pernicious tradition of Kulinism, but there is no historical authenticity regarding this. He married Ramadevi, a Chalukya princess. This also indicates that the Sens maintained close social contact with south India.

Ballalsen must have maintained the kingdom inherited from his father, which included present-day Bangladesh, the whole of West Bengal and Mithila, i.e., portions of north Bihar. According to a cryptic passage in *Adbhut Sagar*, Ballalsen, along with his queen, retired in his old age to the confluence of the Ganga and the Jamuna leaving his son, Lakshmansan, with the task of both maintaining his kingdom and completing his literary work. The book certainly remained incomplete, but there is no historical

evidence that Ballalsen abdicated in favour of his son Lakshmansen. It is reasonably certain, however, that his rule ended around AD 1170. Whether he died at that time or abdicated and spent his last days in retirement is not known.

There is considerable weight of historical evidence to suggest that during the rule of the Sen dynasty there was a relapse into Brahmanical orthodoxy. According to Nihar Ranjan Ray, north Indian Aryan Brahmanism, which for centuries had not found an easy entry into Bengal, now got an 'open door' during the Sen dynasty.¹ The Sen dynasty came from outside Bengal and in a short time was able to establish its power with assistance from the Brahmans. Under the social system created by Ballalsen, the Brahmans became all in all in the land—arbiters of both life and the life after death. The system openly discriminated against all non-Brahmans in general and the lower castes in particular, condemning them to live as second-class citizens. The 'Kulin' system was created as a highly privileged category even among upper-caste Hindus. Due to a marriage alliance with the Sen dynasty, the authority of the kings and the Brahmans was strengthened in Bengal. It was from the Sen period that greater Bengal became a narrower Bengal. Exchanges with the outside world stopped. Travelling across the seas was forbidden, and Bengal was turned into a frog in the well. Intensive quarrels, fear of going out of the frontiers of Bengal and the strong desire to enjoy the comforts of a stay-at-home life, forgetting the world outside, were the reasons for the national degeneration. 'Who could have foreseen that the gentle breeze of enjoyment at home for the sake of which we had become inert would eventually turn into a tornado making us in our own land beggars and dependent on others.'²

Lakshmansen (AD 1178–1207), son of Ballalsen and Ramadevi, must have been fairly old, about sixty years, when he succeeded his father. Seven copper-plate inscriptions have been found in different parts of Bengal, five of them issued early in his reign from Bikrampur. This shows that Bikrampur was the centre of his empire in his early days. These inscriptions show him as a great military leader as also a patron of learning. On his

accession he assumed the title of 'Ariraja-Madana-Sankara'. Along with the traditional title of Gaureshwara, he also assumed the title Paramvaishnava in place of the earlier epithet of Parameshwara used by both Vijayasen and Ballalsen. This indicates that Lakshmansen was a devout Vaishnava, unlike his father and grandfather, who were proclaimed Shaivas. This is also supported by the fact that all the official proclamations from then on started with an invocation to Narayana. Lakshmansen's court was adorned with Jaidev (the famous poet of Bengal), Dhoyi and Umapatidhar, among other distinguished poets. His prime minister, Halayudha, was himself a great poet. The king himself was a man of letters and completed the work *Adbhut Sagar* begun by his father according to tradition.

Thus the military glory of the Sen dynasty reached its climax under Lakshmansen, in a way the last flicker before its inglorious end. According to his own copper plates, he achieved victories over the neighbouring kings in all directions. In particular, his victories over the kings of Gaur, Kamrup, Kalinga and Kashi are mentioned. He is reported to have erected pillars commemorating his military activities at Puri, Benares and Allahabad. It is also quite certain that he liquidated the army of the Pala ruler in the west and carried on his campaign successfully against the Gahadwals who had established themselves in Magadha. He was the first Bengal ruler to extend his suzerainty beyond Benares. Some inscriptions found in Gaya shortly after his reign attest to his rule in Gaya region. But his rule also marked the beginning of the end of the Sen era.

Contemporary sources provide enough evidence to indicate that the disintegration of the Sen kingdom began in the latter part of Lakshmansen's reign, both through centrifugal forces within and through the invasion by Central Asian invaders of Turkish origin and of Islamic faith. There is inscriptional evidence of an independent kingdom being established in the western Sunderbans in south Bengal by one Damanpal around AD 1196. Both Orissa and Kamrup perhaps also threw away the Sen suzerainty. Another challenge came from the rise of the kingdom of Pattikera in Tippera region under Ranabankamalla Harikaladeva who ascended the throne around 1201–03 and ruled till at least 1217. This is known from an

inscription discovered at Mainamati Hills near Comilla. It also appears that another powerful kingdom under the Deva family rose in the territory beyond the Meghna River.

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PALA–SEN ERA

The archaeology of the Pala–Sen period in Bengal has been of great interest to archaeologists and historians since the 1830s. The process of deciphering the inscriptions began with Wilkins who first read inscriptions from Bengal and Bihar belonging to the Pala period. The study of inscriptions went hand in hand with the study of coins and the study of Buddhist literary sources for the dynastic history of the Buddhist period within its chronology. The archaeologists studying the early medieval period of Bengal's history have also highlighted the transition from the Buddhist motifs in the Pala period to orthodox Hindu motifs during the rule of the Sens. Simultaneously, there has been a return of classical Sanskrit in contrast to Pali–Prakrit during the Pala dynasty. The most important aspects of material culture were sculptural pieces, which were found in large number in the region. Sculptures were analysed in modern times by Broadley, Beglar, Kittoe and Cunningham in the course of their surveys but the first real discussion of Pala–Sen sculptures was found in the catalogues by John Anderson and by T. Bloch.³

Certain works attempt to deal with these sculptures as a continuous development and relate them to the reigns of the Pala–Sen kings. Sculptures form the most major evidence of Pala–Sen or 'early medieval' material culture today. Other aspects of material culture were also looked into as part of region-wise surveys carried out by British officers. Buddhism's major value for British scholars of the nineteenth century was an antithesis to the 'degenerate' Brahmanical religion they had come across in both India's past and present. Cunningham brought home the 'greater' benefits involved in his project of searching out the Buddhist ruins of India.

The first person to deal in-depth with material remains was Francis Buchanan. He described the Paharpur remains as that of a temple and 'its

great steepness and height induce me to suppose that it had been solid, like many of the temples of Buddha in Ava and Nepal'. He also visited

Mahasthangarh and surmised that these were Buddhist remains.⁴

Westmacott explored parts of south-eastern Dinajpur and the neighbouring parts of Bogra and found remains of Buddhism and the Buddhist Pala kings.

He described Paharpur as a tall brick mound, which was once a Buddhist stupa. Beveridge travelling in Bogra found nothing Buddhist in Mahasthan.

Cunningham, tracing the routes of Hiuen-Tsang, undertook tours of north Bengal in order to look for the site of the ancient capital called Pundravardhana. He identified it as Mahasthan on the basis of the distance and bearing from the neighbourhood of Rajmahal and partly on the basis of the immediate vicinity of Bhasu Bihara which corresponds exactly with Hiuen-Tsang's account of the Buddhist monastery of Po-shi-po, west of the capital. He was fortunate enough to discover the ancient site of Mahasthan on the Karatoya River.

Considerable work was carried out by the Varendra Research Society in order to bring to light the rich heritage of Varendra. Paharpur was excavated by the society along with the University of Calcutta. The monuments, writes A.K. Maitra, belong to two principal classes — *architectural* and *iconographic* — both of which fall under the general head: devotional. 'In an age in which freedom of faith and observance used to be kept under cruel control, religious toleration appears to have been a noteworthy characteristic of this land.'⁵ Maitra's efforts in reconstructing to some extent the material culture of the people of Varendra was followed by Nihar Ranjan Ray's monumental work, *Bangalir Itihas* (History of the Bengalee People), where there was an effort to 'excite a degree of hope in their lives. It can offer some direction for the future, if it can arouse love and reverence for the land and its people'.⁶

S.K. Saraswati and H.E. Stapleton toured the areas in Malda and Dinajpur districts and discovered many 'sites' and sculptured pieces of the 'early medieval' period. Stapleton writes that the main objects of the tour were to make inquiries about Ekadala and the battle between Sikandar Shah

and his son amongst other aspects. The emphasis was on remains of the sultanate and subsequent dynasties. Saraswati on the other hand was more interested to show the Hindu antecedents of Muslim monuments. He remarked how an examination of the stones used in the construction of the Adina mosque shows that most of them came from temples. 'A study of every Muslim settlement of some antiquity reveals the story how they all sprang up on earlier sites. The ancient town of Devikot was levelled to the ground in the early days of the Muslim rule. Such was also the story of Gaur, of Mahasthan and practically of every Muhammadan establishment, which we so frequently find perched on ancient mounds.'⁷

Of special significance is B. Morrison's work on settlements in Mainamati near Comilla in Bangladesh. It concentrates on a holistic approach to a site in general. The excavations of Jagjivanpur and several other cities in Habibpur in Malda district in West Bengal are also of significance. The site of Jagjivanpur is a single-culture site dating from the ninth century AD belonging to the early medieval period where excavations have been undertaken. All this archaeological evidence points to a rich ancient archaeological heritage from the Stone Age to recorded history.

TURKISH INVASION

The biggest challenge to the Sen rule came from an invasion by Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji, a Turkish adventurer in AD 1202. His invasion is described in *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* written by Minhaj-i-Siraj. Before we come to this event, a little digression is necessary. After the rise of Islam in Arabia in the seventh century AD there was a prolonged occupation of Sind by the Arabs under the Abbasid Caliphate for several centuries from the eighth century onwards. But this was more an episode in this subcontinent's history than a development that had a continuity in the mainstream. It was not the Abbasid Caliphate, but the Turkish dynasties of trans-Oxian Central Asia, that were destined to bring the standard of Islam to the heartland of the Indian subcontinent. One of these dynasties was the Yemeni dynasty, which arose in Ghazni in the tenth century. Under its two rulers, Subuktgin

and Mahmud, it carried on a relentless war against the Shahi kingdom of Udbhandpur (Und), which ruled over western Punjab and the north-western frontier up to the Hindu Kush mountains. The Ghaznavid campaign against the Shahi rulers Jaipal and Anandapal was inspired by both a fiery zeal to spread Islam and a strong temptation to plunder the untold wealth of Hindustan. Sultan Mahmud (AD 998–1030) led a large number of expeditions, at least seventeen, to north India, including places as far as Kashmir, Kangra, Mathura, Kanauj and Somnath, destroyed the power of the Hindu rulers of these regions over time and carried away immense riches to his native Ghazni. The Ghaznavid invasion and occupation of Punjab and Afghanistan was followed a century later by another invasion, once more by a Turkish power, the Ghurids from Ghur in Afghanistan. The Ghurid general Shihabuddin Mohammad invaded India several times. He had an unsuccessful encounter with Prithviraj, the Chauhan ruler of Delhi, around AD 1190–91. He was, in fact, defeated and captured by Prithviraj, but released and allowed to return to his homeland. In 1192 Mohammad returned to India and defeated and killed Prithviraj Chauhan at the well-known battle of Tarain. This led to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate a few years later under Mohammad Ghauri's general, Qutbud-din Aibak (AD 1206). It was Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji, one of Aibak's associates and a reckless adventurer, who was responsible for bringing Islam and Turkish rule to Bengal.

Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji, traditionally held as conqueror of Bengal but described by contemporary sources as conqueror of the kingdom of Lakhnaoti, belonged to a Turkman tribe called Khilji, which migrated from the Oxus region to Afghanistan in the twelfth century. He, like many other adventurers, moved eastward to the fabled Hindustan in quest of fortune. All of them aspired towards carving out kingdoms in Hindustan, taking advantage of the political disunity and vulnerability of the numerous Hindu princes in the face of better horsemanship, better training in swords and guns and better speed and military techniques of the Central Asian tribes. The invaders were strongly motivated by the Islamic fervour to spread the new religion. Indeed, Bengal, along with the whole of north India, had

become, in the twelfth century, a playground for the Turkish–Afghan adventurers. Bakhtiar, who was physically deformed, first came to Ghazni around AD 1195, moved to Delhi shortly thereafter, seeking fortune unsuccessfully everywhere. He moved further east and landed on a soldier's job under Hassan Adib of Badayun in AD 1198 and thereafter took charge of a small *jagir* in Mirzapur district under the governor of Oudh (Ayodhya). Soon he gathered around himself a sizeable body of Khilji and Turkish adventurers, wandering around north India in search of wealth and fortune, and began regular forays into the open country to the east of Karamnasha River, not defended by the army of any large kingdom. The object was to seize as much booty as possible at a minimum of risk and bloodshed. After one or two years of plundering, he was involved in the melodramatic incident of capturing the so-called fortress of Bihar (which was in reality a Buddhist monastery, possibly the famous monastery of Odantapura). It was only after storming the massive structure of the vihara and killing the 'shaven soldiers' that the invaders discovered that they were not soldiers but monks living in a monastery. It is to this fortuitous event that the Indian state of Bihar (Vihara) owes its name, as the Turkish conquerors started referring to this whole country as Bihar. After occupation of Bihar and consolidation for a year through establishing thanas or military camps, Bakhtiar's attention inevitably turned to fabled Bengal. Meanwhile, he also visited Aibak, the sultan of Delhi, and paid homage.

It was in the year 1201 that Bakhtiar made his famous and well-described raid into the heart of Bengal, then ruled by the aged Lakshmansen. He led a cavalry not through the usual route of Rajmahal, but through the hills and jungles of Jharkhand and made a sudden appearance before Nadia or Nabadwip where Lakshmansen was camping at that time. Presumably, this was already a well-known place of pilgrimage where orthodox people used to go for bathing in the sacred Ganga. According to Minhaj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, many of the residents of Nadia panicked at the news of the sudden appearance of Bakhtiar's horsemen and left the city. The vanguard of eighteen horsemen entered into the town without any resistance. Perhaps some of the local people even mistook them as horse dealers from Central

Asia. They suddenly attacked the rulers and residents, causing panic and all-round confusion. Lakshmansen was taking his midday lunch when 'a loud cry rose from the gate of the palace and from the interior of the town'. This shows that the main body of the Turkish troops had followed the reconnaissance party into the town almost immediately. The aged Lakshmansen, taken by surprise, fled the palace by boat together with his retinue, leaving the town in the possession of the daredevil invaders. He withdrew to riverine East Bengal which was beyond the reach of the Turks. Thus Bakhtiar's men had a walkover as far as Nabadwip was concerned. This is the famous event described traditionally as Bakhtiar's conquest of Bengal with only eighteen horsemen. The process of actual conquest of Bengal took many more years. For the present, Bakhtiar had only occupied a holy place on the river Bhagirathi where religious-minded people often stayed in order to have regular dips in the holy river. Nabadwip was not the capital of Bengal, nor close to the capital Gaur, also called Lakhnaoti; but Bakhtiar must have followed up the conquest of Nadia by occupying the central part of Bengal around Lakhnaoti.

Lakshmansen continued to rule in East Bengal for several years after AD 1201. Several land grants issued by him from East Bengal (e.g. Bhawal Pargana grant, AD 1205) clearly attest to this. There is also a laudatory reference to Lakshmansen's victory against the *mlechchha* king and also to the victory of his sons over Yavanas. Even the author of *Tabaqat* uses a very complimentary term in relation to him and describes him as the great Rai of Bengal comparable to Sultan Qutb-ud-din of Delhi. Lakshmansen died around AD 1206. His two sons, Bishwarup Sen and Keshav Sen, ruled in succession in East Bengal with the usual imperial titles. Thereafter, there is no reference to them, although, in general, eastern Bengal stayed outside Delhi's rule for nearly half a century, even up to the time of Balban.

According to Minhaj, Ghiyas-ud-din Iwaz, the sultan of Lakhnaoti, made an abortive attempt in 1226 to conquer Banga. Perhaps this invasion was foiled by Bishwarup Sen. Keshav Sen also claimed victory in his inscription, over invaders from the west, possibly Malik Saifuddin (AD 1231–33) of Gaur, who sent an expedition to Banga which brought some elephants, according

to Minhaj. Minhaj also informs us that the Sens occupied the throne of Banga up to AD 1245.

It was the rise of the Pattikera kingdom and the Deva family, beyond the Meghna River, which perhaps brought about the final end of the Sen dynasty around AD 1250. The memories of the mysterious Pattikera kingdom are generally lost except in the ruins of its capital city at Mainamati Hills near Comilla. The Burmese chronicles from the time of King Anarotha of Burma (AD 1044–77) speak of the close and friendly relations between Burma and her western neighbour, Pattikera; there is a reference to the city of Pattikera in a Nepalese manuscript of AD 1015, and the name of a *pargana* called Pattikera near Mainamati Hills. We know the name of only one king of this dynasty from an inscription in Mainamati Hills. He must have ruled between AD 1202 and 1219.

The Deva dynasty that followed, and possibly gave the final coup de grâce to the Sen dynasty, consisted of Purushottam, who rose from the position of a village headman (*gramani*) and his son, Madhusudan, who took the title of king (*nripati*). They were followed by Vasudev and Damodar, who might have destroyed the Pattikera rule, and Danuja Madhav Dasaratha Deva, who claimed to have wrested Gaur through the grace of god Narayana and who issued an inscription from Bikrampur. Danuja Madhav entered into a treaty with Balban, the sultan of Delhi, in AD 1293, on equal terms. The meeting between Balban and Danuj Rai at Sonargaon is vividly described in *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi*.

EARLY MEDIEVAL BENGAL

Turkish Invasion

The Kingdom of Gaur under Early Turkish Rulers

After his daring conquest of Nadia, Bakhtiar Khilji had a very short life. He occupied Gaur or Lakhnaoti, the western capital of the Sen dynasty. He spent the next two years consolidating his new kingdom and divided it into several administrative units, each in charge of a Turk or Khilji commander.

He built many mosques and madrasas and converted many Hindus to Islam. But he suddenly developed a quixotic vision of conquering distant and mysterious Tibet. He marched along the Brahmaputra River guided by one Ali, a Mech tribal leader, who had presumably been converted to Islam. He marched up to the sub-Himalayan hills where there was a stone bridge with twelve arches across the river, perhaps the present Teesta River. He also got in touch with the king of Kamrup (Assam), requesting him to join in a combined invasion of Tibet. Kamrup king asked him to wait till the next year when he could also join this campaign. But Bakhtiar Khilji was impatient. He crossed the bridge and started a march along the Teesta Valley to Sikkim.

After marching for fifteen days Bakhtiar reached Tibet, possibly the Chumbi Valley. He started looting Tibetan villages. There was an uprising among the Tibetans who inflicted heavy casualties on Bakhtiar's forces. Bakhtiar then decided to withdraw to Bengal but all along the escape route, the hilly forces carried on a relentless guerrilla-style attack on the Turkish army. The raids turned into a rout and Bakhtiar's soldiers were forced to kill

their own horses for food. After reaching the stone bridge at the foothills, he found that the Kamrup forces had destroyed a number of arches in the bridge. It was difficult to cross the river and Bakhtiar took shelter in a nearby temple where they were surrounded by the Assamese. Bakhtiar then made a desperate bid to cross the bridge with his men and horses at a point where the river, from the looks of it was shallow but was actually very deep. The Turkish army lost many men and also their horses. With only about a hundred men left, Bakhtiar reached the other side of the river where his old friend Ali met him and guided him back to Devkot. By now Bakhtiar's authority was challenged by many of his followers and in a few days he was assassinated. Ali Mardan's 'merciful knife' ended a short but eventful life.

After Bakhtiar, there followed several successive shadowy chieftains, all of them his associates, in charge of the kingdom of Lakhnaoti: Malik Izad-ud-din Muhammad Shiran Khilji (AD 1207–08), Ali Mardan (AD 1210–13) and Ghiyas-ud-din Iwaz Khilji (AD 1213–27). There was at first a struggle for succession between the first two, the latter receiving sanction from the Delhi sultan, Qutb-ud-din Aibak, and eventually seizing the kingdom. Ali Mardan remained faithful to Aibak, but declared independence after Aibak's death. His oppressive rule antagonized a large section of the people and he was eventually murdered by the Khilji amirs who elected Iwaz as sultan. Iwaz assumed the name of Ghiyas-ud-din and shifted the capital back to Lakhnaoti from Devkot, which during the preceding years had become the main centre of authority. During his fifteen-year rule Ghiyas-ud-din beat back all invasions from Orissa, constructed many mosques all over the kingdom and built a road from Devkot to Rajnagar in Birbhum district whose traces survived till recently. He also secured a formal recognition from the caliph of Baghdad and unsuccessfully challenged the claim of sovereignty of Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi. There was a prolonged conflict (AD 1225–27) between Delhi and Bengal in the course of which naval battles took place on the Ganga. There was a temporary truce when Lakhnaoti accepted Delhi's suzerainty only to repudiate it in a short time.

Eventually, Ghiyas-ud-din was captured and killed by Delhi forces in AD 1227.

Then followed half a century of direct rule from the Delhi Sultanate (AD 1227–83) by the Delhi governors. There were altogether fourteen governors, starting with Nasir-ud-din Mahmud whom Sultan Iltutmish appointed as governor of Lakhnaoti. The two most important were Tughral Tughan Khan (AD 1236–46) and Ikhtiyar-ud-din Yuzabak Tughral Khan (AD 1251–57).¹ During Tughan Khan's rule, Narsimha Dev, the Ganga king of Orissa invaded Lakhnaoti twice, inflicting military reverses on Tughan. During the second invasion, the governor of Oudh, Taznar Khan, came to the assistance of Tughan at the behest of the Delhi sultan. The king of Orissa lifted the siege of Lakhnaoti, presumably because he felt outnumbered, and returned home. A curious episode of a quarrel took place between Tughan and Taznar after which the Delhi sultan interchanged the two governors—Taznar staying as governor of Lakhnaoti and Tughan moving as governor of Oudh. An interesting sidelight of Tughan's rule was that Minhaj-i-Siraj, the author of *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* came to Bengal, stayed in Tughan's court for three to four years and played an important role as Tughan's emissary in many political and military events. His history book is a remarkable record of what he saw and heard about Bengal, including the immediate history of this land.

Yuzabak also faced three military encounters with Orissa, the first two successful from his point of view but the last one ending in a military disaster. He retrieved the situation somewhat by occupying the kingdom of Mandaran (Hooghly district), a feudatory of Orissa, and thereafter Nadia and large part of West Bengal that had apparently passed out of Lakhnaoti's rule. This emboldened him to attack Oudh and proclaim himself as a sovereign with the title Sultan Mughis-ud-din in defiance of Delhi. He issued coins in his name to mark this occasion (AD 1255), but very soon he was compelled to withdraw from Oudh. His end was disastrous. He led a successful campaign into Kamrup, occupying the capital Gauhati. But the Kamrup king followed a scorched-earth policy, removing food grains from the countryside and thereafter flooding the whole country by cutting the

river dykes and blocking all sources of supply of food grains. The Bengal army decided to withdraw to Bengal through the mountainous route, either the Khasi and Jaintia Hills or the Dooars, but was overpowered by the Assamese. Yuzabak was captured and died in captivity. After him, Lakhnaoti reverted to Delhi sovereignty and coins once again bore the name of the Delhi sultan. There were several obscure figures in charge of Lakhnaoti until Sultan Balban of Delhi appointed Amir Khan and Tughral Khan as governor and deputy governor respectively (AD 1271).

The former was only a titular ruler and the real power revolved around Tughral. Tughral turned to what had by then become the tradition of Bengal governors turning rebellious, taking advantage of Bengal's remoteness, its huge rivers, the forbidding monsoon months and the facility with which Bengal forces resorted to naval action with which the Turks from upper India were not familiar. The Delhi sultan's continued preoccupation with the Mongol invaders from the northwest also encouraged him. Tughral earned popularity in Bengal and secured resources by raiding neighbouring kingdoms. Presumably he was the 'Turkish King of Gaur' who, according to the *Rajmala*, the chronicle of the kingdom of Tripura, intervened in the fight between the two brothers Raja-Fa and Ratna-Fa, drove away the former and gave the latter the title of 'Manikya' or jewel, receiving in his turn a lot of jewels from the Tripura king. He also invaded Rar (West Bengal) and Orissa and got huge booty. By AD 1280 he felt bold enough, according to Barani (*Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*), to withhold the Delhi sovereign's share of the booty captured in his latest raid and to declare himself sovereign ruler with the title Sultan Mughis-ud-din. He easily defeated the forces sent by Balban under the leadership of Amir Khan. Hindu soldiers also fought on his side in large number. Two other expeditions from Delhi also suffered reverses in encounters with Tughral.

But these reverses, instead of demoralizing the octogenarian Balban, only strengthened his resolve to redouble his efforts and crush Tughral's rebellion. He himself led an invasion, occupied Lakhnaoti and pushed Tughral up to eastern Bengal. He entered into a formal treaty with King Danuja Madhav of Sonargaon who agreed to block Tughral's passage to

Orissa through the waterways of his kingdom. Barani's description of the waterways would seem to indicate that Danuja not only ruled East Bengal, but also central Bengal through which alone there could be waterways leading from Sonargaon to Orissa. The interesting thing to note is that this treaty had all the formality of a treaty between two sovereign equals. Sultan Balban even agreed to King Danuja's request to stand up and receive him on his arrival for signing the treaty. After thus closing all Tughral's riverine escape routes, Balban sent a number of search parties in all directions. One such contingent traced Tughral, overpowered his forces and beheaded him. Balban returned to Lakhnaoti and ordered to kill all those who had supported Tughral by mass execution along the main bazaar. He appointed his second son Boghra Khan as governor of the province and returned to Delhi only to suffer a personal tragedy, viz., the killing of his eldest son Muhammad in an encounter with the Mongols in AD 1286. He died broken-hearted in AD 1287. He summoned Boghra Khan to his deathbed and requested him to assume royal responsibility. But an unusual event took place, unique in all history. Boghra, enamoured of the life in Bengal, refused to be the king of Delhi and preferred to remain the governor of the province.

Balban named Kaikhusrav, son of Muhammad, as the next king. Very soon Kaikhusrav was removed by court intrigues and Boghra's own son Kaikobad became king. Kaikobad, like his father, surrendered himself to a life of luxury. These reports reached Boghra, who had by then proclaimed himself independent with the title Sultan Nasir-ud-din. 'The family shirker at last rose to a sense of paternal responsibility,' to quote Barani, and decided to march to Delhi with his forces to discipline his son. For a time it almost looked as if the two armies were on a collision course. Eventually, a meeting was arranged on the borders of Oudh at the bank of the Gogra River, vividly described by Amir Khusro, the poet. As the sultan of Bengal, after crossing the river, entered the court making submissions to the Delhi sultan who was seated on the throne, the young sultan was overcome with emotion, came down from his throne and rushed to his father. Father and son embraced each other with the whole crowd rejoicing at this

reconciliation. They spent three days together and Boghra Khan left for Bengal, giving his son as much advice as he was capable of. But nothing much came out of this meeting.

Kaikobad's rule ended in 1289 and his three-year-old son Kaimurs became the new king, virtually a puppet in the hands of the Turkish nobles of the Delhi court. Then followed the occupation of the throne by the non-Turkish nobles led by Jalal-ud-din Khilji. Boghra still ruled for a while in Bengal with the title Sultan Nasir-ud-din, but with the end of the Balban dynasty in Delhi, he was a broken-hearted man and, in AD 1291, he abdicated in favour of his second son Rukhn-ud-din Kaikavas. Kaikavas, according to coins struck in his name, ruled Bengal from AD 1291 to 1301. During his reign, one Zafar Khan, calling himself in stone inscriptions an 'officer of Sultan Kaikavas', conquered Tribeni in Hooghly district of West Bengal.²

For several years the spotlight shifts from the royal court of Lakhnaoti to Zafar Khan, described in a stone inscription as 'raja and friend of the emperors'. He conquered not only Tribeni, but the famed Satgaon, the western capital of Bengal. His tomb still exists in Tribeni. At some point of time there was a change on the throne of Lakhnaoti, Rukhn-ud-din Kaikavas being replaced by one Shams-ud-din Firuz Shah (1301–22), about whom little is known. He might have been a governor of Bihar who seized the throne of Lakhnaoti after Kaikavas's death and ruled over a vast kingdom that included Satgaon, Sonargaon and Mymensingh. Sylhet was also conquered during his reign by an army led by Sikandar Khan accompanied by the legendary faqir, Shah Jalal, who some have (perhaps wrongly) identified as the well-known dervish Sheikh Jalalud-din Tabrizi (1297–1347).³ According to local legend, Shah Jalal attacked and defeated King Govindadev of Sylhet on account of his oppression of the Muslim subjects and his objection to cow slaughter. Shams-ud-din Firuz also appears to have occupied Kamrup. Although Sonargaon was his main capital, the coins of the Bengal sultans from mid-fourteenth century refer to Pandua (named Firuzabad) in Malda district as the capital.

On Firuz's death there were battles for succession between his two sons, Bughra Shah and Bahadur Shah, and afterwards between the latter, now named Ghiyas-ud-din, and another brother Nasir-ud-din. Inevitably, it was tempting for the sultan of Delhi, Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq, to intervene on the side of Nasir-ud-din. He defeated and captured his rebellious chieftains, occupied Lakhnaoti and appointed Nasir-ud-din governor of Bengal. Curiously, his own foster-son, Tatar Khan, was appointed governor of Satgaon and Sonargaon. After Ghiyas-ud-din's death in an accident in AD 1325, and his succession by Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, Bengal came to be formally split up into the three provinces of Satgaon, Sonargaon and Lakhnaoti, corresponding roughly to West Bengal, East Bengal and north Bengal. For ten years, three separate governors ruled the three provinces under Muhammad Tughlaq. In 1338 Bahram Khan, governor of Sonargaon, was killed and his armour-bearer Fakhr-ud-din seized Sonargaon and declared independence with the title Fakhr-ud-din Mubarak Shah. Bengal reverted to the tradition of an independent sultanate under the new Ilyas Shahi dynasty.

Ilyas Shahi Dynasty

Fakhr-ud-din, the *silahdar* (armour-bearer) of the slain governor of Sonargaon, Bahram Khan, declared himself the independent sultan of Sonargaon and ruled from 1338 to 1349. For a while he was troubled by a combined invasion by the governors of Lakhnaoti, Satgaon and Kara; but Fakhr-ud-din was able to hold his own and also make an unsuccessful attempt to annex Lakhnaoti. East Bengal, under the rule of Fakhr-ud-din, was a prosperous kingdom and this is testified by the Moroccan traveller, Ibn Batuta, who visited Sonargaon in AD 1346. Ibn Batuta found Bengal unbelievably cheap for living. Fakhr-ud-din also conquered Chittagong and built many mosques there. He had a great weakness for faqirs whom he gave precious gifts and allowed to travel free by boat on the Meghna River. His beautiful coins have been discovered from many places. He died in 1349 and, after three years of ineffectual rule by his son, Sonargaon was conquered by a new ruler, Shams-ud-din Ilyas Shah who had also taken possession of both Satgaon and Lakhnaoti. He founded the famous Ilyas Shahi dynasty.

Shams-ud-din Ilyas Shah (AD 1312–59), whose early life is shrouded in mystery, started as an officer under Sultan Ala-ud-din of Lakhnaoti and seized the throne in 1342. He unified all the three regions of Bengal after a long time, first conquering Satgaon and thereafter Sonargaon. After achieving Bengal's political unification, he turned to the neighbouring kingdoms. He conquered Tirhut and later Bihar and made a daring raid across the Terai region to Nepal. He advanced up to the capital Kathmandu, destroyed the holy temple of Pashupatinath (AD 1350) and returned with a rich booty. However, the Nepalese claim to have beaten back the invaders from Bengal. Ilyas then turned his attention to Orissa. He advanced through

Jajpur and Cuttack as far as Chilka Lake, destroying many temples, and returned with a rich booty, including elephants. It was presumably after this that he brought East Bengal under his possession and also occupied a part of Kamrup.

All these conquests aroused the wrath of Firuz Shah Tughlaq of Delhi who had succeeded Muhammad Tughlaq in AD 1351. Firuz decided to crush this powerful kingdom in Bengal before it was too late and organized a huge invasion army equipped with boats, which he personally led in 1353. This campaign is vividly described by three contemporary historians who were Firuz Shah Tughlaq's courtiers and were naturally biased in his favour. What appears from these accounts as reasonably certain is that the Bengal ruler sent his armed boats as far as the Sarayu and the Gandak rivers to oppose the invasion army from Delhi proceeding to Bengal. The Bengal naval contingent retreated to the junction of the Ganga and the Kosi and made a determined stand. Unable to cross the rivers, Firuz made an outflanking movement marching forth along the Kosi as far as the Himalayan foothills and crossing the Kosi at a place named Jiaran where the river was very narrow, with the help of the local raja. He easily occupied Ilyas's capital Pandua near modern Ingraj (English) Bazaar. Ilyas withdrew to a river island fortress named Ekdala, which briefly shot into prominence twice in Bengal's medieval history and of which no trace remains. This was surrounded on all sides by the Chiramati and the Baliya rivers, both tributaries of the Ganga, and was almost unassailable. According to the author of *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*, who accompanied Firuz to Bengal, Ekdala was on the banks of the Ganga and was surrounded by one of the branches of the river. There is also a village called Ekdala in Dinajpur district. Clearly, it stood close to the Ganga and the Mahananda and was not far from Gaur.

Firuz Shah Tughlaq issued a proclamation addressed to the people of Bengal, both Muslims and Hindus. Ilyas was declared a rebel and a heretical Muslim. Complete security of life and property was promised to the people. He tried to lure the soldiers, including the Hindu *paiks*, to abandon Ilyas and join him, with the offer of doubling their salaries. He

promised land revenue remission to the landlords, and land grants and financial help to the Muslim dervishes, but there was not much effect. Tughlaq proceeded to besiege the Ekdala Fort described by Afif as an island, but this impregnable fort defied his assault. With the rainy season approaching, Tughlaq played a trick to bring the Bengal army out. His army pretended to withdraw and started marching in the direction of Delhi. As Ilyas's army, fooled by this feint, came out and attacked the imperial army from the rear, the latter in complete battle readiness turned back and counter-attacked in full fury, inflicting a defeat on the Bengal forces which fled in confusion and disorder towards their island fortress.

As to the sequence of events, we only have the version of Tughlaq's court historians who invariably play up the Delhi ruler's victory and the Bengal ruler's discomfiture. In the battle of Ekdala, the Bengal army consisted of many Hindu soldiers (paiks) who fought valiantly although their commander Sahadev was killed. We have no record from the Bengal side. According to court historians, Tughlaq again besieged Ekdala Fort and was about to take it by assault when, on seeing the ladies on top of the fort wailing and appealing to the emperor for mercy, he decided against annexation and returned to Delhi after ordering the collection of the heads of slain Bengalees at the price of one silver *taka* per head. All the Delhi court historians like Afif, Yahya, Nizam-ud-din and Barani describe Tughlaq's victory over Ilyas and assert that the latter paid tributes to the former every year. But the real position seems to have been different. As summed up by R.C. Majumdar, 'The exchange of presents as tokens of goodwill can obtain only between two sovereigns.' This continued till the death of Shams-ud-din Ilyas, and leaves no doubt that the ruler of Bengal was recognized by Tughlaq as an independent sovereign. It also indirectly proves that the campaign of Tughlaq in Bengal, which probably lasted from November 1353 to September 1355, was a failure despite the weak pretext of the court historians to explain the withdrawal of the sultan. After Tughlaq's withdrawal, Ilyas reoccupied his capital, Pandua, and all his lost territory.

Apart from the highly exaggerated adverse accounts of Ilyas Shah given by contemporary Delhi court historians and subsequent historians like Zia-ud-din Barani, who took the cue from the former, we have no chronicle to explain what actually happened from the point of view of Bengal. The former have variously described Ilyas as a bhang addict and a leper, and again as a tyrant and oppressor of people, both Hindus and Muslims. They lack credibility. On the other hand, the fact that Tughlaq's famous proclamation did not succeed in bringing the people of Bengal on his side appears to speak for itself. Ilyas Shah probably died during 1356–57 and was succeeded by his son, Sikandar.

Once again history was repeated when Firuz Shah Tughlaq invaded Bengal a second time in 1359 in a bid to regain that province after repudiating his own treaty with Ilyas. He accused Sikandar of violating this treaty and declared one Zafar Khan, son-in-law of Sultan Mubarak Shah of Sonargaon, as sultan of Lakhnaoti. Sikandar followed the same strategy his father had followed and, avoiding an open engagement, withdrew to the island fort of Ekdala. Tughlaq besieged Ekdala once again. As before, there were running skirmishes, but no decisive action. And yet again, Tughlaq got tired of Bengal's climate, the approaching monsoon and the mosquitoes and decided to pull his army out of Bengal after concluding a face-saving treaty with Sultan Sikandar Shah, negotiated through one of his Bengalee officials, Haibat Khan, two of whose sons were employees under the ruler of Bengal. Under this treaty, Sikandar acknowledged secession of the territory to the west of the river Kosi to Delhi while Tughlaq formally recognized Sikandar as an independent ruler and even presented him with a golden crown valued at 80,000 takas. As earlier, the Delhi sultan's court historians attributed the sultan's decision to his chivalry, but this must be taken at best as an excuse. For all practical purposes, Delhi accepted Bengal's independence and Bengal was left undisturbed for about two centuries. An interesting piece of information we get from a Sanskrit inscription from Vizianagram district in Andhra Pradesh is that King Choda II of Konamandala (Godavari Delta) helped the sultan of Bengal in vanquishing the emperor of Delhi.¹ From all accounts, Sikandar's rule was

a period of prosperity. Many architectural ruins survive from his times, the most important of them being the Adina mosque at Malda built in 1368. But his last years were marked by despicable palace intrigues involving his two wives and their children, culminating in the rebellion by his second wife's son, who defeated and killed the father.

The rebel prince now ascended the throne with the title Ghiyas-ud-din Azam Shah. Ghiyas-ud-din also carved out a prominent place in Bengal's history, both by virtue of his military adventures and by his strong sense of justice. He invaded Assam, taking advantage of the quarrel between Kamatapur and the Ahom kings. But this did not succeed, according to the Assam *buranjis* (chronicles), as the two kings made up their quarrel and beat back the Bengal invaders. He also gave shelter to the expelled king of Arakan, Meng-tsau-Mwison or Naraimekhala, and unsuccessfully tried to restore him to his throne. The fugitive Arakan king helped him through a new stratagem to repulse an invasion from Jaunpur. He sent missions to the Chinese emperor in 1405 and 1407 and exchanged presents. The Chinese emperor sent his own ambassador to take back with him Buddhist monks, of whom the most prominent was Maharatna Dharmaraja. Dharmaraja travelled to China during 1410–11, and this was a milestone in the history of cultural interaction between China and Bengal.

We also have an interesting account of Bengal and its people from Mahuan, the Chinese interpreter who came with the Chinese envoy in 1409. There is the famous story current in Bengal about Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din and the *qazi*, which illustrates the independence of judiciary and the sultan's strong sense of justice. Once during hunting, he accidentally killed the son of a widow who complained to the *qazi*. The *qazi* summoned the sultan, who appeared before the court and paid the penalty as fixed by the *qazi*. Thereafter Ghiyas-ud-din declared to the *qazi* that had he failed to discharge justice he would have been beheaded. The *qazi* quipped smilingly that if the sultan had not submitted to his verdict, he would have had him caned. Another interesting story is that the sultan sent an incomplete verse composed by himself on his three favourite mistresses to the famous

Persian poet Hafiz who completed it. This illustrates Bengal's close cultural contact with Iran.

According to *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, a chronicle written in 1788, Ghiyas-ud-din was killed by Raja Ganesh, a nobleman of his court, though there is no corroborating evidence. There were two short-lived rulers after him, Saif-ud-din Hamza and Shihab-ud-din Bayazid Shah (AD 1411–14). There is conflicting evidence about whether they were puppet rulers under the thumb of Raja Ganesh, or whether they were ruling only portions of Bengal with effective power at Gaur having passed on to Raja Ganesh. But clearly the Ilyas Shahi dynasty ended around 1410 and a new short-lived dynasty was founded by Ganesh or Kans who himself remained a Hindu, but whose son and successor became a Muslim and ruled like a Muslim sovereign.

The Short-lived Dynasty of Raja Ganesh and Other Rulers

The rise of Raja Ganesh (described as Raja Kans by contemporary Persian writers), who usurped the de facto royal authority of Gaur and established a dynasty of his own, is a unique event in the medieval history of Bengal. There are many conflicting theories about both his origin and the main events of his reign. Numismatic evidence is often at variance with both written accounts and local traditions. We can at best set out the most reasonably certain facts. Ganesh was a zamindar of north Bengal (Dinajpur or Rajshahi according to varying local traditions). He is described by a contemporary personal chronicler as the scion of an old zamindar family of 400 years' standing. He became a prominent nobleman in the court of Ghiyas-ud-din Azam Shah whom he killed, according to the *Riyaz*, a chronicle written in 1788. Although Ghiyas was succeeded as sultan successively by Saif-ud-din Hamza Shah and Shihab-ud-din Bayazid Shah, it was Raja Ganesh who was the de facto ruler of Gaur. Conflicting accounts are, however, given by the *Riyaz*, *Firishta* and *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* about the time and the exact mode of his assuming real power. According to *Firishta*, the Hindu Raja Ganesh was one prominent ruler of Gaur who 'attained great power and predominance during Shihab-ud-din's reign and became the *de facto* master of the treasury and kingdom'. On Shihab-ud-din's death he usurped the throne. *Riyaz* gives a somewhat different account. The most balanced version is given by *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* according to which, after Shihab-ud-din's death Ganesh acquired domination over Bengal for seven years, and after his death his son became a 'Muslim' with the title Sultan Jalal-ud-din. It would be reasonable to conclude from

conflicting reports that Raja Ganesh was at the head of a group of noblemen, both Hindu and Muslim, who became, for all practical purposes, the real power behind the throne. Initially he did not assume sovereign power, but placed his own son on the throne after permitting the latter's conversion to Islam in keeping with the sentiments of the majority of the court nobility. Later on, at a certain point of time, he did feel bold enough to assume supreme power, but again stepped down when faced with a strong confederacy of Muslim rulers from north India. He once again assumed sovereign power after the withdrawal of the confederates and ruled for a few years. After his death his son reverted to the tradition of a Muslim sultan. The following description given in the *Riyaz* seems to be an authentic account.

Raja Ganesh subjugated the whole kingdom of Bengal. He oppressed the Muslims, slew a number of them, and his aim was to extirpate Islam from his dominions. Thereupon the great saint Nur Qutb-ul-Alam appealed to the Sharqi ruler, Sultan Ibrahim of Jaunpur, to save Islam. The sultan accordingly invaded Bengal with an army. Thereupon Raja Ganesh waited on the saint and asked for his forgiveness and protection. The saint agreed to intercede for him provided he adopted Islam. Raja Ganesh agreed, but his wife having objected to this course, his son, Jadu, a boy of twelve, was instead converted by the saint, renamed Jalal-ud-din, and placed on the throne. At the request of the saint, Sultan Ibrahim returned to his kingdom and died shortly thereafter. As soon as Ganesh heard the news, he set aside his son and he himself ascended the throne a second time. He again began to oppress the Muslims and even had the son of the saint murdered by his agent. At that very moment Ganesh also died and 'passed to hell'. Jalal-ud-din, who was reconverted to Hinduism by his father, refused to re-embrace Hinduism. According to some accounts, he was in prison, but slew his father with the help of some servants. The rule of Ganesh lasted for seven years.¹

This account is corroborated by three letters written by Hazrat Ashraf, a Muslim saint to Sultan Ibrahim of Jaunpur urging the latter to invade Bengal in order to rescue the Islamic brethren from oppression by the infidel king, Ganesh. Interestingly, no coin issued by Raja Ganesh has been discovered and we only have coins of the Muslim rulers, including those of Jalal-ud-din, Ganesh's son. There is a series of coins issued by a king called Danuja Mardana Deva and another series by a king called Mahendra Deva around that period. This has led some scholars like Dr N.K. Bhattasali to propound a theory that Danuja Mardana Deva was a title assumed by Raja

Ganesh on his assumption of sovereign power in AD 1417 and that Mahendra Deva was the title taken by the son of Ganesh after his reconversion to Hinduism and before his second conversion to Islam. In the absence of any definitive evidence, we can only hold that these are conjectures. What we can say with reasonable certainty is that Ganesh was the de facto ruler of Bengal for several years when the Ilyas Shahi sultans ruled only as titular kings and that eventually the Muslims accepted the dynasty of Ganesh only when his son Jadu was converted to Islam and became a Muslim ruler, viz., Jalal-ud-din.

Jalal-ud-din ruled from AD 1415 to 1431. His was a peaceful rule. He brought Chittagong, Tippera and Faridpur area effectively under the Gaur rule. He also ruled south Bihar where coins issued by him have been discovered. He kept up communication with China and there was a lot of trade and exchange of envoys between China and Bengal. Certain Sanskrit words in his inscriptions like *smriti ratnahara* and *pada chandrika* appear to hint that he treated his Muslim and Hindu subjects alike. He promoted a Brahman named Brihaspati Misra of Kulingram in Burdwan district to the position of *sarvabhauma pandit* (Supreme Court pandit) and bestowed all sorts of gifts and honours on him. Another Hindu, Shri Rajya Dhara, became one of his main army commanders.

He also appointed another Hindu called Biswas Rai, son of Brihaspati, as a minister under him. The fact that Jalal-ud-din used Sanskrit expressions such as Gaureshwara would also indicate that Jalalud-din, despite being a devout Muslim, maintained a secular attitude in relation to his Hindu and Muslim subjects. Gaur again became a populous town in his time and Jalal-ud-din contributed much to this process by his building activity. He died in 1431 after a distinguished reign and lies buried in Eklakhi tomb at Pandua which is one of the finest specimens of Muslim pre-Mughal architectural style in Bengal. After Jalal-ud-din there was a short-lived reign (1431–35) of his son, Shams-ud-din Ahmed Shah. According to *Firishta*, he followed his father's liberal policy and was known for his sense of justice and charity. A major political event of his reign was an invasion by Sultan Ibrahim of Jaunpur, which was met by seeking help from a king of Central

Asia, Shah Rukh, son of Taimur. Ahmed Shah kept up the tradition of friendly interaction with China and a Chinese mission visited Bengal in 1431–32. He met his end abruptly at the hands of one of his own courtiers in AD 1436. Then followed a short-lived restoration of the Ilyas Shahi dynasty between AD 1437 and 1487.

LATER ILYAS SHAHI DYNASTY

There was confusion for a few years after the abrupt end of the dynasty of Raja Ganesh. Thereafter, we find one Nasir-ud-din Mahmud, who claims to be a descendant of Ilyas Shah, on the throne (AD 1437/38–59). He left behind a large number of inscriptions showing the construction of many public works and testifying to a period of peace and prosperity. There is, however, some indication that the king of Orissa occupied a substantial part of western Bengal. An inscription of King Kapilendra Deva of Orissa (1447) describes him as Gaureshwara (lord of Gaur). Another inscription of this period in Orissa refers to the defeat of Turkish kings by the king of Orissa. There is also evidence that the ruler of Arakan, Ali Khan, occupied substantial parts of Chittagong area and captured the port of Chittagong in 1459. Chittagong then remained in Arakanese hands for two centuries until the Mughal army conquered it in the year 1666. From an inscription on the tomb of one Khan Jahan at Bagerhat in Khulna district, it appears that under the leadership of Khan Jahan, the Sunderbans area was colonized. Nasir-ud-din was succeeded by his son Barbak Shah (1459–74) who also expanded frontiers of the kingdom in several directions. According to a popular tradition prevailing in north Bengal, a local saint, Shah Ismail Ghazi, took a leading role in the wars with the king of Kamatapur in the north-east and with Gajapati Kapilendra, the king of Orissa in the south-western frontier. There is a detailed account available of the activities of this soldier saint in a work written by one Muhammad Shattari titled *Risalat-us Shuhada* (1633). From this work it appears that from his base at Mandaran in Hooghly district he carried on several campaigns in Orissa proceeding up to Puri and that he crossed the river Karatoya and met the Kamatapur army at a place called Santosh in Dinajpur district. According to this report Shah

Ismail Ghazi died in battle in 1474. From the Hatkhola inscription of 1458 it appears that Sylhet and the Surma Valley were effectively conquered during this period, although initial forays had been made as far back as in 1304 by another warrior saint, Sikandar Khan Ghazi. That Barbak Shah followed a policy of religious toleration is illustrated by the laudatory references to him in the Vaishnava Bengali work *Sri Krishna Vijaya* composed by one Maladhar Basu who was awarded the title of Gunaraj Khan.

ABYSSINIAN EPISODE

Barbak Shah's son and successor, Shams-ud-din Shah (AD 1474–81) is also described as a learned and virtuous man and an efficient administrator. His inscriptions have been discovered from places as far as Sylhet, Dinajpur, Mirpur in Dhaka district and Pandua in Hooghly district. A number of buildings of ancient Gaur are traced to his reign, e.g. Lottan Masjid and Tantipara Masjid. The last ruler of Ilyas Shahi dynasty was assassinated by Abyssinian palace guards in 1487. Thereafter there was a short spell of Abyssinian (*Habshi*) slave rule in Gaur for a period of six years. This dark period ended in 1493 when the Habshi sultan was killed with the help of the Hindu paiks under the guidance of Hussain Shah, the wazir under the Abyssinian ruler. With the accession of Hussain Shah to the throne of Gaur began a new period, one of the golden epochs in the history of medieval Bengal.

There is an interesting description of Bengal in the early fifteenth century from the travelogue left by Ma-huan who came as interpreter with the Chinese envoy Cheng-ho sent by the emperor of China to the South Asian countries in 1405. According to this book, *Yung-ai-sheng*, the kingdom of Bengal could be reached from Sumatra by boat. If the winds were favourable, the port of Chittagong could be reached in eleven days. From there one could proceed to Sonargaon in smaller boats covering a distance of 931/3 *kos*. To reach the kingdom of Bengal, one had to cover another 521/2 *kos*. The towns in Bengal were surrounded by walls and the inhabitants were dark-complexioned Muslims. They shaved their heads.

The king and his officials dressed like Muslims. The language was Bengali, but Persian was also used. The name of the currency was tanka, but cowries were used for small transactions. Throughout the year it was as hot as China in summer. Many varieties of crops such as paddy, wheat, maize and mustard were grown. Wine was made from coconuts, rice, palm and *kajang* (possibly cashew) and sold in the open. The country also produced fruits such as banana and mango and also sugar cane. About six kinds of fabrics were woven from cotton. Each piece was two hands in width and twenty-nine hands in length. People reared silkworms and made silk garments. Many physicians, merchants, astrologers, artists and learned scholars lived in Bengal. They counted twelve months in a year but there was no almanac, nor the practice of counting a month as *malmash*. 'The king sends many ships overseas for foreign trading. He also sends gems and pears to China as tributes.'

Islam Spreads in Bengal

The two centuries that followed the annexation of Gaur by Bakhtiar Khilji saw rapid spread of Islam in Bengal. The visible Islamization of the majority of Bengal's population is in sharp contrast to the fact that in Delhi–Agra region, which was the centre of Muslim rule, a predominant Hindu stamp always remained. Unlike there, in outlying Bengal the ruling Turkish elite came in much closer contact with the common people. The rulers of Gaur from Hussain Shah onwards followed a policy of equal distance from Muslim and Hindu subjects. Islam spread largely through the preachings of bands of wandering dervishes or pirs, called Qalandars. They spread themselves all around the length and breadth of Bengal and preached Islam's doctrine of universal brotherhood and direct communion with God, mixing it up with reverence for a whole range of local deities and customs which appealed to the local people. In their preaching and writings, the dynamic interaction between Islam and the culture of the land led to the remarkable assimilation of a large variety of local popular culture in Islam. The pirs achieved their aim of helping Bengalees assimilate Islam in their lives not by doing away with local traditions and practices, but keeping them alive as far as possible while inculcating among the common folk the essential religious, social and legal aspects of Islam such as monotheism, mass prayers, social egalitarianism, direct communion with God and discouragement of image worship. These were analogous to the Rishi movement of Kashmir, e.g. the Suhrawardys and the Naqshbandis who played a similar role in the evolution of Kashmiri Muslim society by integrating the popular local culture with Islam.¹

The influence of Sufism on many of these wandering ascetics is unmistakable. Some of these wandering dervishes also took to arms and led armed bands of the faithful to spread Islam. It was one such dervish, Shah Jalal, who, according to local tradition, led a force of 3,000 dervishes that conquered Sylhet or Srihatta during the reign of Shams-ud-din Firuz Shah (AD 1301–22) at Gaur. The provocation for this armed raid was said to be the oppression of Muslims by Sylhet's Hindu king, Govindadev who wished to punish Muslims for cow slaughter. Local legend attributes to Jalal some magical powers which he used in conquering Sylhet, but these stories lack historical authenticity. Shah Jalal, who some confuse with a famous saint from Persian history (Jalalud-din Tabrizi), might have been a Hindustani Muslim who, with his followers, conquered Sylhet and settled there. He might have introduced among the local Bengalee Muslims a Devanagari script, which is known as 'Sylhetnagari' and is used even now as a quasi-religious alphabet. His tomb stands at Sylhet town to this day and is a centre of pilgrimage for local Muslims. Yet another Jalal-ud-din, a Qalandar, settled at Pandua near Bandel in Hooghly district probably even before the Turks came as conquerors. His dargah, Baro Hazari, still attracts Muslim pilgrims.²

People, dissatisfied with the rigours of a caste-ridden society and a religion based on vulgar ritualism, turned to the new faith which promised common brotherhood, liberation from the offensive yoke of the Brahman priests and some material incentives such as easier appointments to government jobs. The process of conversion was facilitated by the practices of Hindu society, such as the one that outcast anyone who had been forcibly fed beef or who had taken food or water from the hands of a Muslim, or any woman who had been abducted by force and wished to return to her home and faith but was denied that right. Islam offered the prospect of a normal and honoured life for many young widows on whom Hindu society was cruel and imposed a life of privation and indignity. Many members of the lower castes embraced Islam as the only way to escape the concentration-camp kind of existence that Hindu society inflicted on them. Buddhists, who had dominated Bengal for several centuries, but had become victims of

persecution and social ostracism following the revival of Brahmanical Hindum during the Sen dynasty turned to Islam in large numbers. The following passage from Ramai Pandit's *Sunya Purana* describes the scenario where persecuted Buddhists embraced Islam en masse rather than staying on as an oppressed minority under Brahmanical orthodoxy:

Dhamma (the presiding deity of the Buddhists) was greatly pained at all this and assumed in his mystery the form of Mussalmans with black caps on their heads and bows and arrows in their hands. They rode powerful horses which struck terror on all sides, and Siva became Adam; Ganesh became Gazi and Kartik became the Qazi, and all the ancient *rishis* became *faqirs* and dervishes—the goddess Chandi became Hava (*Eve*), and Padmavati became the Lady of Light (Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet). All the gods and goddesses entered Jaipur (a big village) in a body. They went on pulling down walls and gates, feted merrily upon booty and cried out 'catch them, catch them'.

There were also some special economic disabilities imposed on non-Muslims, specially by the early Turko-Afghan rulers. Ibn Batuta, who travelled in Bengal during the reign of Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah, recorded that in Sylhet Hindus were compelled to give half of the crops they produced to the government and that there were several other impositions.

Thus the entire complexion of the countryside in many parts of Bengal changed slowly but surely in the course of two or three centuries. Incidentally, it was relatively easier for the Buddhists to embrace the new faith, as they believed in worshipping a formless God and did not support caste divisions.

A highly interesting piece of literature that throws light on the spread of Islam in Bengal is a poetic composition named *Shekasubhodaya* (Sacred Advent of Sheikh) written in a corrupt, highly Bengalized form of Sanskrit in early Bengali script sometime around the fifteenth century when Sanskrit was still the standard medium of communication among Bengalee Hindus. It describes the auspicious coming of a Muslim saint in a land which till then did not know Islam. There are many stories, some of which are similar to the stories of *Betalapanchabimshati*. Others contain anecdotes that involve historical persons like Lakshmansan, Dhoyi, Umapatidhar, Halayudha Misra, Rampal and Vijayasen. This historical *kavya* written in

both verse and prose is the first literary record in Bengal, which purports to honour a pir. Some of the stories are of interest to those who wish to study the manners and customs of medieval Bengal. King Lakshmansen's hostile attitude to the Turkish people and his military encounters with them are alluded to. The central character of this book, Sheikh Jalal-ud-din, was asked by the 'Great Person' to go to the eastern land of King Lakshmansen who killed any Muslim that came to that country. The unknown author—Halayudha Misra was a pseudonym—was motivated to popularize the pir cult and make it acceptable to people in Bengal by collecting a number of folk stories and putting them together on a thread of veneration for a Muslim pir who is destined to influence others and bring them under his fold. The present text is from a manuscript discovered from the Bais Hazari Mosque of Gaur and is believed to date from the sixteenth century; but there is evidence to show that this was based on an earlier composition largely in verse in which some of the stories date pre-Muslim days. One such story is said to be depicted in a panel of the Paharpur temple. These and some historical stories like the election of Vijayasen to the throne of Gaur, Lakshmansen's dislike of Umapatidhar and Rampal's sense of justice are woven together with later stories in the form of the Sheikh's reminiscences in order to make the Sheikh appear as the ultimate³ and offering a way to truth and dignity for common folk who felt suffocated and humiliated under the existing social system.

It is pertinent to turn at this point to the great controversy in the latter half of the nineteenth century regarding the origin of Bengalee Muslims. Western scholars like Hunter, Beverly and Risley supported the theory that the Muslims of Bengal were, by and large, converts from the lower-caste Hindus of the province and that the sword of Islam was the main instrument that brought about this change. This theory was challenged in the 1880s by Khundkar Muhammad Fazle Rabbi in a well-researched Persian work *Haqiqat-i-Musalmanas-i-Bangla* (The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal), an English translation of which was also published by him. He opposed the theory of large-scale forced conversion and argued that there was large-scale migration of Muslims from north India as government officials,

soldiers and traders, and this included many Muslim families who left Delhi for distant Bengal on account of political uncertainty and hostile environment in Delhi from time to time, and in expectation of better economic prospects in fabulously prosperous Bengal. Both these views are a bit too simplistic to fully explain a complex social phenomenon, although both are partially true.

A relatively recent study by a Western scholar Eaton⁴ has dealt specially with the phenomenal en masse Islamization of the lower Ganga deltaic region (the present-day Bangladesh) which, according to him, stood on the periphery of the Muslim power based in Delhi–Agra. He has classified the various theories into four broad groups, viz., the theory of immigration of hordes of Muslims from Iran, Central Asian Turkistan and the Arabian peninsula; the ‘Religion of the Sword’ thesis that emphasizes the missionary zeal of the Arabs and Central Asian Islamic hordes for military conquest, the booty that it offered and an assured place in heaven through Islamizing non-believers; the ‘Religion of Patronage’ theory which explained the abnormal rise in Muslim population by large-scale conversion of Hindus for jobs and opportunities under the Muslim rulers; and large-scale conversion of oppressed lower-caste Hindus who wished to escape their plight. He has brushed aside the first three. All these had a part to play, but, above all, it was the last factor, which had the largest contribution to make in this process.

The Muslim population of Bengal, as it emerged, consisted of diverse elements: a significant constituent were the Turk migrants and the Persians of Delhi region—the stubborn Pathans who had settled down in significant numbers during the rise of Sher Shah, offered great resistance to the extension of Mughal rule and thereafter settled down all over the province merging with local Muslim population; the large-scale converts from Buddhism and lower-caste Hindus; and also, not so negligible a number of upper-caste Hindus who embraced Islam for reasons such as attraction of superior government positions.

It is quite clear that there was extensive social mixing between the two communities until the nineteenth century. Many Muslims learned Sanskrit

and composed literature in Bengali with Hindu themes. The Sufis and Vaishnava poets dwelt on philosophical aspects which had a great deal of commonality and which appealed to both the communities. All over Bengal there are shrines where members of both communities offer prayers or seek blessings. They also share common rituals such as worshipping Satyanarayana (Satyapir for Muslims). In the Sunderbans, a local deity called Dakshin Roy (combination of a Muslim saint and a Hindu god) is worshipped by Hindus and Muslims alike. Liberal Muslims often participated in Hindu ceremonies like Durgapuja or Saraswatipuja just as Hindus participated in Muslim religious ceremonies like the Id-ul-Fitr. Common people would show reverence to all deities. 'The poets of the medieval Bengal Mangal Kavyas bowed before deities of every cult including Muslim saints.'⁵ It was only after the advent of British power in Bengal that divergences developed on account of a variety of factors, of which the policy of Divide and Rule followed by the rulers was an important one. Paradoxically, the mighty renaissance and reformation movement of Hindu society accentuated the divide between the ascending Hindu community and the numerically larger but withdrawn Muslim community.

EMERGENCE OF BENGAL IN HISTORY

The Golden Age of Hussain Shah

Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah who ruled Gaur between 1493 and 1519 must be given the credit of being the first Bengalee ruler of Gaur. While there are many theories about his origin, he was clearly born of a Bengalee mother and was the first ruler of Gaur who gave encouragement to the newly growing Bengali language. He showed no discrimination between his Hindu and Muslim subjects and fought several wars with neighbouring kings in order to consolidate the unclear frontiers of what was eventually to become Bengal. He left his mark in a way greater than any other ruler of Bengal in the past—on inscriptions, coins and numerous references in contemporary literature, in particular the Bengali Vaishnava literature of his time which was passing through a creative phase, thanks to the great saint Shri Chaitanya who was Hussain Shah's contemporary.

His origin has been variously traced from a Saiyad family of Tarmuz in central Turkistan, from an Arab parentage, from a village named Chandpara in Murshidabad district and also the village Debnagar in Rangpur district of Bangladesh.¹ According to a local legend of Murshidabad district, Hussain Shah was a cowboy serving a Brahman of Chandpara village of that district and, after he became king of Gaur, gave the village to this Brahman on an annual rent of one anna. This village still survives under the name of Ekani Chandpara. Another local tradition of Rangpur district makes him the son of a Bengalee mother in the village Debnagar linked to Boda police station.

Both Krishna Das Kaviraj's *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and the memoirs of Babar allude to his dark complexion. The latter even described his son and successor Nusrat Shah as a Bengalee. It would therefore be reasonable to conclude that he might have been born in a Saiyad family which had been in Bengal for many years and had intermarriages with the local people, and that starting his life in a humble way he rose to the position of the wazir to Bengal's ruler, Muzaffar Shah. On Muzaffar Shah's death, according to *Riyaz*, he was chosen as king of Gaur by an assembly of the nobles around 1493. Whether this was a real election, or the fact of his assuming sovereign power with the support of his fellow nobles is not clear. There is, however, much similarity between the circumstances of Hussain Shah becoming the king of Gaur and those in which Gopal (of the Pala dynasty) had become king several centuries earlier.

That the new king was determined to rule effectively rather than be a mere puppet became clear immediately after his accession when he issued an order to his victorious generals and soldiers not to loot the capital city, Gaur, and executed 12,000 of them for flouting his order. All the looted articles were recovered, including 13,000 gold plates, illustrating how wealthy the residents of Gaur were at that time. He also demobilized both the Abyssinians, who had dominated the upper echelons of administration for a long time, and the paiks who had become something like the janissaries of the Turkish Empire. Both had become troublesome elements. He replaced the Abyssinians by the local nobility including the Hindus, one of whom, Purandar Khan, a Kayastha, was appointed his wazir early in his reign.

Having consolidated his rule around Gaur, he turned to the borders. He had mixed success in the west where he sided with the sultan of Jaunpur against the Lodi sultan of Delhi and sent an army led by his son Daniel in 1495 to oppose Sikandar Lodi's invasion of north Bihar. The Delhi and Bengal armies faced each other at Barh near Patna, but instead of fighting it out, the two sultans decided to conclude a treaty of friendship, agreeing to observe territorial status quo and mutual non-aggression. All the land to the east of Barh including Monghyr remained under the control of Gaur.

Hussain Shah then turned to the north-east, the kingdom of Kamatapur–Kamrup, which had been a traditional enemy of Gaur. With the help of a renegade minister of King Nilambar, the Bengal army led by Shah Ismail Ghazi occupied the capital city of Kamatapur, capturing King Nilambar, and advanced as far as Hazo in Assam. A Hussain Shahi inscription at Malda (1502)² records this conquest which took place around 1499–1502. But according to Assamese records, Nilambar escaped from captivity and, after prolonged fighting for years, the Kamrup forces regained their lost territory. The fighting continued during Nusrat Shah's reign. The Kamatapur–Kamrup victory was the zenith of Hussain Shah's military career. The Sylhet inscription (1512) alludes to Hussain Shah's conquest of Kamatapur–Kamrup and Jajnagar (Orissa).

Hussain Shah turned to the kingdom of Orissa (Jajnagar) whose forces frequently crossed the river Saraswati, which was at that time the border between Orissa and Bengal, and ravaged Bengal territory. In the year 1508–09 the Bengal army, under the leadership of the old veteran, Shah Ismail Ghazi, started from the border fortress of Garh Mandaran near Arambagh in Hooghly district and conducted a lightning raid through Orissa—as described by Madla Punj, chronicler of the Jagannath temple of Puri—capturing Jajpur and Cuttack and struck coins to celebrate this victory. No doubt the Bengal army took advantage of the absence of the king of Orissa, Gajapati Pratap Rudra, who was then campaigning in south India. On hearing the news of the invasion, King Pratap Rudra hurriedly returned to his kingdom, drove back the invaders and captured all his lost territory up to Mandaran, besieging the fortress there. As some Oriya generals defected to the other side, this siege had to be abandoned. Thus Hussain Shah's campaign to Orissa was not a success and the border between the two kingdoms on the whole remained unaltered. Hostilities continued in the border regions as shown by the impressions of Shri Chaitanya during his journey to Orissa in 1509, as also his return journey four years later.

Hussain Shah's efforts to extend Bengal's frontiers to the southeast also met with limited success. He first targeted the hill kingdom of Tripura, home of the semi-Mongoloid Tippera tribesmen who had spread out from

the Agartala Hills to the plains up to the river Meghna during the previous one or two centuries. Apart from conquest, the main motive of Hussain Shah's military action was to secure the line of communication to Chittagong, which was all along threatened by the Tipperis. According to the chronicle of Tripura, *Rajmala*, Hussain Shah's four successive invasions did not succeed fully in their objectives. The first was a complete failure. The second conquered Comilla and proceeded inside Tripura, but the invading army was destroyed while crossing the Gomati River through a stratagem by the Tippera general, Rai Chai Chan, who had dammed the river upstream, thereby blocking the flow of water to the lower reaches. When the invaders, deceived by the dry riverbed, tried to cross it on foot, he had the dyke cut, and the invaders were washed away with their horses and weapons by the onrush of the flood waters. That there might have been some success is hinted at in the description of one Khwas Khan in Hussain Shah's Sonargaon inscription (1513) as Sar-i-Lashkar (Commander of Forces) in Tripura. *Rajmala* also refers to a number of instances when the Tripura forces applied witchcraft to the discomfiture of the invaders. The third expedition also met with failure. The final expedition ended in a victory against the Tripura forces led by King Dhanja Manikya at Kali Fort, but this was also a limited success. Hussain Shah retained control over the approach to Chittagong, but did not succeed in his overall objective of conquering Tripura, despite some words in Sonargaon inscription suggesting some sort of annexation of Tripura area.³

As the kingdom of Arakan had helped the king of Tripura in the closing phases of the war, the war with Tripura inevitably led to a war with Arakan. Initially, Arakan forces had come and occupied Chittagong. In the year 1513 the Bengal army, led by Paragal Khan, advanced along the Feni River and tried to dislodge the Arakan forces. But this proved to be a long-drawn campaign which continued even after Paragal, under the leadership of his son Chhutti Khan. Chhutti captured Chittagong and could drive out the Arakanese only around 1516. According to Barrows, a contemporary Portuguese writer, Arakan became a vassal kingdom of Bengal, although this could only have been for a very brief period.

Hussain Shah's reign, a glorious epoch in Bengal's history, came to an end shortly after the reconquest of Chittagong around 1519. He had not only restored peace in the kingdom after years of lawlessness, but also consolidated the traditional frontiers of Bengal and even extended them in several directions. His reign was marked by almost continuous fighting with the neighbouring kingdoms in all directions, but most of these wars were fought beyond the frontiers of Bengal. Therefore, the conditions inside the kingdom were generally peaceful. Hussain Shah is also a memorable figure in history because he treated his Muslim and Hindu subjects alike and, like Akbar, tried to create a national monarchy to which all sections of the population showed loyalty. Many Hindus like Roop and Sanatan, who became Chaitanya's disciples, were appointed to high offices in the government, including the post of wazir. That the Hindus also gave him complete loyalty is illustrated by a Vaishnava poet's description of Hussain Shah as an incarnation of Lord Krishna. Some historians have tried to underplay the secular character of Hussain Shah's administration by dwelling on his destruction of temples and images during his campaigns in Orissa; but this was essentially the habit of all medieval generals while attacking another land, and there was no personal involvement of Hussain Shah himself. It was during his reign that the great saint Chaitanya preached Vaishnavism, which created an intense movement of bhakti in Bengal and drew followers from many sources into it, some of them Muslims. This was also the first great age of Bengali literature and the fact that so many poets and scholars produced important works in Bengali during the reigns of Hussain Shah and his son, Nusrat Shah, would clearly indicate that the state patronized such activities and created conditions where such creative activities could flourish. That in some instances a few qazis objected to *samkirtan* (public chanting) and procession of idols by Hindus is of lesser consequence than the fact that the government officials, in general, did not put restriction on these activities at Nabadwip and other towns and that some Muslim officials even patronized and participated in samkirtans. Above all, the Vaishnava literature in Bengal had many adulatory references to Hussain Shah. All aspects of his rule taken together, this was a great

golden age for Bengal, the first such age after Bengal as such had emerged in history, shorn of the earlier name ‘Gaur’, and with a distinct cultural and racial identity and a common language for the Bengalee people.

The following verse from Parameshwar’s Mahabharata is a self-evident testimony to contemporary Hindu attitudes to Hussain Shah:

*Nripati Hussain Shah hai mahamati
Pancham Gaurete jar parama sukhyati
Ashtra shastre supandit mahima apar
Kalikale habu jeno Krishna avatar
Nripati Hussain Shah Gaurer Ishwar
Tar hok senapati Hasanta Laskar
Laskar Paragal Khan mahamati
Suvarna basan paila ashwa bayugati
Lashkari bishaya pai aibanta chalia
Chatigrame chali gela harshita haiya
Putra pautre rajya kare Khan mahamati
Puran shunante niti harshita mati*

(King Hussain Shah is of noble mind. His great fame spreads all over Gaur. Well-versed in weaponry, his achievements are infinite. He is the incarnation of Krishna in the Kali era. King Hussain is the lord of Gaur. His commander Hasant Lashkar Paragal Khan has a great mind. He was gifted a golden dress and his horse was of wind’s speed. Lashkar having recovered his possession moved on and arrived at Chittagong in a cheerful mood. The great Khan ruled the kingdom with sons and grandsons listening gladly to the Puranas.)⁴

His name also figures in Vijay Gupta’s *Manasamangal* composed in 1495 — ‘Nripati Hussain Shah Gaura Sulakshman’. The following reference to Hussain Shah in a song composed by Yashoraj Khan is also significant: *Shrijukta Hussain jagat bhushan sheo ei rasa jane* (The great King Hussain Shah, the ornament of the universe, also appreciates the rasa).

Some historians have associated Allauddin Hussain Shah with the formalization of the Bengali era (Bangabda). This era actually began in AD 594, long before Hussain Shah. According to one school of thought, this was an adaptation of the Islamic Hijra lunar calendar (with 354 days)—which started in AD 622 to commemorate Prophet Muhammad’s journey from Mecca to Medina—to the solar calendar system of 365 days that was prevalent in India and under which the seasons like summer, winter, spring and monsoon occurred at fixed periods in a calendar year. The origin of the

Bengali calendar is shrouded in mystery. Some historians attribute it to King Sasanka of Gaur (c. 606–37). Chronologically, this has a high degree of probability. Whether this was started by Sasanka or whether it was a modification of the Hijra calendar, which too started around the same time and came to Bengal along with the Turkish conquest, is difficult to answer. But clearly this is the calendar starting around AD 594 which was given recognition as the standard Bengali calendar either by Hussain Shah or by Akbar (on the advice of Todar Mal) for facility of administration. In particular, the administration of land revenue could not depend on the uncertainty of a lunar calendar which had no relationship with the time of harvesting of foodgrains.

Akbar ascended the throne in AD 1556 (965 Hijra) and started a lunar calendar which he called *Tarikh-e-Elahi* on the model of a similar calendar in use in Persia. Interestingly, the expression Bangabda also came into use from AD 1556. The earliest reference to Bangabda occurs in two Shiva temples in Bankura district, one of them located at the village Dihargram and the other at a place called Sonatapan. Both these temples are around a thousand years old. Clearly, the Bengali calendar was in existence at that time, well before Emperor Akbar. This supports the view that rather than Akbar, it was Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah who, on seeing the administrative difficulties the Hijra calendar created in land-revenue collection, gave his official approval to another calendar which might have been adopted around the time of Sasanka as the official calendar. The first month was Baishakh and it ended with the month of Chaitra. It had 365 days, although months sometimes had thirty-two days and some others, twenty-nine. It is difficult to arrive at the exact truth, but surely the association of the Bengali calendar with one whom we have called the first Bengalee ruler of Bengal stands to reason and can be regarded as an additional feather in King Hussain Shah's cap.

BENGAL UNDER NUSRAT SHAH

Nusrat Shah, Hussain Shah's eldest son and successor (AD 1519–32) carried on the political and military traditions of his father and also his

liberal and secular policies and the patronage of Bengali literature. His identification with Bengal was complete as is shown by his description as a Bengalee by Emperor Babar, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, in his memoirs. It was during Nusrat Shah's reign that the Mughals led by Babar entered the Indian stage from Kabul, defeated the ruler of Delhi Ibrahim Lodi, at Panipat in 1526, and occupied Delhi. But Babar never took interest in the eastern part of the subcontinent and Nusrat Shah's reign in Bengal remained undisturbed. However, the following observation of Babar in his autobiography is significant:

During this time, Nusrat Shah, the son of Sultan Alauddin was the king of Gaur. He came to the throne through inheritance from his father, a rare occurrence in Bengal. In this land whoever captures the throne by force is honoured as a king. Before Nusrat's father became king, an Abyssinian had ruled after killing the then king, and Sultan Alauddin became the king after killing that Abyssinian king. There is another custom in Bengal. It is considered undignified for a king to spend funds collected by previous kings. Every ruler collects funds for his own treasury. That is considered creditable. Yet another special practice in Bengal is that the land revenue for a tract of land is earmarked for defraying the expenses of every government department and even every functionary. Thus the king's personal expenses and the expenses of his treasury are met out of the revenue from given estates.⁵

In the west, Nusrat conquered Tirhut, checked the Afghan warlords who had been dislodged from Delhi by the Mughal invaders led by Babar in 1526 and driven to the east, and fought Babar unsuccessfully at the battle of Gogra (6 May 1529) at the confluence of the Ganga and the Gogra. After the battle, Mughal overlordship in Bihar was acknowledged and Nusrat concluded a treaty of peace with Babar, thereby recognizing the great political change that was taking place in north India.⁶ This was an alliance between equals, and there was no question of Bengal accepting Delhi's suzerainty. Once again, following his father's traditions, Nusrat invaded the Ahom kingdom of upper Brahmaputra Valley in an attempt to extend his possessions beyond Kamatapur conquered by his father. But his forces met with military reverses. The Ahoms occupied all the territory up to Hazo, the headquarters of the Bengal occupation forces, and defeated the Bengal forces in a naval battle at Temani (Trimohini). But the Bengal forces regrouped and defeated the Ahom army in the battle of Singiri. The

indecisive campaign continued even after Nusrat's assassination in 1532, with claims of success by both. What is clear, however, is that not only did the Ahoms foil Bengal's attempt to conquer them, they even occupied Kamatapur–Kamrup territory, which slipped away from Gaur's control during the troubled times that followed Nusrat's assassination.

Like his father, Nusrat also patronized Bengali literature. He also erected a number of public buildings, the most important among them being the Barra Sona Mosque (Great Golden Mosque) at Gaur (1526), the largest structure in this ancient capital. He had the mausoleum of his father built at Gaur, a magnificent edifice that lasted till the eighteenth century, but of which only the foundation remains now. He also built mosques at Mangalkot (Burdwan), Bagha (Rajshahi) and Saptagram (Satgaon), and magnificent gates at Gaur, Satgaon and several places in Malda. Commerce, including overseas trade, flourished during Nusrat's reign and Satgaon, Sonargaon and Chittagong became prosperous trade centres. His gold coins have been discovered from several parts of Bengal.

After Nusrat's assassination in 1532, his son Ala-ud-din Feroze ascended the throne. He was soon replaced by his uncle Ghiyas-ud-din Mahmud Shah (1533–38), brother of Nusrat Shah, who was a contemporary of both Emperor Humayun, Babar's son, and Emperor Sher Shah of Delhi, and who can be called the last representative of the line of independent sultans of Bengal. His name has been traced in at least one mosque, one gate and several structures in the ruins of Gaur and, interestingly, in a Sanskrit inscription (1533) from Dhorail (Dinajpur)—the only Sanskrit inscription from a Gaur sultan. Also his gold and silver coins have been found at Gaur and several other places. He was an incompetent, pleasure-loving ruler who soon became a pawn in the great struggle that arose between the Mughals and the Afghans (called Pathans) led by the military adventurer Sher Shah Suri, who distinguished himself by defeating Humayun, the second Mughal emperor, and became emperor of Hindustan for a few years. In this process Bengal disappeared as an independent kingdom and Mahmud Shah died as a lonely fugitive in 1538, thus ending the dynasty of Hussain Shah.⁷

Origin and Growth of Bengali

Bengali language, which is the sixth largest language in the world in terms of the number of people speaking it (coming after Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish and Russian), acquired its distinctive character only in recent times, that is, in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. In his monumental study *The Origin and Development of Bengali Language*, Suniti Kumar Chatterji does not find any evidence of Bengali having become a distinctive language before the tenth century. The prevailing language was Sanskrit, a very ancient language which is one among the Indo-European group of languages. It became widespread in Bengal along with the Aryan migration across the subcontinent, got replaced as the main language by its immediate descendant, Pali or Prakrit, during the Buddhist centuries, and re-established itself in its orthodox form during the Sen period. Indeed the predominant vehicle of thought and expression in Bengal till the Sen dynasty was Sanskrit.

Bengali can be traced as an independent, identifiable language from only about the tenth century, although it traces its lineage to ancient Sanskrit and also to Prakrit and Pali. It belongs to the Indic group of Indo-Aryan or the Aryan branch of the Indo-European family of languages.¹ Together with its sister languages, Assamese, Oriya and Maithili, Bengali forms the easternmost language group in South Asia. It was the language of the largest number of people in the 1941 census—the last before the partition of the subcontinent.

The oldest specimen of written epigraphic form found in Bengal is the Mahasthangarh inscription in Bogra district of Bangladesh. It is in Pali and dates back to the third century BC, roughly to the period of Emperor

Ashoka. It is broken into fragments. The only word we can decipher is Pundranagar (Pundnagar). The next available epigraphic record is the well-known Susunia Hill inscription (third century AD) of one Chandravarman — who was perhaps a local ruler in Bankura district from the Chandra of Mehrauli iron pillar in Delhi or from Maharaja Chandra mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription of the Gupta emperor Samudragupta. It is in classical Sanskrit showing that the Prakrit–Pali medium, which had replaced Sanskrit several centuries ago, had in its turn been replaced by a rejuvenated Sanskrit, signifying a return to the past. This is an inscription from perhaps the very first ruler in this region for whom we have a contemporary record although in a classical and stylized form. Sanskrit continued to be the language under Sasanka, the Pala dynasty and the Sen dynasty. It was also the principal literary vehicle reaching great height with Jaydev (twelfth century), the last great poet in Sanskrit whose *Geeta Govinda* (on the life of Krishna and his consort Radha) has been the source of inspiration for many poets, playwrights and dance composers in Bengal, Orissa and other regions. According to tradition, he belonged to the village Kenduli in Birbhum district of West Bengal and spent some time in the court of Lakshmansen, but there is no historical evidence in support of this. The little that is known of the life of Jaydev, the first poet of Bengal — although not a poet in Bengali — is so mixed up with legends that it is simply not possible to say for certain what is true and what is not. But what is beyond controversy is the profound influence of *Geeta Govinda*'s exquisite poetry and music on posterity. 'In the hands of a Bengali poet the Sanskrit language loses its august stiffness and assumes more than Italian softness.'²

In Jaydev's times Sanskrit was clearly the language of expression for the educated, although Bengali was the spoken language. Gradually, the distance between the newly revived, grammar-ridden Sanskrit and the Bengali vernacular language became greater and greater. The Tibeto-Burman elements which appeared in Bengal through the northeast and the Dravidian and the Australoid tribal elements which were indigenous also made their impacts on the Bengali language. Slowly but surely, a lingua

franca took shape that was common to Bengal, Assam, Nepal, Orissa and north Bihar. Hiuen-Tsang's travelogue in the seventh century suggests that there was one common language spoken in Bihar, Bengal and western Assam. This has been loosely called Magadhi Apabhramsa. The most well-known poet who wrote in this language, also known as Brajabuli, was Bidyapati (fifteenth century) and is claimed by both Bengali and Maithili Hindi literature as one of the pioneers. According to tradition, Bidyapati was the court poet of Raja Shiv Sinha of Mithila. His compositions centred on the eternal Vaishnava theme of the love between Radha and Lord Krishna and related anecdotes and combined devotional and romantic elements. It is possible that the name Bidyapati became a generic name adopted by several poets in Bengali, Maithili and Nepali, who wrote in the same form and style on the same or similar themes in the succeeding centuries. There was, however, at least one historical Bidyapati at Mithila, who lived around AD 1460. The Brajabuli style influenced Bengalee poets long afterwards, and even the great Rabindranath Tagore composed one of his works, *Bhanusingher Padabali*, in this form.

All the eastern languages branched off from the Magadhi. Slowly, Nepali and Oriya disassociated themselves from Bengali by adopting their own scripts. Assamese, almost identical to the Bengali dialect of north Bengal and parts of East Bengal, adopted the same alphabet with some variations and developed its own characteristics, as it spread deeper and deeper into the Brahmaputra Valley, and was influenced by Bodo, Tibeto-Burman and Shan elements. It should be underscored that Bengali dialects of Sylhet, Dhaka, Chittagong, Mymensingh and Rangpur are akin to Assamese. Similarly, the dialects of Midnapore and parts of Bankura, Purulia and Singhbhum are closer to Oriya although they accepted standard Bengali. Orissa adopted a separate script akin to Telugu script, but close contact with Bengali continued, as illustrated by the fact that substantial portions of Kashiram Das's Mahabharata were composed on the soil of Orissa. All the dialects in various parts of Bengal were eventually to acknowledge the umbrella role of literary Bengali that evolved in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

The earliest specimens of Bengali before the fourteenth century are the *Charyapadas*. These were discovered in manuscript form in Nepal by Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri. These are forty-seven songs composed by *siddhas* or teachers of the Sahajiya sect, an offshoot of the tantric variety of Mahayana Buddhism. They date from the twelfth century although, according to Rakhal Das Banerjee, they could even be from the fourteenth century. These songs were written in aphoristic form and are in Prakrit or Apabhramsa language with which old Bengali dialects are mixed up. They definitely show some distinctive traits of what later on became Bengali despite the fact that 'the ignorance of the Newari copyist who knew little Sanskrit and much less of Apabhramsa made the text the enigma [in the manuscript] that it is'. The language of the *Charyas* is more akin to the West Bengal dialect rather than to the one in East Bengal. It contained mystic principles as also yoga doctrines and Sahajiya erotic practices. The reference to raga in some of the poems indicate that they were meant to be sung. But the *Charyapadas* remain in isolated splendour making a sudden appearance in the twelfth century without any evidence of a history leading to them and even without evidence of any subsequent evolution. Thereafter, there were two centuries of complete darkness after which, when the dark night was over, we did not find ourselves in the early dawn but in the splendour of bright sunshine at noon. A galaxy of highly articulate and sensitive poets like Chandidas, Krittivas, Maladhar Basu and Vijay Gupta made their appearance all of a sudden in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This fruitful phase in Bengal's early medieval history almost merges with the glorious age of Hussain Shah when, under the influence of Sri Chaitanya's bhakti movement, countless Vaishnava writers made their valuable poetic contributions.

There are one or two other stray evidences of the early Bengali language such as in Sandhyakar Nandi's *Ramcharita* (eleventh century), although these texts are predominantly in Sanskrit. *Shrikrishna Kirtana*, whose authorship is claimed by one Badu Chandidas, is undoubtedly the first great literary work in Bengali language. Whether this is the same Chandidas who composed the famous verses attributed to Chandidas by tradition cannot be

known for certain. According to Krishnadas Kaviraj, the author of *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Chaitanya used to listen to songs composed by Chandidas. There are reasons to believe that *Shrikrishna Kirttana* was a pre-Chaitanya period composition, although the same Badu Chandidas must have written other verses that were appreciated by Chaitanya. It is also possible that some of the other verses attributed to Chandidas were compositions by other lesser-known Chandidas, such as Dwija Chandidas or Dina Chandidas who clearly appeared after Chaitanya. Thus 'Chandidas' must have become a general umbrella name under which many poets took their positions.

Shrikrishna Kirttana deals with the romance of Radha and Krishna. It is a strange combination of high poetic skill, scholarship and occasional relapses into eroticism. It is composed in a dramatic style with different characters using different dialogues. It gives interesting sidelights on the social conditions around the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the daily life of the people, their food, dress, manners and prejudices. In spite of the sexual content at several places, the character of Radha that emerges out of Chandidas's verses is essentially that of a devotee bearing a feeling of total surrender to God—in this case Shri Krishna. According to tradition, Chandidas was born at a village Nannur in Birbhum district, although there are several other places claiming to be his place of birth and residence.

The next great writer after Chandidas was Krittivas, the author of the most famous Bengali version of the Ramayana, which has sustained the spiritual life of many generations of Bengalee Hindus. He was possibly born sometime in the fifteenth century in a village in East Bengal, but shifted to West Bengal and settled in a village called Fulia on the bank of the Ganga in Nadia district. Krittivas studied under various teachers, including at a school beyond the river Padma and returned home as a learned man. He also paid a visit to the king of Gaur who honoured him by presenting garlands and a scarf. The exact identity of the king of Gaur who honoured Krittivas cannot be ascertained. According to various theories, it could be Barbak Shah or Raja Ganesh. Krittivas's Ramayana differs substantially from the original Sanskrit Ramayana written by Valmiki. He

adopted many popular anecdotes as parts of the story and depicted the characters of Rama, Laxmana and Sita in a language with the typical softness of Bengal rather than the harsh, orthodox tone of north India. The original composition of Krittivas's Ramayana must have been much shorter, but through the passage of centuries, there were additions and interpolations, and the size of the book grew as in the case of Kashiram Das's Mahabharata.

The third epoch-making composition was Maladhar Basu's *Sri Krishna Vijaya*, which both translates passages from the Srimad Bhagavad and depicts the playful life of Shri Krishna in Brindavan. This work was composed around AD 1473–80. Shri Chaitanya also read Maladhar's poems and paid him high compliments. There were several other poets during this formative period of Bengali literature like Vijay Gupta, the author of *Manasamangal*, and Parameshwar Das who wrote the first Bengali Mahabharata and received the title of Kavindra from Paragal Khan. Nusrat Shah, was apparently not satisfied with Parameshwar's version of Ashwamedhaparva, i.e., the episode of the horse sacrifice, and persuaded his own court poet, Shrikaran Nandi, to compose a longer version. *Sunya Purana*, a Buddhist treatise of this period by Ramai Pandit, is also a work of significance.

Indeed, there were four major strands in the literary activity during the period immediately preceding Chaitanya: (i) Vaishnava lyrics, (ii) Bengali version of the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, (iii) the composition on the life story of Krishna, and (iv) non-Puranic themes like *Mangalkavyas*. Then we reach the high noon of Vaishnava literature concentrating on the life and teachings of Chaitanya and peripherally on Radha and Krishna. A number of poetic biographies on Chaitanya were composed—the earliest being Murari Gupta's *Shri Krishna Charitamrita* followed by Brindaban Das's biography of Chaitanya, which is the only biography that mentions Chaitanya's death and, last but the most important, Krishna Das Kaviraj's *Chaitanya Charitamrita* (sixteenth century AD), which was composed more than half a century after the passing away of Chaitanya. The writer lived in Brindavan as a sanyasi and had the opportunity of meeting some of the

great preachers of Vaishnavism and also of studying the philosophical system. The work therefore became not just an authentic narration of the main events of Chaitanya's life, but also an exposition of the philosophy of Vaishnavism. His account of Chaitanya's early life is somewhat sketchy, but the account of the last eighteen years of Chaitanya's life is fairly detailed.

Out of all this grew the great tradition of *padabali* literature which sustained a substantial number of Hindus in Bengal for centuries, both spiritually and aesthetically. The padabalis, or lyrical poems, concentrated on the theme of Lord Krishna being the only god and the object of rapturous adoration, stressing the fact that the ideal way of obtaining his grace is not through meditations and austerities, but through chanting his name and showering love and affection on mankind in general. Padabalis are written mostly in Bengali and partly in Brajabuli—the language created by mixing Bengali and Maithili.

Through these padabalis a new spiritual-cum-cultural tradition grew in Bengal where these lyrics were systematically chanted in groups by devotees of Chaitanya. Some of the most well-known *kirtaniyas* were Narottam Das, Gobinda Das Kaviraj, Gopal Das, Narahari Chakravarty and Jayanta Nanda. This tradition has acquired an international dimension in recent years through the activities of the Society for Krishna Consciousness all over the world. Side by side with padabalis there were other traditions, such as the Krishna Mangal school that also composed narrative poems on the Krishna legends (Sayana Acharya, Madhav Acharya and Raghu Pandit) and also the school of Vaishnavism consisting of treatises like *Rasa Kadamba* written in 1599, Ram Gopal Deb's *Rasa Kalapabali* written in 1673 and Daibabir Nandan's *Vaishnava Badan* written in the latter part of the sixteenth century.

A distinct school of original Vaishnavism, but eventually going beyond its narrow confines, was the Sahajiya sect, which also produced a vast literature consisting of both padabalis and essays. Along with the frequent outbursts of eroticism, Sahajiya literature contained some fundamental philosophical principles. The translation of the Mahabharata provided a great stimulus to the growth of early Bengali. The greatest name in this

regard is Kashiram Das. His father was one Kamalakanta Deva who left his home in Burdwan district and settled in Orissa. It was in Orissa that Kashiram Das composed most of his Mahabharata. It is historically established that Kashiram Das died only after composing the first four chapters of his Mahabharata, viz., Adiparva, Sabhaparva, Banaparva and Viratparva. The remaining *parvas* were possibly composed by AD 1605 by others under the umbrella name of Kashiram Das. Kashiram Das's Mahabharata, like Krittivas's Ramayana, is a national epic of the Bengalees and has cast a tremendous influence on the Bengalee people, both Hindus and Muslims, for generations. This slowly came to dominate the entire firmament and crowded out all earlier versions of the Mahabharata and also several other efforts made by subsequent poets which relapsed into obscurity.

The Bhagavad was also translated into Bengali several times—first by Raghunath Pandit, a contemporary of Shri Chaitanya, then by Sankar Deva, the famous Assamese Vaishnava saint who was living under the protection of the king of Koch Bihar, and thereafter by Sanatan Chakravorty (1655). Several other poetic styles in early Bengali language were *Mangalkavya* which centred on the glories of both Puranic deities like Krishna and non-Puranic popular deities like Manasa, Chandi and Dharmathakur—*Chandimangal*, *Dharmamangal*, *Sivamangal*, *Kalikamangal*, *Raimangal*, *Sitalamangal*, *Sasthimangal* and *Laxmimangal*. These were sung in the well-known panchali style. There was also the tradition of the Nath religious practices centred on self-discipline, celibacy and yoga, and an extensive literature grew around the siddhas of the Nath school. Interestingly, there were several Muslim poets who also composed verses in this tradition, e.g. Faizulla's *Goraksa Vijay*, Sukur Mohammad's *Tale of Gopichand and his Queen*, *Mainamati*.

As with most of the South Asian subcontinent, there was no tradition of historical writing in Bengali language. There is, however, one notable exception, viz., *Rajmala* of Tripura, which describes in detail the entire history of the Tripura kingdom from its inception till the eighteenth century. The book has four different parts: the first part was written in the fifteenth

century during the reign of Amar Manikya; the third part in the seventeenth century during the reign of Govinda Manikya; and the fourth part in the eighteenth century during the reign of Krishna Manikya. Apart from *Rajmala*, there were several other historical works written about the history of Tripura such as *Champaka Vijay*, *Krishna Mala* and *Baradamangal*. The kings of Tripura systematically encouraged the rendering of Puranic stories into Bengali verse by court pandits.

This is also an appropriate occasion for noting the important contributions made by the rulers of Koch Bihar in patronizing Bengali language. Pitambar, the court poet of Bishwa Sinha, the founder of the dynasty, translated into Bengali verse *Markandeya Purana* in 1530 and the Nala–Damayanti episode of the Mahabharata in 1544. Both Naranarayan and his brother, Sukladhwaja, patronized Bengali poets. At the latter's instance, the court poet, Aniruddha, translated stories from the Mahabharata into Bengali. Many poets were reported to be engaged in such translation processes.

We must also note the great tradition of folk literature that grew in the medieval period. This included the legends of Behula and Lakhindar, Khullana and Dhanapati, Phullara and Kalketu, Gopichand and Mainamati, which acquired their final shapes only in the subsequent centuries. All of them must have started as oral literature, which has as rich a heritage as that of written literature. They were narrated or recited in both prose and poetic forms by grandparents, mothers, aunts, uncles, village elders and teachers at schools as nursery tales or folk stories. They reflect the changing social background in the early medieval period, a society that was changing from agriculture-based to one dependent on vigorous trade and commerce, from stay-at-home village life to large-scale wanderings in the world outside, from the worship of traditional gods and goddesses to newer deities like Manasa or Shani with their strong desire to enlarge the number of their respective devotees, and with great powers of doing harm to the people who did not bow in their devotion and to ensure that people like Chand Saudagar were made to pay homage to them. Subsequently, these legends got incorporated in written literature. However, in general, they never became

the subject of interest for the scholarly and the learned, but remained, as they were perhaps meant to be, as sustenance for people with little education or for minds without formal education that could follow recitation. These helped the evolution of a culture that made the people god-fearing, righteous and yet acquisitive in life. Women had a very honoured place in these folk tales. An implicit appeal to break loose from the rigours of the caste system and the early rumblings caused by the arrival of Islam are also evident. As the story of Chand Saudagar vividly illustrates, Bengalees of the early medieval period were seafaring people and carried on extensive trade with the lands beyond the seas. The following assessment of these stories by Suniti Chatterji is relevant:

The cycle of these stories appears to have originated in Bengal during the ninth and tenth centuries, and then they spread over the whole of Aryan-speaking India, being taken up by both the late Mahayana Buddhist teachers of Bengal and Eastern India in evolving their hagiology of *siddhas* or miracle-working adepts or masters, as many as 84 of them being recognised both by the Mahayana Buddhists and by Bengali and North Indian Saivites. These cycles spread from Bengal and Eastern India to Bihar, then to Nepal, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat, and then as far south as Maharashtra (where stories of the Siddha Natha-Guru's Matsyendranatha, Gorakhanatha and Goyaninatha, or Gaininatha became part of the Vedantic Sanyasi tradition by AD 1290 as we find from Jhanoba's *Commentary on Translation of the Bhagavad Gita (the Jnaneswar)* ...

It is also important to note that the *Manasamangal*, *Chandimangal*, and *Dharmamangal* cycles in the medieval Bengal have been composed mostly by Hindu poets and singers, although the stories have always been equally popular among Mussalmans of Bengal as well. But the cycles relating to Raja Gopi Chandra and to the *siddha yogis* have been, curiously enough, composed by a number of Muslim poets, like Shukur Muhammad, Shaikh Faizullah and Moksed Ali, in addition to Hindu poets. The reason for this special attraction (if there was any at all) which was felt by Muslim writers for this cycle of tales about the *siddhas* or *natha yogis* is a matter of some interest. It might have been so because there was some resemblance between the wandering *yogis* of this religious persuasion, with their equally vague affiliation to both Mahayana Buddhism and Saiva Yoga, and not complete identification with any of the orthodox Brahmanical creeds, with the Muslim *sufi qalandars*, or wandering mendicants, with their mystic doctrines and their toleration for all forms of religion. There was an ideological rapprochement which was nurtured by some religious faith of a mystic style, which brought the Muslim Bengalee (who was too much under the spell of orthodoxy and the rigid Arabism of the Quran as interpreted by the fundamentalist thinkers, but was something of a tolerant free-thinker of the Muta 'zalite type'), and the Brahman Bengalee (who was actuated by the spirit of non-ritualistic Vedanta) very close together.³

By the time the fifteenth century began, a standard literary poetic form of Bengal had already grown and come to be in use all over Bengal. It was written largely on palm leaves, but also substantially on paper. This form continued till the eighteenth century when prose literature began as a parallel stream and soon edged out the hitherto conventional verse form as the normal form of literary expression. Initially, for at least half a century, Bengali prose was under the tyranny of Sanskrit.

MUSLIM CONTRIBUTION TO EARLY BENGALI LANGUAGE

The contributions made by early Muslim writers to the growth of Bengali literature must also be highlighted. In fact, the Muslims played a leading role in wresting Bengali from Sanskrit domination and in helping it develop its own identity. The fact that the Turkish conquerors mostly spoke Persian and that they had extensive interaction with Bengalees, both Muslims and Hindus, ensured that they tried to make extensive use of local vernacular expressions in their own Persian and Arabic lingua. Slowly but surely, a new vernacular form evolved out of both Sanskrit and Persianized court language. One of the pioneers was Sabirid Khan (sixteenth century) who composed a poetical work *Vidya-Sundara*. Syed Sultan of Paragalpur in Chittagong wrote three books: *Jnanapradip*, *Nabivamsa* and *Sabe Meyeraj*. The first deals with the principles of yoga. The second is a massive work on the lives of twelve Nabhis, and the third is centred on the life of Hazarat Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Muhammad Khan, a disciple of Syed Sultan, composed a poetical work with the title *Makbul-Hossain* in 1645, describing the sad tale of Karbala. His other book, titled *Satya Kali Vivada Samvada* or *Yuga Samvada*, describes an imaginary quarrel between Satya Yuga and Kali Yuga. Some romantic poems in Hindi were either translated into Bengali or imitated by more than one Bengalee Muslim poet. These are Qutban's *Mrigavati* (1503) and some romantic works in Hindi based on a love episode of Manohar and Madhumalati.

Similarly, Persian romantic works based on the love stories of Laila–Majnu and Yusuf–Jolekha were translated into Bengali by some Muslim poets. Bahram Khan of Chittagong, an officer of Srichandra Sudharma, king

of Arakan and Chittagong, was the best storyteller of Laila–Majnu in Bengali. Shah Muhammad Sagir (alias Sagiri) was the most well-known author of the romance of Yusuf and Jolekha in Bengali.

DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS

The life of Hazarat Muhammad and the religious wars of the preachers of Islam formed the subjects of some works composed in imitation of the style of *Harivamsa* and the Mahabharata. Hayat Mahmud who belonged to the eighteenth century was the most important among the authors who wrote in this style. He wrote three other books entitled *Hitta-Uttan*, *Hitajnanarvan* and *Amrit Vani*. The first of these was based on the Persian translation of the *Hitopadesa*. The Muslim poets of Bengal have also composed many poetical works on the pirs (religious preceptors possessing uncommon powers) and the ghazis (fighters in wars of religion). Among the works of this class the *Manikpirer Gita* of Garib Fakir and the *Ghazi Vijaya* of Faizulla are particularly remarkable.

Some of the Muslim poets of Bengal also composed verses on the love of Radha and Krishna in imitation of padabalis. Syed Murtaza is the most remarkable of the Muslim composers of padabalis. A few Bengalee Muslim poets also composed verses on the glory of Chaitanya. There are a few ballads, mostly love stories written by Muslim poets, such as *Damini Charitra* by Saruf, *Chandravati* by Quresh Magan and *Chandramukhi Punthi* by Khalil. Some Bengalee Muslim poets wrote treatises on religious practices and meditation (sadhana), especially of the *bauls* and dervishes; one of these, Ali Raja, authored *Jnanasagar* and *Sirajkulup*.

Panchali, a form of popular ballad in eulogy of minor deities, was composed by both Hindus and Muslims. Satyapir and Satyanarayana were two different forms of the same object of devotion. The worship of Satyanarayana was confined to the Hindus while Satyapir was an object of devotion for both the communities. The panchali of Satyanarayana is a legend, to be read on the occasion of worshipping the deity, and falls into two classes. The first is on the line of the tale in the *Dharmamangal* relating to the advent of Dharmathakur and the second is on the line of the tale of

Dhanapati in the *Chandimangal*. Notable among the writers of *Satyanarayaner Panchali* are Ghanaram Chakravarti, Ramesvara Raygunakar and Bharatchandra.

Krishnahaaridas, Sankar, Kavikarna, Nayek Mayaz Ghazi, Arif and Faizulla are among the most remarkable writers of *Satyapirer Panchali*. There are different accounts of the birth of Satyapir. In one he was the son of the unmarried daughter of a king named Ata Badshah. In another he appears as a woman to restrain the desire of Hosain Shah Badshah. Other tales deal with other matters, but all the tales disclose the central object of the panchali, which is that Satyapir is working through his chosen people to spread his message on earth. Besides Satyapir, there are some other objects of devotion common to both the Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus worship Banadurga, Thakur Gorachand, Kalu Roy (god of the crocodiles) and Siddha Matsyendranath. All these deities are also objects of prayer for the Muslims under the respective names of Banabibi, Pir Gorachand, Kalu Shah and Mochra Pir. Poets of both communities composed panchalis in eulogy of their respective objects of devotion. These do not possess much literary merit, but were created to meet the recreational and devotional needs of the unlettered masses.

BENGALI LITERATURE IN ARAKAN

The most important Muslim contribution to Bengali literature during the medieval period was made by two Bengalee poets who lived in Arakan outside Bengal in the seventeenth century. These are Daulat Qazi and Alaol. They lived at Rosang, the capital of the king of Arakan, and composed their works under the patronage of the ministers of this king. Daulat Qazi received the patronage of Asraf Khan, Laskar Uzir of King Sri Sudharma (AD 1622–38) and composed at his direction the poetical work *Sati Maynamati*. It is written on the lines of a small Hindi book titled *Maina Sat* written by Sadhan, a poet of northern India. Daulat Qazi excelled as a poet in this work. It remained unfinished at the time of his sudden death and it was completed long afterwards by Alaol.

Alaol has left us a detailed account of his life in his different works. He was born around 1600. His father served under Majlis Qutb, an independent zamindar of Fatehabad (modern district of Faridpur). Once when Alaol and his father were travelling by boat, they were attacked by Portuguese pirates and his father was killed. Alaol escaped and swam to the Arakan coast. He later got himself enrolled in the Arakan cavalry. His high birth, learning and skill in music made him a well-known figure. The prime minister of the king, Magan Thakur, became his disciple and patron. At Magan's request Alaol wrote his work *Padmawati* which is a free translation of the book *Padmawati* written by Jayasi, a Sufi poet of northern India on the life of Queen Padmawati of Mewar (about the middle of sixteenth century). *Padmawati* was composed during the reign of King Thado Mintar of Arakan (1645–52). The blending of the romantic with spiritual perceptions has given the work a certain novelty and excellence. This work also gives us an indication of Alaol's deep knowledge of the Hindu Puranas and of Sanskrit literature. The influence of the Vaishnava padabalis is also evident in this work. *Padmawati* is the best known composition of Alaol.

Alaol also received the patronage of Sulaiman, the *mahapatra* or prime minister of the Arakan king, and at his request he completed Daulat Qazi's unfinished work *Sati Maynamati*. Daulat Qazi shows himself as a better poet in his unfinished portion. Alaol's composition of the latter part of *Sati Maynamati* was made to order and is a shade inferior to the earlier part. At the request of Sulaiman, Alaol also translated into Bengali several Arabic and Persian books. Alaol wrote a treatise on music which he named Raganma and composed some verses on Radha and Krishna. None of these works, however, matches the poetic excellence of *Padmawati*.

Shri Chaitanya and Bengali Vaishnavism

In the growth of Bengali language and, for that matter, of the people of Bengal into a distinctive cultural and social entity, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu played a major role in the fifteenth century. His life and work constitute a watershed in the history of Vaishnavism that centres on worshipping Krishna, the great Hindu god, as the embodiment of Supreme God and prescribes breaking away from orthodox rituals and casteism, and chanting the name of God in ecstasy. Moreover, Chaitanya and his disciples expressed their thoughts in Bengali in a poetic form and not in Sanskrit, which till then had been the linguistic vehicle of Bengalee Hindus. In many respects it was the convergence of Chaitanya's Vaishnavism with King Hussain Shah's secular rule and the impact of both on Bengali literature that led to the emergence of Bengal and the Bengalee people.

Shri Chaitanya, whose real name was Bishwambhar and was also called Gauranga (on account of his fair complexion) or Nimai, was born in a Brahman family that originally hailed from Jeypore in Orissa, but had migrated to Sylhet in eastern Bangladesh. His father, Jagannath Mishra, after having studied grammar in his village moved to Nabadwip (in Nadia district) together with his wife Sachidevi for further studies. According to Jayananda's *Chaitanyamangal*, it was a severe famine in Sylhet region that compelled his family to migrate to Nabadwip which had become a great centre of Sanskrit learning and pilgrimage, attracting thousands of pilgrims to its ghats for bathing in the holy Ganga and many scholars for study in its *tols* under well-known teachers. Bengali Hindu society of this period was steeped in ritualism of the most vulgar kind and hopelessly divided into castes, which did not create any feeling of solidarity. Those born in the lower castes were condemned to a life of social humiliation and economic

exploitation in an upper-caste-dominated society. Many of them felt that the only path to redemption lay in embracing Islam with its spirit of egalitarianism and universal brotherhood among believers. In this situation, the Vaishnavism that Shri Chaitanya preached, with its emphasis on eradication of caste differences, discarding ritualistic religion, and direct communication with God through devotional chanting without the intermediation of Brahman priests, offered solace to many.

Bishwambhar was born in 1485. His life of forty-nine years can be equally divided into two parts, the first part (1485–1510) being his life as a householder and scholar at Nabadwip, and the second part (1510–34) being his life as a God-intoxicated ascetic at Puri in Orissa with about six years spent on pilgrimage travels. As a child he studied Sanskrit at various schools at Nabadwip till the age of sixteen. He soon established his position among scholars. According to Jayananda's *Chaitanyamangal*, he went to East Bengal in search of a career and lived for several years on the banks of the Padma River. He returned after earning enough money only to hear that his first wife had died of snakebite. He settled down as a teacher and married again, his second wife being Bishnupriya. On a pilgrimage to Gaya for his late father's sacred rites he turned deeply spiritual and also came under the influence of a sage named Ishwarapuri, who taught him the worship of Krishna. After his return, Bishwambhar gave up teaching and turned to spiritual practices. He became a mystic saint who would chant the name of Krishna and fall into trances. Together with his associates, Advaita and Nityananda, he would engage in *nagarsamkirtan*, or chanting the name of Krishna, on the streets of Nabadwip. This incurred the wrath of Jagai and Madhai, two criminals who headed a group of antisocials. They tried to harm Bishwambhar and Nityananda, but eventually came under their spell and gave up their evil ways.

In 1510 Bishwambhar left home and his wife Bishnupriya and embraced monkhood through another ascetic named Keshav Bharati. He took on the name Shri Krishna Chaitanya and after some travels in Bengal went to Orissa and made Puri his main centre. He travelled intermittently all over the pilgrimage centres in southern and western India and proceeded as far

as Rameshwaram, Kanyakumari, Poona, Ahmedabad, Somnath, Dwarka and eventually Mathura and Brindavan. Everywhere people in large number, including many kings, became his devotees. His biographers also attribute miraculous occurrences to him. They also allude to the disturbed conditions along the border between Orissa and Bengal during his various journeys. According to Brindaban Das's *Chaitanyabhagat*, Sultan Hussain Shah came to know of Shri Chaitanya when he visited Gaur and passed orders to the following effect:

*Sarbaloke laiya sukhe karun kirtan
ki birale thakun ne lai tar mone
Qazi ba kotal tahake kono jane
Kichchhu balilei tar laimu jibane*

(Let him engage himself happily with others in kirtan or stay in seclusion if his mind so desires. If anybody troubles him, whether qazi or kotwal, he will pay with his life.)

It appears that some orthodox Brahmans and some Muslims requested the qazi of Nabadwip to stop Shri Chaitanya's kirtan processions. The qazi banned music and samkirtan in his ward. But after a frank discussion with Haridas, Advaita and Chaitanya himself, the qazi was convinced that these men of godly love did not mean any offence to the state and withdrew his ban. The qazi was then so moved to see the devotional fervour of the kirtan that he allowed Chaitanya to continue nagarsamkirtans with his followers.¹ Chaitanya parted company after calling the qazi his maternal uncle.

Shri Chaitanya spent most of the latter part of his life (1515–34) at Puri. The king of Orissa, Pratapa Rudradev, and his queen were said to have met him and sought his blessings. During these years he alternated between spiritual discourses and devotional chanting, often leading to deep trances. Such devotional chanting is described in Vaishnava literatures as *premonmada* or *divyonmada* (madness of divine love). It was during one such trance that he embraced the sea waves and ended his life. Some miracles are also associated with his death, which may be discounted.

Shri Chaitanya is a historical figure whose life is well documented by the countless poets who described his life and work as also of his well-known disciples in Vaishnava poetry for generations. Along with his band of

disciples, his large following and the poetry written on him, he marked a distinct watershed in the evolution of Bengali language, literature and culture. Not only did the nascent Bengali literature receive a great fillip, but the new Vaishnavism also provided sustenance to a whole generation of people who, after the disappearance of Buddhism from Bengal, had felt somewhat helpless at being caught between ritualistic, traditional religion and Islam, neither of which they were able to accept whole-heartedly. Shri Chaitanya's Vaishnavism was therefore a *via media*. It was nothing short of a social revolution. Like some of his great contemporaries, Chaitanya emphasized deep passionate yearning for God as the way to salvation. His Radha–Krishna cult was also influenced by the romantic and devotional poems of Jaydev (in Sanskrit) and Chandidas (in Bengali). This path was open to Brahmans or Chandals or Yavanas (Muslims) alike. Some Muslims also came under his influence—among them, his favourite disciple, Haridas. 'The liberal outlook which formed an essential feature of Chaitanya's sect was one of the most important reasons for its wide popularity among the masses.'²

It would not be correct to hold that Vaishnavism was a sectarian religious movement, which originated and spent itself in Bengal. It was a mighty spiritual upheaval, which was responsible for multifaceted developments in spiritual, literary, musical and other cultural spheres of life. It spread beyond the confines of Gaur–Banga and to far-flung areas in north and south India. It was a humanistic revival which, in many ways, influenced the social and political history of the country. Besides Nawadip, which was politically and culturally important even before the advent of the god-man of Nadia, there sprang up several other important centres outside the geographical limits of Bengal. Nilachal (Puri) became culturally a part of greater Bengal during the post-renunciation days of Shri Chaitanya.

An important aspect of the Chaitanya movement was the honoured position it assigned to women as equal members of the sect. In a society where women, for all practical purposes, were confined within the houses, the Chaitanyite Vaishnavas emancipated them by permitting them to take part in kirtans side by side with men and encouraged them to get educated.

The practice of marrying them off as children was discouraged. This emancipation of women in a limited sense long before the nineteenth-century Brahmo movement must be considered as an important legacy of Chaitanya's movement.

Although Chaitanya did not leave behind any formal organization or any chosen spiritual successor to carry on his work, a number of sects claiming to carry on his tradition arose, centring on Nabadwip or nearby Santipur, Mathura, Brindavan and Puri. These tended to become formal missions with their followers sporting a U-shaped mark at the forehead and wearing a necklace of tulsi beads. Women are also members of these sects. In recent years the Chaitanya cult has also attracted many followers all over the world through the Hare-Krishna consciousness movement. An important outcome of Chaitanya's movement was the revival of the twin towns of Mathura and Brindavan, which had been associated with Lord Krishna according to tradition, but had become deserted places, or had been nearly forgotten. With Chaitanya's well-known disciples Roop and Sanatan settling down there, they began to hum with activity. Chaitanya specially commissioned Roop and Sanatan to combat godless scholasticism by reawakening Krishna consciousness and by creating the philosophical and devotional literature for the purpose in Sanskrit, meant for an all-India audience, and thus to restore Brindavan to its glory as a seat of learning and devotion.

It is wrongly supposed in some quarters that the neo-Brindavan revivalists bearing the appellation 'Goswami' were mostly non-Bengalee. As a matter of fact, the six Goswamis (*Shad Goswami*) of Brindavan, with the single exception of Gopala Bhatta, were Bengalees in every sense of the term. These wonderful men of piety and learning, all excepting Jiva Goswami, the lowest in order of seniority, had the personal blessings of and directions from Sri Chaitanya. Roop and Sanatan were high officials under the sultan of Gaur, with the respective titles of Dabir Khan and Sahar Malik. They became Chaitanya's followers after meeting him while he was visiting Gaur on his way to Brindavan. They both left their state jobs and settled in Brindavan, carrying on Chaitanya's work and establishing temples and

ashrams in this deserted town, which got rejuvenated and became, like Benares and Puri, an important centre for Bengalee Hindus outside Bengal.

LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Pathans and Mughals Fight over Bengal

Between the fall of the Hussain Shah dynasty and the rise of Mughal power there was a bitter fight between the Mughals and the Pathans for the control of this rich kingdom. Initially, the Pathan challenge was spearheaded by the great Sher Shah Suri who challenged both the Gaur sultan and the emerging Mughal power. For quite some time Bengal's history centred on the struggle for power between the Mughals and the Pathans. The Pathans, even after their defeat by their co-religionists, did not accept the sovereignty of the Mughals and challenged them repeatedly for several decades whenever any opportunity arose. More often than not, the Pathan chieftains and the Hindu zamindars collaborated against the Mughals whom they treated as invaders from outside. Pathans fought fiercely under Hindu masters, and likewise Hindus fought with complete loyalty under Pathan chieftains.

RISE OF SHER SHAH

Sher Shah Suri, born in a *jagirdar* family as Farid Khan, and named Sher Khan after he killed a tiger in a shikar, started as a small estate owner and became a military adventurer, spending some time in the Mughal court at Delhi and Agra and learning their battle techniques. In the triangular conflict that developed around Bengal involving the Gaur sultanate, the ambitious Sher Khan in Bihar and the Mughals, Mahmud Shah of Gaur sided with Sher Khan's rivals and suffered defeat at his hands at Surajgarh.

Sher Khan seized a lot of wealth, elephants and armaments from the vanquished Bengal forces and seized the territory up to Teliagarhi Pass, which was defended successfully by the Gaur forces, supported vigorously by several Portuguese commanders. Sher Khan advanced to Gaur through an unguarded route and imposed a treaty on a weak Mahmud Shah under which Gaur went under Sher Khan's suzerainty. The capital city of Gaur fell to opposing forces several times and the people went through considerable privations and suffering. Sher Khan had to face the might of the Mughal ruler of Delhi, Humayun, who came to north Bihar in response to the Bengal sultan Mahmud Shah's request for help that stated he was still ruling Bengal despite losing the capital city of Gaur to Sher Khan. Humayun spent a lot of unnecessary time in capturing Chunar Fort through a long siege, thereby allowing Sher Khan to consolidate his hold in and around Gaur. Mahmud Shah fled to south Bengal after his defeat and died a fugitive at Koholgaon (1538) on hearing the news of the killing of his two imprisoned sons under Sher Khan's orders. He was the last independent sultan of Bengal, which became a part of the Delhi empire and stayed so till the British takeover in the eighteenth century. However, for two spells around 1550 and 1573, the then Afghan governors, Mohammad Khan Sur and Daud Khan, unsuccessfully tried to break away from Delhi rule.

After the occupation of Gaur, Sher Khan had a formal coronation in this capital city as sultan (1538) with a grand title. When Humayun finally advanced towards Gaur, he was held for a month at Sakrigali by Sher Khan's soldiers. Meanwhile, Sher Khan staged a feint, leaving Gaur and capturing Rohtas Fort, which became his headquarters and compensated for his loss of Chunar. When the Afghans left Sakrigali for Rohtas, Humayun occupied Gaur. He had it renamed Jannatabad and struck coins in his name. But he wasted three valuable months in luxuries allowing Sher Khan to strengthen his hold over Bihar and cut off the Mughal army's line of communication with north India. During his return journey to Agra, Humayun was defeated decisively by Sher Khan at Chausa (Buxar) and at Bilgram (1540).

Sher Khan then proceeded to occupy Agra, Gwalior, Delhi and Lahore and had himself crowned as the emperor of Hindustan with the name Sher Shah, thereby lending support to Vincent Smith's tenuous theory that whichever power controls the lower Gangetic valley ultimately rules north India. Sher Shah ruled over the major portions of Bengal except the territories beyond the Brahmaputra. Meanwhile, the king of Arakan conquered Chittagong, which remained under Arakan's rule till 1666. Sher Shah ruled for six years (1539–45), a remarkable period in the subcontinent's history when good administration was established. Also, the foundations of a sound land revenue system were laid on which Emperor Akbar subsequently built his system that came to be named after his minister Raja Todar Mal. Interestingly, Todar Mal had started as an officer under Sher Shah. The entire dominion, including Bengal, came to be divided into 11,600 revenue parganas with five officials in each. In between, Sher Shah had once again to invade and occupy Gaur (1541) when Khizr Khan, his governor of Bengal, revolted. A number of Sher Shah's canons have been discovered in Bengal in places as far apart as Malda, Dhubri and Dhaka. Also, Sher Shahi gold, silver and copper coins have been found in many places.

The most significant legacy of Sher Shah was the famous highway which stretched from Satgaon and Gaur to the Indus River, thus spanning the whole empire from the east to the west, and providing a vital line of communication. Serais were built on this road after every kos (12 miles) with policemen to maintain order. It was this highway that Governor General Dalhousie reconstructed in the mid-nineteenth century in the form of the Grand Trunk Road that connected Calcutta with Peshawar.

On Sher Shah's death in an explosion while besieging Kalinjar Fort in Rajasthan (1545), his son ascended the Delhi throne under the name Islam Shah. Bengal continued under Delhi's rule during the tenure of Islam Shah, his shadowy son Firoz Shah and the next ruler Mohammad Adil Shah who usurped the throne. Taking advantage of Delhi's weakness, the governor of Bengal, Mohammad Khan Sur, declared independence and for a few years

the rebel Afghan nobles ruled Bengal despite being bitterly divided into groups.

RETURN OF HUMAYUN AND RESTORATION OF MUGHAL RULE

Taking advantage of the decline of the Pathan rule in Delhi by Sher Shah's successors, Humayun returned to Delhi in 1555 displacing Sher Shah's weak successor and restoring Mughal rule. Meanwhile, the sultanate of Gaur continued with Shams-ud-din Muhammad Shah, Ghiyas-ud-din Bahadur Shah and Ghiyas-ud-din Jalal Shah as rulers. In 1564 the Karrani family took over control, first under Taj Khan Karrani, and then his brother, the more well-known Suleman Karrani (1566–72), whose authority extended from Koch Bihar to Puri and from the river Sone to the Brahmaputra. He shifted the capital from insanitary Gaur to nearby Tanda and invaded Orissa, but nominally accepted the sovereignty of Emperor Akbar, Humayun's son and successor who was the real architect of the Mughal Empire. After Suleman's death in 1572 and the short-lived rule of his elder son Bayazed, Daud, the younger son, proclaimed independence and attacked Mughal territory up to Ghazipur district in UP. Akbar sent General Munim Khan to quell this rebellion. Initially, Munim Khan was bought over with gifts. Akbar himself came to the east and occupied Patna. He left Munim, assisted by Todar Mal, with reinforcements to continue the campaign. Munim Khan occupied Daud's capital Tanda. Daud fled to Orissa and Mughal rule was established up to Midnapore. Daud was defeated by Todar Mal at the battle of Tukaroi (Danton) in Midnapore and made his submission to Munim Khan. The battle of Tukaroi (1575) marked the annexation of Bengal by the Mughals. Next year, after Munim Khan's death at Tanda, Daud made yet another effort to assert his independence, but was defeated at the battle of Rajmahal (1576). Daud's veteran general, Kala Pahar,¹ fled wounded, and Daud himself was captured and executed. This ended the brief thirty-nine years of Afghan rule in Bengal that had begun with Sher Shah's coronation at Gaur in 1538. But the battle of Rajmahal symbolized only the de jure Mughal conquest of Bengal. Only the towns

were under Mughal control. The countryside remained under the control of Hindu chiefs and Afghan warlords. For many years Bengal under Akbar remained more as a territory under military occupation than an integral part of the empire with a settled administration.

RISE OF KOCH BIHAR KINGDOM

We may note in passing the rise of the new Koch Bihar kings in the Kamatapur region within a few years of the destruction of Kamatapur.² Bishwa Sinha who came from the Koch tribe was its founder. He declared independence around 1515 and ruled till 1540. His eldest son, Naranarayan, succeeded him and extended the frontiers of the Koch kingdom in several directions. His brother Shukledhwaj, known in Assam and north Bengal as Chilarai or the 'hawk-prince', was the commander of his army. He attacked the Ahom kingdom in the year 1547. At first he was defeated and had to retreat; but in 1562 he again led a stronger force, defeated the Ahom king, Suklenmung, near Dikhu River and occupied the capital Garhgaon. The Ahom king accepted Naranarayan's overlordship, gifted him a good part of his wealth and sent hostages to the Koch king. Shukledhwaj proceeded to occupy Cachar, Manipur and portions of Sylhet and Tripura after a series of military victories. He advanced as far as Jayantipur (Jaintia Hills) whose king also submitted to the Koch sovereign, sent revenues to the latter and agreed not to strike coins in his own name. In fact, the coins at Jayantipur until 1731 did not contain any king's name. The military might of Chilarai spread all over the north-east and Naranarayan, in acknowledgement of his brother's services, partitioned the kingdom, giving the eastern half to Chilarai with the river Sankosh as the boundary. This was the final separation of the kingdom of Koch Bihar and Kamrup.

Bengal Becomes a Province of the Mughal Empire

With the defeat and death of Daud, the last of the Karrani commanders in 1576 at Rajmahal, Bengal formally became a *subah* or province of the Mughal Empire and remained so until around the first quarter of the eighteenth century when Murshid Quli Khan, nominally a governor, no doubt, but a de facto sovereign in Bengal, established some sort of independent monarchy. During the earlier years the Mughals ruled from fortified towns like Dhaka or Tanda, while the countryside was under the effective control of powerful Hindu zamindars or Pathan overlords, often operating in concert and having an uneasy relationship with the nawab.¹

The first two *subedars*, viz. Khan-i-Jahan (1575–78) and Muzaffar Khan (1578–80), were shadowy figures. Their advent coincided with the first serious revolt Akbar faced in Bengal–Bihar region, partly from orthodox Islamic elements protesting against Akbar's secularism and perceived heterodoxy and partly from rebellion by vested interests that felt threatened by some of Akbar's new centralizing measures, including pay cuts of soldiers and revocation of unauthorized alienation of lands and false muster rolls of horses. The rebels supported Akbar's brother Mirza Hakim's claim from Kabul to the imperial throne. This was termed by Abu'l-Fazl 'as a revolt of the Bengal officers', by Jesuit Monserrate as 'war against the religion of Christ which had influenced Akbar' and by R.D. Banerjee as 'really another Afghan war'. It started at Tanda on 28 January 1580. Bengal rebels crossed the Ganga at Rajmahal and were joined by Bihar rebels. Akbar's governor, Muzaffar Khan, was defeated and a *khutba* was read in Mirza Hakim's name.

By 1582 Akbar was in a position to assert his authority and sent Khan Azam as subedar along with Todar Mal as his deputy to reclaim the province. Khan Azam defeated the Afghan forces led by Masum Khan Kabuli at Teliagarhi; but the campaign remained indecisive as Masum Kabuli ganged up with Isa Khan, one of the twelve warlords or *baro bhuyians*. Akbar then appointed a new subedar, Shahbaz Khan, but even he was not successful, as Khan Azam remained unreconciled. Shahbaz set up his capital at Tanda, but the Afghans overran the whole country up to Malda. The jealousy between Khan Azam and Shahbaz Khan delayed the recovery of Bengal for the Mughals. Meanwhile, Qutlu Khan Lehani, Daud's general, immortalized in Bankim Chandra's novel *Durgesh Nandini*, occupied Orissa and advanced up to Burdwan, but he was defeated near Burdwan and surrendered to the Mughals (1584).

Once Qutlu withdrew to Orissa, Shahbaz Khan left him alone. The new Mughal administrative set-up was introduced in Bengal under the subedar, also called *sipahsalar*. Several key officials were appointed in charge of departments like dewan (revenue), *sadar* (justice), qazi (criminal justice), *bakshi* (military accounts) and kotwal (in charge of towns). Shahbaz Khan defeated the Pathan forces under Masum Kabuli and pursued them up to Bikrampur in Dhaka, which was controlled by Isa Khan, and asked Isa Khan to surrender. Isa Khan deluded him for several months with false promises and then launched a surprise attack on him on 30 September 1584. Shahbaz Khan was defeated and was forced to retreat to Tanda. Shahbaz Khan turned to diplomacy and money power and by 1586–87 won over some of the Pathan warlords. Isa Khan, now isolated, made peace with the Mughals. Masum also sent his son to the Delhi court and himself went to Mecca. By 1587 Akbar's sovereignty was acknowledged all over Bengal. From that time till the subedarship of Murshid Quli Khan from 1717 onwards, Bengal was just a province of the Mughal Empire and ruled by a governor who took orders from Delhi.

After Shahbaz Khan, Akbar sent Raja Man Singh of Ajmer (Rajasthan) as the new governor. The rule of Man Singh was important in the sense that he made the maximum impact in subduing the recalcitrant warlords who effectively ruled Bengal till then. Man Singh was appointed governor of Bengal in 1593 and stayed in overall control till 1605 despite the temporary governorship by his two sons on two occasions under his overall charge. Ultimately, he was to be recalled by Emperor Jahangir on his accession in 1605.

Immediately after his arrival at Tanda, the Bengal capital, Man Singh sent his army in different directions to suppress the rebels. His son Himmat Singh occupied the Bhushana Fort (April 1595). On 7 November 1595, Man Singh laid the foundation of a new capital at Rajmahal and named it Akbarnagar. He first proceeded against Isa Khan and forced the Pathans to fall back to the east of the Brahmaputra River. Most of the zamindari of Isa Khan fell to the Mughals and the rebellion in other parts of Bengal was suppressed too. In 1596 Man Singh became seriously ill in his camp at Ghoraghat and, hearing of it, the other rebels got together a naval force and proceeded against the Mughal army in large boats. As the Mughals had no navy, the rebels came within 24 miles of Ghoraghat without any resistance, but they were forced back due to a fall in the level of the water. On his recovery from illness Man Singh sent an army against the rebels who retreated to the forest tract in Egarasindur in Mymensingh.

Isa Khan joined up with Kedar Roy of Sripur, another of the baro bhuiyans. Raja Lakshmi Narayan of Koch Bihar was on the side of the Mughals, but his cousin Raghudeb sided with Isa Khan and they invaded Koch Bihar; Lakshmi Narayan sought help from Man Singh. At the end of 1596, when Man Singh advanced with his army against Isa Khan, the latter ran away, but again invaded Koch Bihar as soon as the Mughal army left. To counteract the move, Man Singh sent his son, Durjan Singh, with an army and naval force to occupy Isa Khan's fortified residence at Katrabhu. On 5 September 1597, the huge naval force of Isa Khan and Masum Khan surrounded the Mughal army. Durjan Singh was killed and many Mughal soldiers were captured, but Isa Khan released the captives, withdrew from

Koch Bihar and entered into a treaty with the Mughals by accepting the suzerainty of the emperor. Two years later, Isa Khan died (1599).

Meanwhile, Man Singh's other son, Himmat Singh, had conquered Bhushana, but he died of cholera shortly thereafter. After the death of two of his sons, Man Singh, with the emperor's permission, went to Ajmer to rest in 1598, and his eldest son, Jagat Singh, was appointed governor in his place. But Jagat Singh died of heavy drinking at Agra. Man Singh's young son, Maha Singh, was now appointed governor of Bengal under Man Singh's overall authority. Taking this opportunity, the Pathans in Bengal again raised their head, successfully fought the Mughal army on several occasions and occupied extensive territories, including a portion of Orissa.

These reverses forced Man Singh to return to Bengal. The rebels in eastern Bengal were routed in 1601. Next year, Man Singh set up his camp at Dhaka. Kedar Roy, zamindar of Sripur, surrendered to Usman (nephew of late Qutlu Khan, the Pathan ruler of Orissa) who had shifted his operation to the east in the trans-Brahmaputra region, crossed the Brahmaputra River, defeated the Mughal commander in charge of the outpost there and forced him to take shelter in Bhawal. Man Singh at once moved to Bhawal and defeated Usman. Many Pathans were killed, many Pathan gunboats captured and a large quantity of ammunition was seized. In the meantime, Kedar Roy revolted and joined forces with Musa Khan, son of Isa Khan, Daud Khan, son of the wazir of Qutlu Khan and some other zamindars. Man Singh, on reaching Dhaka in 1602, sent a force against the insurgents, but it could not cross the turbulent Ichhamati River despite repeated attempts. Man Singh himself went to Shahpur and crossed the river on his elephant. The Mughal cavalry followed him across. After this act of bravery, Man Singh attacked the rebels and defeated them. He chased them for a long distance.

This time there was a new menace—the Mug pirates of Arakan who started cruising on the rivers near Dhaka and looting villages. Man Singh moved against them, defeated them and forced them to take shelter in their boats. Kedar Roy joined the Mugs with his navy and attacked the Mughal outposts at Srinagar. Man Singh sent a force with cannon to relieve the

outpost. In a fierce battle near Bikrampur, Kedar Roy was wounded and captured, but died before he could be taken to Man Singh (1603). Many Portuguese pirates and Bengalee sailors under Kedar Roy were killed and the Arakan king was forced to return to his country. Man Singh prepared for a showdown with Usman, but the latter fled to the east beyond the Mughal's control. Thereafter peace and tranquillity returned to Bengal.

On Akbar's death (1605), his son, Salim, succeeded him on the throne and assumed the name of Jahangir. Sher Afghan was at the time the *faujdar* of Burdwan. His wife, Meherunnisa, was reported to be a rare beauty. According to a popular belief, which is not supported by any historical evidence, Jahangir was captivated by her beauty even before her marriage and after becoming emperor wanted to possess her. It seems that with the object of making it easier for him to get her he removed Man Singh and appointed, as subedar of Bengal, a trusted man, Qutb-ud-din Khan Koka, the son of his foster-mother. Sher Afghan was accused of disloyal intentions and, in order to sort out the matter, Qutb-ud-din met Sher Afghan at Burdwan for a discussion. From an altercation they came to blows. Sher Afghan killed Qutb-ud-din and was killed by the latter's followers. Sher Afghan's widow was taken to the Mughal imperial harem at Agra and after four years she was married to Jahangir (1611). She was given the name 'Nur Jahan'. She was destined to become the real power behind the throne and go down in history as the famed Empress Nur Jahan.²

CONSOLIDATION UNDER ISLAM KHAN

The next major event was the five-year rule of Islam Khan as governor, commencing from June 1608 when he completed the mission of Man Singh in putting down all insurgency in Bengal. By 1613 when he died, Mughal administration was firmly established in Bengal. When Islam Khan joined his post, the writ of the Mughals ran only in the capital Rajmahal, a few well-guarded thanas or outposts under the faujdars and the regions immediately surrounding them. Of the Mughal thanas or outposts those worth mentioning were at Ghoraghat on the banks of the Karatoya River

(Dinajpur district), Alapsingh and Sherpur (Mymensingh district), Bhawal (Dhaka), Toke (22 miles to the north of Bhawal) and Trimohini (near modern Narayanganj) at the confluence of Padma, Lakhya and Meghna rivers.

Shortly after Islam Khan arrived, the veteran Pathan warlord, Usman Khan, became active and suddenly attacked and occupied the Mughal outpost of Alapsingh. Islam Khan immediately sent an army and recovered the outpost; but this drove home the lesson that Mughal authority in Bengal was still shaky. He launched a systematic campaign to consolidate the Mughal hold and establish peace. His first success came with the willing submission of Pratapaditya to Mughal authority. It was agreed that Pratapaditya himself would meet Islam Khan at Alaipur with his army and war equipment and join the campaign against troublesome Musa Khan. His son Sangramaditya was to stay in Islam Khan's durbar as hostage to ensure Pratapaditya's good behaviour. After the rains, Islam Khan proceeded towards lower Bengal from Rajmahal with a big army and navy and a large number of guns in big boats. Reaching Gaur, Islam Khan sent his army against the three recalcitrant zamindars in the region to the west of the Bhagirathi. Of these, Bir Hambir and Salim Khan surrendered without a fight and Shams Khan surrendered after a fortnight's battle. Islam Khan marched southwards through Murshidabad, crossed the Padma and arrived at Alaipur within the present district of Rajshahi (1609). Pitambar, zamindar of Putia, Ananta, zamindar of Chilajugar within Bhaturia Bazaar pargana and Ilahi Bux, zamindar of Alaipur surrendered.

Pratapaditya came to Islam Khan's camp on the river Atrai as promised. It was agreed that he would fight Musa Khan along with the Mughals and send a navy comprising 400 boats and that this navy under the command of his son Sangramaditya would fight along with the Mughal navy. Thus Islam Khan, with the main Mughal army, marched south along the Karatoya River and came to Katasgarh at the confluence of the Padma, the Dhaleshwari and the Ichhamati rivers. The Mughal navy also came up and anchored there. Musa Khan had a strong fort close to Katasgarh on the river Ichhamati,

which was the objective of the Mughal force. In order to mislead Musa Khan, a small army and naval contingents were dispatched towards Dhaka.

Musa Khan now attacked the Mughal camp at Katasgarh with 700 boats in alliance with ten or twelve other zamindars on whom he could rely. After the first day's battle, Musa Khan set up, overnight, an improvised fort well-protected by earth ramparts at Dakachera, close to Katasgarh; and on two consecutive days he marched out from the fort in the morning and launched heavy attacks on the Mughal force. In the grim battles that followed, both sides suffered heavy losses. Musa Khan retreated to his fort at Jatipur and Dakachera. The Mughals repeatedly attacked the fort, but the fort fell to them only after a long-drawn battle involving major damage. This undermined Musa's power significantly. The Mughals occupied Dhaka. From Dhaka, Islam Khan sent armies against Sripur and Bikrampur. Musa Khan, after arranging for the protection of his capital Sonargaon, collected his navy in the river Lakhya. The Mughal army stationed itself on the other bank of the river facing the enemy and stayed there for a few days before launching a night attack on Katrabhu, Musa Khan's ancestral home. Katrabhu was occupied, and a few other forts also fell within a short time, one after another. Musa Khan was forced to run away, leaving Sonargaon an easy prey to the Mughal army. He took shelter on an island on the river Meghna. The zamindars who were his allies in the war deserted him and surrendered one by one to the Mughals. Islam Khan sent his army against Anantamanikya, zamindar of Bhulua. The king of Arakan came to the latter's assistance. Anantamanikya heroically fought from his fort and the Mughals failed to destroy his defence. They bribed one of the principal officers of Bhulua and, with his help, managed to undermine the defence of the fort and capture it. Anantamanikya fled to Arakan, leaving his kingdom and his possessions in the hands of the Mughals.

Musa Khan realized that further insurgency would be futile and surrendered to the Mughals. Islam Khan magnanimously let him and his allies keep their territories as jagirs. Mughal soldiers were deputed to protect the jagirs. The jagirdars' own forces were disbanded and their gunboats formed a part of the Mughal navy. Musa Khan was kept under

surveillance in Islam Khan's durbar. This was the end of the longest insurgency against the Mughals in Bengal.

With war against Musa Khan over, Islam Khan turned his attention to fighting the veteran Pathan insurgent, Usman Khan, operating in the trans-Brahmaputra region. Overcoming resistance at every step, the Mughal force occupied Bokainagar, the capital of Usman (1611). Usman took shelter with Bayazid Karrani, the Pathan chieftain of Sylhet. Gradually, the other rebel Pathan chieftains submitted to the Mughals. Though Pathan resistance was not completely crushed, Islam Khan postponed further action against them and thought it more important to proceed at once to subdue Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore who had gone back on his earlier promise to join Islam Khan in his war against Musa Khan. In a bid to prevent Mughal invasion, Pratapaditya sent his son Sangramaditya, with eighty gunboats, to Islam Khan with a plea for forgiveness. Islam Khan, however, spurned the plea and had the gunboats destroyed. He then sent a large army against Pratapaditya and simultaneously another against his son-in-law, Ramachandra, king of Bakla. The navy sailed along the Padma, the Jalangi and the Ichhamati rivers and arrived at Salka (modern Tibi) situated 10 miles to the south of Bongaon near the confluence of Jamuna and Ichhamati rivers. Here Pratapaditya's eldest son, Udayaditya, was waiting with the major portion of his army, many elephants, cannon and 500 gunboats. He attacked the Mughal navy, but due to heavy shelling by the Mughal army from both banks of the Ichhamati, Udayaditya's navy could not advance far and retreated on the death of its commander Khwaja Kamal. Udayaditya escaped, leaving the greater part of his navy and ammunition in the hands of the Mughals.

Meanwhile, the expedition against Bakla had also ended successfully. Its young king, Ramachandra, ignoring his mother's advice to make peace with the Mughals, fought them from one of his forts for a whole week. Then the fort fell. His mother threatened to take poison unless he made peace with the Mughals. Ramachandra surrendered and was taken to Dhaka as a captive. Bakla became part of the Mughal Empire. The Mughal army marched eastwards to meet Pratapaditya. Pratapaditya resisted the Mughals

from his new fort at Kagarghata 5 miles to the north of his capital, Dhumghat, but the fort fell to the superior generalship and tactics of the Mughals, and Pratapaditya surrendered. It was agreed that the Mughal general Ghyan Khan would himself accompany Pratapaditya to meet Islam Khan and that the Mughal army would stay at Kagarghata. Udayaditya would also stay at Dhumghat. Islam Khan passed orders for the imprisonment of Pratapaditya and annexation of his kingdom. According to popular tradition, Pratapaditya was kept confined in an iron cage at Dhaka and was being transported to Delhi when he died on the way at Benares, but there is no historical evidence for this. Bengali literature has depicted Pratapaditya as a national patriot who resisted the Mughal invaders, but history does not bear out such description. Pratapaditya was undoubtedly a very powerful chieftain who fought the Mughals with valour, but the facts narrated above do not fit in with the traditional picture of a patriotic hero who became a freedom fighter. His portrayal in Rabindranath Tagore's play *Bauthakuranir Haat* as a calculating, self-centred person seems more realistic. According to another popular tradition prevailing in Jaipur (Rajasthan), Man Singh defeated Pratapaditya and had the family deity, Jashoreshwari (Goddess Kali) removed to his fort at Ajmer. While the shifting of the image is probably true, there is no historical evidence of a direct encounter between Man Singh and Pratapaditya.

The Pathan insurgent, Usman Khan, still remained to be subdued. The Mughal army could not cope with the superior courage and tactics displayed by Usman and was defeated at Daulambapur in Sylhet and pushed back to its camp. Unfortunately, however, Usman himself was killed and his soldiers left the battlefield at night (12 March 1612). Usman's sons and brothers got ready to continue the battle, but disunity among the Pathan leaders made further engagement impossible and they surrendered to the Mughals. Islam Khan annexed Usman Khan's kingdom and imprisoned his sons and brothers. After a short resistance, all the Pathan chieftains surrendered on hearing of the defeat and death of Usman Khan. Sylhet was included in Bengal subah and its principal Pathan leaders were imprisoned. A force was sent against Satrudaman, king of Cachar, who fought for some

time before he surrendered and agreed to pay tribute to the Mughal emperor (1612).

The Mughal rule was thus firmly established in Bengal by Islam Khan. His other important action was shifting the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka. He himself had been living in Dhaka city all this time. He never personally commanded any army in battle, but was a great strategist. Man Singh had lived in Dhaka earlier for two years (1602–04) and had fortified it. Islam Khan built a new fort and connected it with good roads. Due to a change in the current of the Ganga, big gunboats could not go up to Rajmahal and Dhaka was strategically better situated than Rajmahal for dealing with the incursions of the Mug and Portuguese pirates and for generally controlling riverine East Bengal. It was in these circumstances that Islam Khan shifted the capital of Bengal from Rajmahal to Dhaka in April 1612 and renamed it Jahangirnagar to perpetuate the name of the emperor.

After Mughal authority had been well established in Bengal, Islam Khan turned his attention to Kamrup. The king of Koch Bihar had conquered the kingdom of Kamrup and a branch of the Koch Bihar royal family was at this time ruling over the independent kingdom, which extended from the Sankosh River on the west to Baranadi on the east. The reigning king, Parikshitnarayan, possessed a large army, a navy and numerous elephants. He fought with the Mughals, but was defeated and Kamrup was annexed to Bengal subah (1613). Islam Khan invaded Koch Bihar, although it was under Mughal protection, and annexed a portion of it. He also imprisoned the members of the family of the king of Susang (Mymensingh) who had earlier submitted to the Mughals. It was at the instigation of the king of Susang that he invaded Kamrup.

Shortly after the annexation of Kamrup, Islam Khan died at Bhawal near Dhaka. He had shown unparalleled ability, courage and statesmanship by consolidating Mughal imperial authority over the whole of Bengal within a period of five years, thus completing a process started by Man Singh. Also, he established peace, order and administrative efficiency in the province during this period.

GOVERNORSHIP OF QASIM KHAN AND IBRAHIM KHAN

Islam Khan's younger brother, Qasim Khan, succeeded him as subedar, but he had neither the wisdom nor the competence of his elder brother. He behaved ungraciously towards his officers and the defeated kings. He broke the undertaking given by Islam Khan to the kings of Koch Bihar and Kamrup and imprisoned them. This led to revolts in both the kingdoms and these could be put down only with difficulty. An army had to be sent against Cachar's king Satrudaman who had revolted against the Mughals, but this campaign was unsuccessful, and for a long time Satrudaman maintained his independence. The zamindars of Birbhum also turned to insurgency. Qasim Khan sent an army against them, but without any success. The territory of Bhulua was ravaged by a joint attack launched by the Mug king of Arakan and the Portuguese pirate Sebastian Gonzales, who controlled Sandip (1614). Next year the king of Arakan again led an invasion, but was accidentally captured by the Mughals. He could secure his release only by handing over his retinue and wealth to the captors. Qasim Khan also sent an army for the conquest of Assam, but it was defeated by the Ahom king. An army sent against Chittagong also returned after sustaining defeat. All these reverses weakened the Mughal administration in Bengal during Qasim Khan's regime (1614–17).

The next subedar, Ibrahim Khan, conquered Tripura and imprisoned the king with the members of his family. The king of Arakan again invaded south-western Bengal and attacked the villages on the banks of the Meghna, but was driven away. On the whole, during the regime of Ibrahim Khan, Bengal experienced peace and tranquillity and the authority and prestige of the Mughal emperor was re-established.

Ibrahim Khan faced a dilemma when Prince Khurram (Shah Jahan) rebelled against his father in 1623. After his defeat by the imperial forces, the prince retreated towards Bengal, determined to carve out an independent kingdom there with the help of the sons of the old rebel Musa Khan, the king of Arakan—the perpetual enemy of the Mughals—and the Portuguese pirates. Ibrahim Khan at first hesitated to fight with the emperor's son, but when Khurram occupied Rajmahal, he felt duty-bound to resist. In the battle

that followed, he was defeated and killed. Prince Khurram who occupied the capital Jahangirnagar for some time, began to rule there as an independent king (April 1624). He had already occupied Orissa and he next occupied parts of Bihar and Awadh. He was, however, shortly afterwards defeated by an army sent by the emperor and fled towards the south (October 1624) where he became governor of the Deccan after reconciliation with his father. On Jahangir's death in 1628, Khurram ascended the imperial throne at Delhi.

RULE OF SHAH JAHAN AND AURANGZEB

On the whole peace and prosperity prevailed in Bengal from 1628 when Shah Jahan ascended the throne till Aurangzeb's death in 1707. Three subedars who governed Bengal during the greater part of this period were Shah Jahan's son, Shuja (1639–59), Shayesta Khan (1664–88) and Aurangzeb's grandson, Azim-ush-Shan (1697–1712).

Towards the beginning of Shah Jahan's reign, the Portuguese were driven away from the Hooghly port (1632). There was also a war with the Ahoms of Assam. In 1615 the Mughal army was defeated by the Ahom king. Meanwhile, there was a revolt in Kamrup on the death of King Parikshitnarayan in 1615. His younger brother, Balinarayan, took shelter with the Ahom king and this led to a long-drawn war between the Ahom kings and the Bengal subedar. Balinarayan at one stage routed the Mughal army and captured the faujdar of Kamrup, but ultimately the Mughals won, Kamrup was reconquered and the war was ended by a treaty with the Ahom king (1638). The rivers Baranadi on the north and Asurali on the south were fixed as the boundary between Bengal and Kamrup.

During Shuja's long and peaceful rule, trade and industry flourished in Bengal and the province became rich. In 1658, when Emperor Shah Jahan fell seriously ill, there was a tussle among his sons Dara, Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad, each staking his claim to the throne. In this war of succession, Aurangzeb first ganged up with Murad and defeated Dara. The emperor was kept a prisoner in Agra Fort. Shuja, who had been assured of being allowed to retain Bihar and Bengal by Aurangzeb, challenged his brother and

marched towards Agra, but he was defeated by Aurangzeb's forces in the battle of Khajua (1659). The Mughal general, Mir Jumla, followed him and took possession of Dhaka (May 1660). Shuja fled to Arakan where he was slain two years later on the charge of having conspired against the king of Arakan (1661).

Mir Jumla was appointed subedar of Bengal (June 1660). While Shuja had been busy fighting Aurangzeb, the king of Koch Bihar seized the opportunity to occupy Kamrup. Similarly, Gauhati was occupied by the Ahom king (March 1659). These two kings later fell out, and the Ahom king ousted the king of Koch Bihar and took forcible possession of Kamrup (March 1660).

On taking charge of the subah, Mir Jumla sent a large force against Kamrup and Koch Bihar (1661). The king of Koch Bihar having fled, that kingdom was easily occupied. He proceeded against the Ahom king, who also ran away. His kingdom too was occupied by Mir Jumla (March 1662). With the outbreak of the monsoon, however, the whole country was inundated. The Mughal outposts being separated from one another, the problem of maintaining lines of communication and supply of provisions became very real. The Mughal camp was submerged, horses died of starvation and an epidemic broke out. The Ahom king took advantage of the situation and repeatedly attacked the Mughal camp. The end of the monsoon brought relief and Mir Jumla once again advanced against the Ahom king. He was, however, suddenly taken ill, and this forced him to enter into a treaty with the Ahom king and to return to Bengal with his army. He died when he was within a few miles of Dhaka (March 1663). In the midst of the confusion, the king of Koch Bihar recovered his kingdom, though not his entire territory. Scattered pockets remained inside Mughal-held territories that still owed allegiance to the Koch king. Similarly, some pockets remained inside the Koch Bihar kingdom that owed allegiance to Dhaka. Presumably, this was how the Koch Bihar enclaves started—a vexed issue that still remains unsolved.

In March 1664 Shayesta Khan joined as subedar. He governed Bengal for a period of twenty-four years. He used to live an ostentatious life with royal grandeur and kept the emperor happy by sending him huge sums of money collected by fleecing the people. A huge income was derived from the monopolies in trade that Shayesta Khan had introduced. Contemporary accounts by Englishmen speak of his avarice and he is said to have collected thirty-eight crore rupees during the first thirteen years of his rule as subedar. His daily income was said to be two lakh rupees and his expenses amounted to a lakh a day.

Shayesta Khan himself never took part in battle. He spent his days in comfort in his harem, but had the instinct to choose competent officials who carried on the administration with an iron hand and also fought battles successfully. He brought Koch Bihar back to subjugation after driving away the rebel king and also put down some petty rebellions here and there. The principal event of his rule was the conquest of Chittagong, which had been occupied from about the middle of the fifteenth century by the king of Arakan and had become the main centre of the Mug and Portuguese pirates operating in collaboration. Shayesta Khan first captured the island of Sandip (November 1665) that was being used as a base by the marauders for slave trading. About this time the Mugs and the Portuguese fell out. Shayesta Khan won over the Portuguese by bribe and offer of shelter, and all the *firangees* of Chittagong, along with their families, took shelter in Mughal territory. With their help he conquered Chittagong (January 1666). Under orders of Aurangzeb, Chittagong was renamed Islamabad and a Mughal faujdar was posted there. Subsequently, Shayesta Khan quarrelled with English merchants of Hooghly on the issue of whether the private trade of the East India Company should be exempt from customs duties as allowed to the Company's official trade by Shah Shuja. As the controversy remained unsettled, the English, in a fit of rashness, declared war on the Mughal Empire. The Mughals attacked the factory at Hooghly, forcing the English to abandon it and withdraw to their boats on the river. The English even made a foolhardy attempt to seize Chittagong and eventually took shelter on the Hijli island at the mouth of the river. Negotiations succeeded in 1690

when they were allowed to restart their factory in Bengal in a new location, Calcutta.

Shayesta Khan, whose rule ended in June 1688 is still remembered in Bengal. It is said that during his rule rice used to sell at five *maunds* a rupee. East Bengal produced an enormous quantity of rice and the price of rice is an index of the real value of the reputed daily income of two lakh rupees of Shayesta Khan. His wide popularity was also due to extensive building programmes, his pomp and grandeur, and the liberal gifts, donations and the patronage to the needy. All this largely accounted for the daily expenses of a lakh of rupees incurred by him. It is established that it was the revenue from Bengal that largely sustained the Mughal Empire. But Bengal was much more than the main source of revenue for the empire. It was also the centre for manufacture of fine luxuries such as muslin. Through its traders and entrepreneurs, Bengal took active part in maritime commerce controlled by foreigners.

IBRAHIM KHAN II AND AZIM-USH-SHAN

Shayesta Khan was succeeded as subedar of Bengal by Khan-i-Jahan, the worthless son of Aurangzeb's foster-mother, but he was dismissed after a year. He, however, took with him two crore rupees when he left. After him came Ibrahim Khan II. The principal event of his regime was the revolt of Sobha Singh, a petty zamindar of Midnapore, who started looting extensively. Sobha was resisted by Krishnaram, the revenue collector of Burdwan, who was killed in January 1696. Sobha Singh occupied Burdwan and, with the funds he had plundered, he got together a large following and assumed the title of Raja. Rahim Khan, a Pathan sardar of Orissa joined hands with him and added to his strength. They occupied a territory—180 miles from north to south—on the western bank of the Ganga near Hooghly. Subedar Ibrahim Khan did not give much importance to this revolt and simply ordered the faujdar of western Bengal to quell it. The faujdar was, however, forced to take shelter in Hooghly Fort and, finding the situation difficult, surreptitiously left at night. Sobha Singh's army entered Hooghly and sacked it. On an appeal from the distressed residents of the town, the

Dutch merchants of Chinsurah sent a force to chase Sobha Singh away. He left Hooghly and returned to Burdwan. There he met with his death while trying to dishonour Krishnaram's captive daughter who, in saving her honour, stabbed Sobha Singh to death and thereafter took her own life.

On Sobha's death, his soldiers elected Rahim Khan as their leader. Rahim Khan assumed the name Rahim Shah and had himself ceremoniously installed as king. Riff-raffs from different areas joined his force, which gradually swelled to a cavalry of 10,000 and an infantry of 60,000 soldiers with which he advanced towards Maksudabad (present-day Murshidabad) and defeated a Mughal force of 5,000. He sacked Maksudabad and occupied Rajmahal and Malda. Thereafter, his followers split up into small bands of bandits who plundered the countryside (1696–97).

When information of these happenings reached Aurangzeb, the emperor dismissed Ibrahim Khan and appointed his grandson Azim-ud-din (known as Azim-ush-Shan) as subedar of Bengal. He also ordered Zabardast Khan, son of Ibrahim Khan, to crush the plundering insurgents. Zabardast Khan met Rahim Shah in battle and defeated him. Rajmahal, Malda, Maksudabad, Burdwan and other regions occupied by Rahim Shah were recovered and Rahim Shah took shelter in the forests. Azim-ush-Shan, on reaching Bengal, did not give credit to Zabardast Khan for his successful expedition, but slighted him in public. In disgust, the latter left Bengal. Rahim Shah reappeared and started ransacking the countryside. He proceeded towards Burdwan and, on the pretext of discussing the terms of a treaty, met the principal minister of the subedar and killed him. Azim-ush-Shan sent an army to deal with him and Rahim Shah was eventually routed and killed.

Azim-ush-Shan was subedar of Bengal from 1697 to 1712. For the last ten years, he was, in addition, subedar of Bihar, and from 1704 he operated from Patna. He knew that the death of the old emperor would be followed by a struggle for succession and prepared himself for this eventuality by amassing a fortune in various illegal ways and by oppressing the people. This led to a confrontation with his dewan, Murshid Quli Khan, an able and honest official who blocked the illegal sources of the subedar's income. But

Murshid Quli Khan had the emperor's support. Murshid Quli Khan eventually became de facto subedar of Bengal and Bihar during Bahadur Shah's reign and was named subedar in 1717.

Appearance of Europeans

A new element made its entry into Bengal's history during the sixteenth century. From the fifteenth century onwards, European mariners had been trying to discover a direct sea route to India to reduce their dependence on the Arabs and Turks in trading with the fabled East. In that process Columbus stumbled on to America in 1492 and Vasco da Gama eventually discovered the sea route to India via the Cape of Good Hope in 1498. The Portuguese seized Goa in 1510 and occupied several strategic centres in the east of the subcontinent, including Chittagong. They were followed by other Europeans like the Dutch, French, Danes and the English. The Portuguese, in their zeal to conquer and also to spread Christianity, occupied Chittagong during the reign of Nusrat Shah and started sailing up to Gaur through the Hooghly River and also the Meghna. It was during Ghiyas-ud-din Mahmud Shah's reign that the Portuguese first arrived in Bengal. In 1534 the governor of Goa, Nuno da Cunha, sent 200 men on five ships led by Martin Afonso de Mello Jusarte to Chittagong to commence trading with Bengal. A delegation proceeded to the sultan at Gaur with costly presents. But the sultan not only had the delegation members arrested, but even Jusarte with thirty other Portuguese were arrested at Chittagong and brought to Gaur. The Portuguese helped Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din Mahmud Shah in his military engagements against the Afghans and thus secured their release and got the sultan's permission to construct a fort at Chittagong. Soon misunderstandings developed again and Jusarte and his men were taken prisoners a second time. The governor of Goa sent Antonio de Silva Meneses with nine ships and 350 men to Chittagong to relieve the situation. As their letter to the Gaur authorities remained unanswered, they sacked Chittagong and the nearby villages. The sultan was adamant

initially, but later released the Portuguese prisoners after they had helped him against Sher Khan's invasion of Gaur. In 1537, when Sher Khan laid siege on Gaur, Ghiyas-ud-din Mahmud formally requested the Portuguese governor of Goa for military help. A force from Goa in nine ships led by Perez de Sampayo was sent to Bengal, but Sampayo, on his arrival, got the news that Gaur had already fallen to Sher Khan and Sultan Mahmud Shah had died. Every year Portuguese merchant ships would lay anchor at a place called Betore opposite the present Calcutta Port and do extensive trading. They opened a factory at Satgaon in 1517 and another at Hooghly in 1579–80. But they earned notoriety on account of capturing people from the riverine villages and selling them as slaves, their indiscriminate looting and converting people to Christianity by force. The popular Bengali expression *harmad* (which must have come from 'armada') to denote the Portuguese meant 'notorious freebooters'.

The lure of Eastern trade also brought other competitors. The Dutch, the British and the French (in that order) staked their claims for a share of maritime trade with the East which, among other things, meant control over the spice trade. Spices were of great importance to the aristocrats in Europe who desperately needed these, particularly pepper, to provide taste to their food and drinks during the long winter and also to act as preservatives. Portuguese naval supremacy was soon challenged by the Dutch. The Dutch successfully captured from the Portuguese East Indies (modern Indonesia) in 1617, Malacca in 1641 and Ceylon (present Sri Lanka) by 1654. They appeared in Bengal by the middle of the seventeenth century and set up settlements at Hooghly, Cossimbazar (near Murshidabad), Patna and Dhaka, as also at Surat, Agra and the Coromandel Coast. By the end of the century, of the great network of Portuguese fortresses, which at one time dominated Asia, nothing was left except for Goa, Daman, Diu and Macao. The main reason for the eclipse of Portuguese power was Portugal's annexation by Spain in 1580. Emperor Shah Jahan turned hostile to the Portuguese and ordered the subedar of Bengal to capture their factory at Hooghly in 1632. Those who were captured were given a choice between slavery and conversion. The fall of Hooghly, for all practical purposes, signalled the fall

of Portuguese power in Bengal, although Portuguese marauders continued to trouble the coastal areas for years. The king of Arakan had occupied Sandip and Dianga. After 1632, the Portuguese only operated as pirates in alliance with Thiri, the king of Arakan who believed he was a future Buddha who would unite the whole world under him. For many years the Portuguese harmads and the bandits of Arakan carried on in unison a reign of terror in the entire coastal region of Bengal which survived in Bengalee memory for generations.

It was now the turn of the Dutch merchants to enter Bengal. The Dutch company, Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie, established its factory at Chinsurah near Hooghly in 1653 and subsequently two other subsidiary factories at Patna and Cossimbazar. Soon, the French East India Company (Compagnie des Indes Orientales) set up a factory at Chandernagore (Chandannagar) near Hooghly. Emperor Farrukh Siyar granted important customs concessions to both the Dutch and the French.

The English East India Company came to Bengal after the Dutch and before the French, but it was they who were destined to create an empire in India. The Company came into existence on 24 September 1599 when eighty merchants of the city of London met to establish a formal association for carrying out trade with India. The Company received a royal charter. Interestingly, one major reason given was the raising of the price of pepper by the Dutch merchants of Amsterdam from three shillings to eight shillings a pound, thereby putting English traders, hitherto only dealing with India indirectly through Amsterdam, into serious difficulty. The Company had to fight the Portuguese in the Arabian Sea and the Dutch in the East Indies. The Portuguese were easily defeated, leading to the capture of Ormuz on the Persian Gulf, and the setting up of the first English factory at Surat with Jahangir's permission, along with agencies at Ahmedabad, Agra and Ajmer (1612). This followed the successful embassy of Sir Thomas Roe (1615) to the imperial court at Agra in contrast to the complete failure of Hawkins's mission to Agra in 1508. Roe came on behalf of both King James I and the East India Company. His mission was an important landmark. Roe's advice to the Company was 'let this be perceived as a rule that if you will profit,

seek it at sea, and in quiet trade—it is an error to afford garrisons and lead wars in India’. That was a lesson learnt from the Portuguese and Dutch activities in Asia. This was good advice and the English did seem to adhere to it for about a century, but thereafter ignored it, as their growing involvement in local affairs pushed them ahead.

The bitter fighting with the Dutch in the East Indies led to the famous massacre of the English by the Dutch at Amboyna (1623) and the end of English ambition in Indonesia. Under a tacit understanding, the English withdrew from Indonesia, and the Dutch gave up their pretensions in Bengal, although there had to be another short war in 1759 before they finally withdrew from India. The East India Company soon became a prosperous trading company. There was an average annual return of 25 per cent on the capital employed, which at times rose to 50 per cent in cash with 100 per cent in bonus shares for every share held. The English king was prompted to end its monopoly and grant a charter to a rival group of London merchants in 1635. The rivalry between the two companies caused many problems until they got merged in 1657. The first factory to be established in Bengal was at Balasore in 1633. In 1650 permission was obtained from the nawab of Bengal to trade in Bengal. A factory was established at Hooghly in 1651. This was followed by factories at Dhaka, Rajmahal and Malda. Soon, the English came to have a visible presence in Bengal through a network of trading, including private trading by its officials backed by a small but effective military contingent. Meanwhile, the Danes and the French had also come and the neighbouring river ports of Serampore, Chandernagore, Hooghly and Chinsurah became seats of Danish, French, English and Dutch factories, respectively, in Bengal. On the western coast the English received from the Portuguese as dowry of Catherine, the Portuguese king’s daughter, on her marriage to King Charles II (1660), the island of Bombay (Mumbai) which was to replace Surat as the Company’s western headquarters.

In the closing years of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth, as Mughal authority declined to the point where it could no longer provide stable conditions for merchants, the European merchant

warriors moved to fill the political vacuum in and around their settlements. They offered, on a small scale, a forerunner of the nineteenth-century Pax Britannica or Pax Netherlandica (in Java) in lieu of the Mughal peace. Another significant development was that while wars and rivalries among nations in Europe did not have an impact on any of the European merchants in Asia in the past, these came to have a direct impact now through armed conflicts between, say, Madras and Pondicherry, or between Calcutta and Chandernagore.

From the beginning the English Company's men showed their determination to protect their commercial interests by their armed might, fortified by a belief acquired in the course of their encounters in western and southern India with the forces of Indian rulers that a small European contingent, by dint of its discipline, firepower and superior morale, could at any time get the better of larger hordes of native forces who were undisciplined, ill-equipped and without any motivation or strong will to fight. In 1686, following a commercial dispute, the English at Hooghly declared war on the mighty Mughal Empire with only ten armed ships and 600 men. Clearly, they were not interested in peaceful trade any more. When the Mughal governor Qasim Khan attacked their Hooghly factory, the chief of the factory, Job Charnock, decided against frontal resistance on land and in favour of boarding their ships and sailing downstream. After a temporary halt at Sutanuti village (future Calcutta), the English sailed down to Hijli island and burnt down the town of Balasore in retaliation. The Mughals besieged them at Hijli.

When a truce was signed, the English did not return to Hooghly, but to the temporary halt at Sutanuti (Calcutta), which Job Charnock favoured on account of the security of its location. It was protected on the west by the Hooghly River and on the south and the east by impassable marshes. The ships could easily defend the settlement from Mughal or other invaders from the western bank of the river. Only the northern approach around Cossipore and Baranagar needed to be defended. Ships from the river could supplement such defence and rush troops easily, even cutting off the invading enemy from its base. Also, there was an excellent anchoring place

for large ships, which eventually became the Calcutta harbour. On all these counts Charnock favoured Calcutta as the future headquarters of his Company in Bengal. But the board of directors, despite Charnock's opposition, decided to abandon this idea and move to Chittagong. The English attacked Chittagong, but the raid was a failure, forcing the English to return to Madras (1686) and sign a humiliating treaty. The nawab of Bengal, on payment of Rs 3,000, permitted the British to trade in Bengal without payment of duty and to return to Calcutta. In August 1690 the Company's ships were again moored off Calcutta and a factory was built. Thus was founded what was to become the capital of British India and the centre of British power in Asia for over one and a half centuries. Although the three adjoining villages Kalikata, Sutanuti and Gobindapur existed before the visit of Job Charnock, traditionally viewed as the founder of Calcutta, it was the English presence and the location of the seat of that power that created modern Calcutta. To quote from Rudyard Kipling's famous ode:

Thus from the mid-day halt of Charnock
Grew up a city
As the fungus sprouts chaotic from its bed
So it spread
Chance directed, chance erected,
Laid and built
Upon the silt
Palace, mire, hovel, poverty and pride
Side by side.

A year after the quixotic war with the Mughals, Sir Josiah Child, the Company's chief in London, in a dispatch to Madras made a significant remark that it was the duty of the Company 'to lay the foundations of a large, well-guarded, sure English dominion in India for all time to come for events were forcing us into sovereign state in India'. This attitude is supported by other documents such as the following unsigned statement in a document in the India Office Library:

We must lay down one fundamental maxim with regard to Indostan, which is that as we acquired our influence and our possessions by force, it is by force that we must maintain and preserve them and that no neighbouring subah, nawab or rajah will suffer to remain

in tranquillity except from fear, and a conviction that they cannot disturb us without danger to themselves, come what may.¹

This repudiates the other view among some Western historians as illustrated by Vincent Smith's oft-quoted statement that the British Empire in India was not a matter of design.²

During the subedarship of Prince Azim-ush-Shan (1697–1712), the English took the zamindari of the three villages of Sutanuti, Kalikata, and Gobindapur for an annual rental of Rs 12,000. The rebellion of Sobha Singh, a zamindar of Chandrakona in Midnapore district who had ganged up with a Pathan sardar of Orissa, Rahim Khan, gave the English the pretext to fortify Calcutta, and the fort was named Fort William after William of Orange, at that time the king of both England and Holland. Calcutta soon grew into a prosperous town, which, apart from being an entrepôt port, attracted merchants, skilled artisans and both adventurers and law-abiding citizens anxious to flee from the lawless conditions in the neighbouring territories. Its wealth and fortifications also attracted the attention of the nawab of Murshidabad. In 1700 Calcutta was separated from Madras and became a new Presidency. From then onwards, East India Company's operation in India centred on three Presidencies independent of one another and in direct relationship with the Company's head office in London. Each was under a governor and the council. All decisions were collective decisions of the council, but inevitably the governor called the shots.

An important landmark in the consolidation of British hold over Calcutta was a firman granted by Emperor Farrukh Siyar to the Company's plenipotentiary, John Surman, in 1717. Following the embassy that Surman took to Delhi from Calcutta, accompanied by Khwaja Israel Sarhadi, a leading Armenian merchant, the English were allowed, in return for an annual payment of Rs 3,000 in lieu of customs duty, to take their merchandise to Bengal, to acquire land in Calcutta and to settle down anywhere in the subah. This privilege of duty-free movement of merchandise was to lead to a great corruption perpetrated by the British in Bengal, viz., the forcible extension of this privilege through a *dastak* or

permit from the president allowing private trading by the East India Company's servants—a practice that was widespread all over the East. Dutiful Mughal officials insisted on inspecting all goods that passed as Company's goods to distinguish between the Company's own merchandise and the goods that belonged to the Company's employees and to levy customs duties on the latter category. This was to become a bone of contention between the nawabs of Bengal and the English, a festering wound that lasted from Murshid Quli Khan to Mir Qasim. The nawab's government continued to object to the privilege of duty-free movement of goods claimed for private trading by the Company's servants. Murshid Quli kept the practice under check by instructing his officers to make sure that the dastak only covered goods that had been either imported by sea or clearly intended to be exported by sea. But this evil practice grew in volume, contributing to the increase of Calcutta's shipping, thereby coming to the notice of Shuja-ud-din. Alivardi (nawab of Bengal) did not disturb the European merchants so long as the abuse of the dastak did not go beyond reasonable proportions and so long as they traded in peace and did not extend their European wars to Bengal.

When the War of Austrian Succession (1740–48) broke out in Europe, Alivardi specially exhorted the English, the French and the Dutch to refrain from military activities within his dominion. He was appreciative of the prosperity that European trading brought to Bengal and in 1755 permitted a new entrant, the Danish company, to set up a factory at Serampore. Thus, European trading steadily grew and with it the prosperity of their centres, viz., Calcutta, Chandernagore, Hooghly, Chinsurah and Serampore. During the Maratha raids many people abandoned the countryside and settled in the protective haven of Calcutta, which steadily grew in prosperity. The British dug a canal, i.e., the Maratha ditch across the narrow strip of land in the north between the Hooghly River and the salt lakes to prevent Maratha invaders from making use of this lone easy access by land to the city. With official trade, private trade also grew. By 1753, the two became inextricably blended.³

Thus by the middle of the eighteenth century, British mercantile capitalism was poised to jump into its destined role of an imperialist power in Bengal or, for that matter, the entire subcontinent and to become the catalyst for transition from medieval to modern times. This process was rendered easy by the political and military degeneration of the Mughal Empire accompanied by a certain moral degeneration and total disunity among Indian rulers and a lack of patriotism and overall political vision. Alexis de Tocqueville,⁴ who attempted to historically study the grand phenomenon of the rise of the British Empire in India, noted that foreign conquerors had never encountered a united and patriotic nation, but only a multiplicity of disunited groups, that the British did not have to fight a nation but only a foreign aristocracy to whom the natives had subordinated themselves, and the English victories were not due to great generals or great military skill, but simply the fact that well-disciplined, better-equipped and motivated forces easily got the better of vastly larger, but ill-equipped and poorly disciplined hordes. Also, the latter were poorly motivated, not inspired by a real love for their country, or a real attachment to their prize, but simply with a strong desire to plunder the conquered countryside to augment the meagre salaries drawn from their masters. The effective combat strength was invariably a fraction of the official numerical strength of an indigenous army, not counting camp followers, service staff and the harem. The lifestyle, eating habits and poor state of artillery also favoured the Europeans. All these became clear during the mid-century clashes in south India between the British and the French, each siding with rival pretenders to the throne of the Carnatic and Hyderabad (the so-called Carnatic wars), where the British and the French became conscious of the military inferiority of the Indian princes when faced with Western armies. What was to follow in Bengal was only a replay of the wars of the south. Clive's seizure of Arcot in 1751 and his defence of the fort during the siege by an overwhelmingly large force backed by the French was the precursor of Plassey and the English conquest of Bengal—where the English took sides in a local conflict in which the French also joined.

Era of Independent Nawabs of Bengal

The rule of Bengal by Murshid Quli Khan, nominally as a subedar under the Mughal emperor of Delhi, but practically as an independent nawab, marked the beginning of several decades of near-independent nawabs in Bengal. Mughal rule through viceroys had, in general, the character of an army in occupation of the territory that had been annexed. The surplus funds from the revenue were usually diverted to other parts of the empire. It was Murshid Quli Khan who, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, gave this province (along with Bihar and Orissa) the look of a settled country with a settled administration and general peace at a time when, paradoxically, conditions in the Mughal Empire as a whole were fast becoming unsettled. He also tried to conserve Bengal's revenue and prevent its diversion. Bengal's economy grew at a fast pace backed by vigorous maritime trade and also thriving trade with the interior provinces, in both of which the European traders took the leading role supported by Bengalee *banians* (agents) and Armenian intermediaries. The British settlement of Calcutta became a world centre of entrepôt trade.

Born in a Brahman family, but sold to a Persian nobleman, Murshid Quli Khan spent his early years in Persia and thereafter landed in the Mughal court where he found employment in the revenue department. Here he developed expertise in revenue that sustained him throughout his life. He was appointed dewan of Bengal (1700) in the declining years of Aurangzeb's reign and became *naib subedar* in 1707. With a rare honesty and competence, he improved the revenue administration of Bengal, so much so that even the illegal sources of the income of the subedar, in this case the emperor's own grandson, Azim-ush-Shan, were cut off. This antagonized the subedar, who hatched a conspiracy for Murshid Quli's

assassination; but the latter came to know of this and complained to the emperor who took Azim-ush-Shan to task. Murshid Quli transferred the dewani department of Bengal, with the emperor's permission, from Dhaka to Maksudabad, which was renamed Murshidabad. Murshidabad virtually became Bengal's capital.

But Azim-ush-Shan had his way when his father Bahadur Shah succeeded Aurangzeb in 1707. He poisoned his father's ears and got Murshid Quli Khan transferred to the Deccan as dewan. But things deteriorated fast in Bengal, and the new dewan was murdered by insubordinate soldiers. Murshid Quli Khan was brought back in 1710. The administration now had stability and he was able to keep Bengal out of the general disorder that followed Aurangzeb's death. He became, for all practical purposes, the ruler of Bengal although he was formally appointed subedar only in 1717. During his long period of governance (1710–27) there was an efficient civil administration where functionaries like the faujdars, the *amins*, and the *kanungos* functioned effectively under the benign eyes of the nawab who was both subedar and dewan, de facto ruler, subject only to a vague suzerainty of the shadowy Mughal emperor in Delhi and an annual payment of nazrana. The administration interfaced with a multitude of zamindars, who by and large maintained peace in the countryside. He also appointed many Bengalee Hindus to high offices under the government. Many family names among Bengalee Hindus and Muslims, such as Sarkar, Bakshi, Kanungo, Chakladar, Tarafdar, Talukdar, Dastidar, Lashkar, Haldar, Khan, Mirbahar and Chaudhuri, have descended from those who served in Murshid Quli Khan's administration. Hindus were the majority among zamindars and other intermediate landowners. It was Murshid Quli Khan, not Lord Cornwallis, contrary to a common belief, who was the founder of the zamindari system. In fact, the British inherited Murshid Quli's system of revenue administration and built on it. There were sixteen mega zamindars in charge of 615 parganas or revenue units. Smaller zamindars and *talukdars* controlled another 1,600 parganas. The zamindar, as the subordinate instrument of a larger system, was answerable for the peace and good order in the country. The kanungo preserved regular,

uninterrupted records, and every encouragement was given to weavers and spinners as the textile business was regarded as one of the main sources of revenue. There was a new structure of foreign trade and full competition existed among the European nations, who imported bullion and metals and exported cloth. Thus, Bengal prospered under Murshid Quli both in terms of internal as well as maritime trade, in which European traders took the dominant role. The political changes that took place some years afterwards were not due to any economic malaise or administrative collapse in Bengal.¹

Murshid Quli largely replaced the old zamindars and jagirdars, most of whom were upcountry Muslim nobles who had no vested interest in their estates and frequently defaulted in their revenue payments after misappropriating the funds. He appointed in their place a set of new farmers, majority of them Hindus, who would strengthen their hold by prompt payments. The nawab, while inflicting heavy punishment on the defaulters, including confining them in a room without food or water or toilet facilities, was kind to the zamindars who regularly paid revenue. He gave them the titles of Raja and Maharaja. Thus, a new aristocracy that included famous zamindar houses such as Natore, Dighapatiya, Muktagachha, Santosh, Panchakot and Searsole came into being. All of them declared their personal allegiance to the nawab. The only exception was Raja Sitaram Roy of Bhushana (Jessore), who is the central figure in Bankim Chandra's famous novel *Sitaram*. Sitaram stopped payment of revenue, collected a small but compact force and killed the faujdar of Hooghly. Murshid Quli had to invade Sitaram's domain in full strength. Sitaram was defeated and captured and his capital Mohammedpur, so named after the name of a Muslim fakir he revered, was destroyed. There was no other major political event during Murshid Quli's rule. Thanks to his encouragement of merit, a Hindu aristocracy consisting of zamindars, high government officials and wealthy merchants came to be established in Bengal by the first half of the eighteenth century. This class was destined to dominate Bengal society after the establishment of British rule up to the early years of the twentieth century.

An important political change coincided with Murshid Quli's rule. No longer would faujdars or nawabs be appointed and sent to Bengal by the Delhi durbar. The Mughal emperor had become too weak to do so. Unavoidably, the throne of Murshidabad was from now on bound to pass by heredity or through usurpation by local nobles with the power of the sword. Imperial recognition was more of a formality to be obtained by whosoever came to rule in Murshidabad by money or muscle power. Also, as noted earlier, Murshidabad replaced Dhaka as the capital of Bengal.

Murshid Quli Khan died in 1727 without a son. His favourite grandson, Sarfaraz Khan, who was in Murshidabad, quickly proclaimed himself as nawab. But Sarfaraz's father, Shuja-ud-din (1727–37), who was governor of Cuttack, staked his own claim to the throne and marched towards Murshidabad, accompanied by his close adviser Alivardi Khan. As his army reached the outskirts of Murshidabad, Sarfaraz, instead of fighting, came forward to welcome his father and offer him the throne of Bengal. Shuja-ud-din was a good man and a humane ruler. He released most of the zamindars from the inhuman captivity to which they had been condemned during Murshid Quli's rule. He was fond of wine and women and gradually withdrew from active administrative duties. 'As he considered his ascendancy [being] due to the excellent wisdom of that unequalled counsellor, Alivardi, he never transacted any state business, complete or partial, without consulting him.'² He conferred on Alivardi the faujdari of Akbarnagar. Haji Ahmed, Alivardi's brother, was given the charge of land customs of Murshidabad. Two other persons who wielded great influence on Shuja-ud-din were Jagat Seth, the merchant, and Alamchand of the revenue department. According to Yusuf Ali Khan,³ Alivardi used to visit Murshidabad from Akbarnagar once a year and advised the ruler on all state and financial matters, and the latter invariably followed his advice. Because of his profound intellect and unusual sagacity, Alivardi had come to know Shuja-ud-din's mind so well that he could anticipate his thoughts. Alivardi received yet another honour when Shuja-ud-din sent him in 1733 as *naib*

nazim (deputy governor) of Bihar where he soon made a mark. On a visit to Murshidabad, Shuja-ud-din had the lofty title of Mahabatjang conferred on Alivardi by Emperor Muhammad Shah. This further added to Alivardi's stature. Trade and commerce flourished in Bengal and rice was again sold in Dhaka at eight maunds for a rupee.

SARFARAZ KHAN

On Shuja-ud-din's death (March 1737) Sarfaraz automatically succeeded to the throne (1737–40). He was a strange combination of a devout Muslim who prayed five times a day and observed all rituals and a pleasure-loving man who spent most of the time in the harem. Although he never allowed any outward change to occur in his behaviour towards the friends of his father 'and retained all of them in their original positions', the court soon became a hothouse of intrigues between broad groups of noblemen—those who were followers of Haji Ahmed and Alivardi and all those who were against those two brothers. The latter managed to gain the ears of the nawab who humiliated Haji Ahmed and his relatives. This gave Alivardi Khan the pretext to advance towards Murshidabad from Patna in March 1740, ostensibly to rescue his brother, his family and associates and with outward profession of loyalty. Alivardi's advance continued on some other pretext even after the nawab permitted Haji Ahmed to leave Murshidabad with his family and friends. Sarfaraz had no other choice except to ready himself to defend his capital from the invader. On 10 April 1740, the two armies clashed at the battle of Giria near Suti, north of Murshidabad. Alivardi rode a black elephant and led his men to victory. Sarfaraz was killed. So were most of his faithful commanders who showed great courage.

Two or three days later, Alivardi triumphantly entered the city of Murshidabad, but, unlike most usurpers in medieval times, he showed great kindness towards the family members of the fallen nawab. Before seating himself on the throne, he went to the door of the chamber of Nafiza, Sarfaraz's mother, saying, 'All that was written on the tablet of fate has already occurred. This disgrace had been permanently inscribed on the pages of time along with the name of the helpless man. But henceforth, for

the rest of my life, I shall never do anything even to the meanest of the slaves of Your Excellency, except be obedient and loyal. I hope the petition of this aged slave will receive Your Excellency's acceptance.'⁴ Then he turned to the capital city and ascended the throne of Bengal at the age of sixty. He allowed Nafiza Begum to retain all her personal possessions and also settled a land grant that fetched her a good annual income. He gave similar grants to each of the late nawab's sons and daughters. Alivardi's compassionate behaviour on this occasion contrasts sharply with the standard medieval pattern of cruelty by victors in similar circumstances.

ALIVARDI KHAN AND THE MARATHA INVASION

Alivardi's reign as nawab (1740–56) was marked by serious fightings with disgruntled and ambitious Mughal chieftains and the Maratha invasions taking place almost regularly. Within a few months of his accession by the power of sword, as mentioned earlier, his rule was challenged by Rustam Jung, Nawab Shuja-ud-din's son-in-law, who was naib nazim of Orissa. Alivardi defeated him in a battle at Falwari near Balasore (March 1741) and left for Murshidabad, leaving his own nephew as naib nazim of Orissa. Rustam Jung sought the help of Bhonsle, the Maratha ruler of Nagpur, and reconquered Orissa with the help of Maratha soldiers. Alivardi returned to Orissa and again defeated Rustam Jung (December 1741). But, having once discovered how easy it was to plunder Bengal's rich countryside through lightning raids, the Marathas were tempted to invade Bengal over and over. Thus, even before Alivardi could reach Murshidabad, a Maratha cavalry under Bhaskar Pandit was sent to Bengal by Bhonsle. It entered Burdwan through Panchet and started looting the countryside. Alivardi was initially stranded at Burdwan, with the supplies cut off, but managed to break through the Maratha forces to reach Katwa. The Marathas had been joined by Mir Habib, Rustam Jung's cunning naib, who provided them with valuable information about the countryside and with logistic support.

For about ten years the spectre of 'Bargi'⁵ invasion and large-scale plundering of the countryside dominated western Bengal. Maratha

horsemen would appear every year, plundering the whole territory west of the Hooghly River from Rajmahal in the north to Midnapore and Jaleswar in the south. On at least two occasions (1742 and 1745), they came up to Murshidabad and looted the capital city, including the mansions of the legendary merchant prince, Jagat Seth. How dreaded the Bargi were in popular view is evident from nursery rhymes, which are still current in Bengal. Contemporary chroniclers also left vivid descriptions of the Bargi terror, their hit-and-run tactics and the helplessness of the nawab's army in effectively checking them in the face of their unwillingness to be engaged in pitched battles.

Alivardi showed exemplary courage and military skill in every frontal battle that took place between his forces and the Marathas, in each of which, almost without exception, he had the upper hand. But his soldiers were unable to move fast and keep pace with the speed and easy manoeuvrability of the Maratha horsemen who moved like the wind in any direction they chose, outflanking the nawab's army and merrily plundering West Bengal's prosperous towns and villages. In any case, their object was not occupation but plundering. They would often do the vanishing trick before the nawab's forces came in hot pursuit. Only the Ganga–Bhagirathi River line proved an effective barrier to their movements. They crossed over to the eastern side only on a few occasions. It was the fear of Maratha attack that made the English in Calcutta dig the Maratha ditch, cutting across the only pathway in the north of Calcutta through which invasions by land were possible.

The official pretext of the forces of Bhonsle of Nagpur led by Bhaskar Pandit was that the emperor of Delhi had promised the Maratha sovereign, King Shahu, the right to realize *chauth*, i.e. one-fourth, of the revenues from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and Shahu had assigned that right to King Raghuji Bhonsle. The emperor later sought the help of Peshwa Balaji Rao to check the depredations of Maratha horsemen in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Balaji and Raghuji were sworn enemies, and Balaji himself came to Bengal at least once to chase out Raghuji's son, who also led expeditions to Bengal on several occasions.

We have vivid description of the Bargi invasion from contemporary sources. One of the sources is the *Maharashtra Purana* composed by one Gangaram, of which only one canto entitled *Bhaskara Parabhaba* has survived. It gives a somewhat ingenious explanation about the original *raison d'être* of Maratha invasion. Goddess Bhavani (Durga) appeared in a dream before the Maratha Emperor Shahu in Poona and asked him to rescue Bengalee Hindus from the oppression of Alivardi. It was following this that Shahu asked Raghuji Bhonsle to invade Bengal. This contrasts sharply with Gangaram's own description of the devastation caused to Bengal's countryside by repeated Maratha invasions, affecting Muslims and Hindus equally. Initially, when the Maratha menace appeared, Alivardi did not take it very seriously. To quote a contemporary source, viz., Yusuf Ali Khan:

As, since the earliest days of Bengal, the name 'Mahratta' had never reached the ears of the people and as the route through which to enter this province was the only well-known path through the pass of Sikri-gali, and as the Marathas first chose to cut through Panchet, the nawab did not pay heed to the invasion when he heard of the invasion of Manzil-i-Mubarak (Midnapore).⁶

Also, after the victory in Orissa, he had disbanded his troops temporarily. When Alivardi realized the full magnitude of the invasion, he showed remarkable courage and determination, but, as the Maratha way of fighting consisted of fleeing in the face of attack and then catching the enemy unawares, Alivardi's advisers counselled him to make up with the enemy, who appeared to be invincible. But Alivardi stuck to his firm resolve to fight the enemy at any cost, come what may. Bhaskar Pandit, on the advice of Mir Habib who accompanied him, went as far as Murshidabad. As Alivardi came in hot pursuit, the Maratha army withdrew after having plundered the city and taking away three lakh rupees in cash from the house of Jagat Seth. The entire territory from Malda in the north, on to Balasore, Midnapore and Orissa in the south, came under Maratha occupation. Only Murshidabad and the territory on the eastern side of river Hooghly remained in the possession of the nawab. In between, help came to the nawab from two different quarters. First, the Mughal general, Safdar Jung, in pursuance of an instruction of the emperor, Mohammed Shah of Delhi,

proceeded to Azimabad (Patna), but his high-handedness, misbehaviour and ill-treatment of the people of Patna antagonized Nawab Alivardi who persuaded the emperor to order Safdar Jung to return. Secondly, the Peshwa of Poona sent one of his commanders, Bala Rao Pandit, to chastise Raghuji Bhonsle and Bhaskar Pandit. Bala Rao met the nawab near Murshidabad. The nawab gave him the usual gifts of elephants, pearls, etc., and a formal alliance was entered into against Raghuji Bhonsle. The unified forces marched against Raghuji and defeated and expelled him as well as Bhaskar Pandit from Bengal. Bala Rao returned to the Deccan and the nawab also went back to Murshidabad. But Bhaskar Pandit returned to Bengal shortly thereafter and went back to his usual game of looting, plundering and extortion.

Alivardi was piqued. His entire objective in giving a huge sum of money to the Peshwa as a price for preventing the Marathas from disturbing Bengal had been frustrated. He had no money in his treasury and the Marathas were back to their old game. In this situation, he decided to meet deceit with deceit. He invited Bhaskar Pandit and his commanders to meet him at a place called Mankaura near Murshidabad to discuss peace. When Bhaskar came unarmed with nineteen of his chiefs, they were suddenly attacked and murdered in cold blood by the nawab's men. While Nawab Alivardi undoubtedly had good reason, this was contrary to diplomatic practice. This treacherous assassination of Bhaskar Pandit and his men remains a blot on Alivardi's character. However, after the massacre of Mankaura, the Maratha army left Bengal in peace for several years. Raghuji Bhonsle returned again in 1745, accompanied as usual by Mir Habib, and also received good support from a number of disgruntled Afghan chiefs. Nawab Alivardi initially sent Mir Jafar to reconquer Orissa, but Mir Jafar's mission was a failure. Alivardi, now seventy-one years old, led his army and defeated the Marathas and Mir Habib's men near Burdwan. He once again proceeded to Orissa in 1749 and defeated the Marathas, but as soon as he turned his back, Mir Habib reoccupied it with the help of Maratha soldiers. In that year the nawab set up a fortified military base at Midnapore to keep constant vigil against Maratha incursion in Orissa. The nearly ten-

year period of Maratha invasion came to an end only in May 1751 when the Marathas and the nawab entered into a peace treaty on the following terms:

1. All the territory beyond the Subarnarekha River would be under Maratha occupation and the Maratha army would never cross this river.
2. Mir Habib was to become naib nazim of Orissa, nominally under Alivardi, but paying the surplus revenue of the province to Raghuji Bhonsle for the cost of the Maratha army.
3. The nawab would give Raghuji twelve lakh rupees as chauth every year drawn from the revenue of Bengal.

A year after this treaty, the Marathas killed Mir Habib and formally incorporated Orissa in the dominion of Raghuji Bhonsle.

In between, Alivardi also had serious family problems. Alivardi had no son. He had three daughters whom he married to the three sons of his elder brother, Haji Ahmed. These three sons-in-law were appointed governors of Dhaka, Purnea and Patna. All the three died during Alivardi's lifetime. His most competent and favourite son-in-law, Zain-ud-din, who was naib nazim of Bihar, was killed along with his father, Haji Ahmed, by the rebellious Afghans (1748). Siraj-ud-Daula (real name Mirza Muhammad), Zain-ud-din's son, was Alivardi's favourite grandson and had stayed with him at Patna since his childhood, rebelled against his grandfather from Patna in 1750. It needed all Alivardi's patience and cajoling to win him back. Repeated insubordination by near relatives, the untimely death of favoured relatives, constant conflict with Rustam Jung of Orissa and the Marathas and, above all, the family quarrels broke him down. He died on 1 April 1756 at the ripe age of eighty-two.

What is surprising is that in spite of these chronic political problems, Bengal's economy remained prosperous during Alivardi's reign, largely on account of the huge volume of maritime trade carried on by the European traders and the network of economic activities that it had generated. Alivardi realized their importance and protected them against unfairness despite his suspicion arising out of the stories of the Carnatic and Hyderabad wars that he had been hearing about. He extorted funds from the English, French and the powerful Dutch merchants when he needed them. But he did not let them become powerful as in south India by disallowing

them to take part in local conflicts. He also would not permit the English and the French to fight with each other or build any fort when they fought each other in Europe in the Austrian succession war. He declared that merchants should not be warriors and should look to him for protection. He therefore asked the British after the end of the European conflict in 1751 to stop any further fortification. 'You are merchants. What need have you of a fortress? Being under my protection you have no enemies to fear.' But shrewd and wise as he was he did nothing more than occasionally threatening the British and the French with the show of force and, unlike his ill-fated successor, never took up any political position from which he could not easily withdraw with pride. He was fully aware that Bengal's prosperity very largely depended on the external commerce that the British, the French and the Dutch carried on through Calcutta, Chandernagore and Chinsurah, respectively. He compared them once with the 'bees of whose honey you might reap the benefit but which, if attacked in their hives, would sting you to death' — a prophecy that was to become true during his successor's reign. This issue of fortification of Calcutta by the British was to reappear as a festering wound with the commencement of the Seven Years' War (1756–63) in Europe and North America between the French and the British, with its inevitable fallout in Bengal.

The Battle of Plassey

Siraj-ud-Daula, who succeeded his grandfather as his chosen successor, was destined to be the last independent nawab before Bengal passed on to British rule after his short reign (1756–57). He has been glorified by poet Nabin Chandra Sen, dramatists like Girish Ghosh and Sachin Sengupta, and historians like Akshoy Kumar Maitra during the days of the freedom movement. As a ruler, he was subjected to all kinds of intrigues by the British and a section of his own courtiers, but he fought valiant battles against all of them and eventually went down like a Shakespearean hero in a tragedy. Contemporary English historians accused him of being the perpetrator of the infamous Black Hole tragedy, a charge that has been denied by other historians, including some Englishmen. Truth, as usual, perhaps lies somewhere in between. For a true account of Siraj-ud-Daula we can turn to the memoirs of a Frenchman, Jean Law who was his friend and not biased against him. Law does refer to Siraj's cruel and lascivious nature during Alivardi's time but talks about him as a fairly straightforward man after he ascended the throne. This is supported by Ghulam Hussain Khan's *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*.

The young nawab showed much courage and determination after ascending the throne in Murshidabad in April 1756. He faced opposition from three sides: his aunt Ghasiti Begum who disputed his right to succeed Alivardi on the ground that she was older than his mother Amina; his cousin by the second aunt Shaukat Jang, nawab of Purnea; and third, the British in Calcutta. They were supported by Siraj's own commander-in-chief, Mir Jaffer, who also must have entertained an ambition to ascend the throne in the same manner in which his benefactor Alivardi did. Ghasiti's palace at Murshidabad's Moti Jheel became the centre for anti-Siraj

intrigues and Ghasiti, with the help of her famous dewan, Hussain Quli Khan, distributed funds to those who joined her in opposing Siraj. Siraj had Hussain Quli Khan publicly murdered in 1754, but his successor, Raja Raj Ballabh, a native of Bikrampur, who now became the dewan of Dhaka, was even more intriguing and skilful. Siraj took Ghasiti into custody and detained Raja Raj Ballabh on a charge of defalcation and sent soldiers to his village home at Rajnagar in Dhaka to arrest the members of Ballabh's family and seize his property. But even before the troops could reach, Raj Ballabh's son, Krishna Das, fled to Calcutta by boat with his family members and his own wealth, as also Ghasiti's wealth, and sought political asylum from the governor of Calcutta, Drake. The nawab demanded Krishna Das's extradition from the English settlement, as he was the nawab's subject. But the British refused. In fact they insulted the nawab's emissary who went to Calcutta to demand extradition and also to demand that the English stop repairing the fortifications in Calcutta on account of the outbreak of the Seven Years' War with France in Europe.

Meanwhile, Siraj had left on a campaign against rebellious Shaukat Jang, who had also started marching towards Murshidabad. But, on 20 May at Rajmahal he received the news that the British had refused both his requests and humiliated his envoy. Leaving Shaukat Jang for the time being, the nawab returned to Murshidabad, sacked the English factory at Cossimbazar arresting its chief, Watts, and proceeded on a campaign to attack Calcutta. He reached the outskirts of Calcutta on 16 June 1756 with around 15,000 soldiers, 500 elephants and fifty guns, and immediately attacked the British forces inflicting on them one of the worst military defeats in their colonial history. Despite the serious cannonade by the British ships from Perrin's Redoubt at Chitpur, where the Maratha ditch meets the Hooghly River, the Bengal army simply bypassed the British opposition, crossed the Maratha ditch, burnt down much of the civilian houses and laid siege to Fort William. The nawab himself set up his quarters at Dumdum in the garden house of Omichand, the wealthiest Indian in Calcutta. The siege began on 17 June and continued through the next day. By 18 June the Bengal forces were also on the riverbank firing upon the English ships. Drake now

ordered evacuation of women and himself embarked on a ship in a shameful show of panic, leaving Holwell in charge of the forces. By 20 June the nawab's forces had completely encircled Fort William and pounded it heavily. The acting governor, Holwell, surrendered with all his men. Siraj-ud-Daula was in an upbeat mood and retired at night in one of the private quarters inside the fort. It was on that night that the English prisoners, numbering 146, were confined in the jail in the fort, in a small room (18×14 feet), where nearly all except twenty-three were said to have suffocated to death. The so-called 'Black Hole' tragedy was recorded by Holwell seven years later on board a ship. It was an English scholar H.J. Little who questioned the authenticity of the event and called Holwell's account a tissue of lies. Holwell's account was subsequently dramatized beyond reasonable limits by Lord Macaulay and a whole generation of Englishmen were bred on the myth of this Black Hole tragedy. What, however, is reasonably possible is that some incident of confining a large number of men in a small room took place where some of them died of suffocation, but Siraj-ud-Daula was not personally responsible for it. After all, neither the nawab nor his officers were familiar with the fort in Calcutta and must have been guided by the Englishmen themselves in locating what was used as a prison in the fort. It was more a case of negligence by subordinates than a case of diabolical cruelty by the nawab.

The nawab then ordered the demolition of the English factory and the erection of a mosque and renamed Calcutta as Alinagar. He appointed Manikchand as the governor of Alinagar and, after seizing rupees three lakh from the treasury, marched to the port of Hooghly, collecting Rs 3,50,000 from the French and Rs 4,50,000 from the Dutch. The French and the Dutch expressed their submission to the nawab. After offering Id prayers at the end of Ramadan, he returned to Murshidabad in great pomp and splendour. He wrote to his purported superior, the Mughal emperor, that he had achieved a resounding victory on par with the conquests of Tamerlane.

Now he returned to his rebellious cousin, Shaukat Jang, and defeated and killed him at the battle at Manihari in Bihar on 16 October 1756. The battle of Manihari marked the rise of one of Siraj's associates, Mohanlal, a low-

caste Hindu, now given the title of Raja and appointed governor of Purnea. Thus, in several brilliant moves, the young nawab had got the better of the three challengers, Ghasiti Begum, Shaukat Jang and the English. This was the high-water mark of the young nawab's short-lived career. The relative ease with which he got the better of his three challengers enhanced his prestige. On the other hand, this made him overconfident and arrogant.

He now antagonized the court nobility in general and inevitably, this resulted in a conspiracy hatched by a section of the nobility to replace him by another person of noble descent.

Meanwhile, Drake, along with the other fugitives from Calcutta, took shelter at Falta down the river and had a miserable existence until relieved by Clive and Admiral Watson who were sent from Madras after six months. Clive, heading the East India Company's soldiers, and Watson, commanding the Royal Navy's warships, with a small contingent of the king's soldiers commanded by Eyre Coote, arrived at Falta on 15 December 1756 and started their advance towards Calcutta on 27 December. They demanded of Manikchand that the nawab's forces vacate Calcutta and the English be allowed to trade as before. Manikchand proved a double-dealer and allowed the English to demolish a fort at Budge Budge and to reoccupy Calcutta on 2 January 1757 without any fight.

A ticklish protocol problem arose as to whether Clive, the commander of the Company's land forces, or Watson, the commander of the king's warships, should formally reoccupy Fort William. This was solved with typical British ingenuity. Clive took over the fort, being the senior commander on land, but handed it over to Watson the next day indicating the precedence of the Royal Navy. Watson, in his turn, gave the key of the fort to the discredited Governor Drake who had obviously made common cause with Watson against Clive. Now Clive formally declared war on Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula and advanced up to Hooghly. As the nawab with his forces came up to Hooghly, the English retreated to Calcutta. The nawab advanced to the outskirts of Calcutta and camped in Omichand's garden house. Both sides then pretended to engage each other in negotiations for a settlement. On the night of 4 February, while the emissaries of both sides

were still engaged in a show of discussion, Clive attacked the nawab's camp treacherously, hoping to get a surprise success as he had got at Arcot during the Carnatic wars. According to some contemporary sources, Clive launched the attack with the object of capturing Siraj-ud-Daula himself. But there was a heavy fog that morning leading Clive and his men in the wrong direction. They failed in their main objective and could not get anywhere near the nawab; but they were able to kill around 1,300 of the nawab's men and withdrew after suffering some losses. History might have been different if the nawab had counter-attacked. But the daredevil attack by the British so unnerved Siraj-ud-Daula that he asked for negotiations. On 9 February 1757 a treaty was signed between the nawab and the British, more or less on the terms dictated by Clive. Nearly all the nawab's advisers wanted him not to continue hostilities with the English.

The outbreak of the Seven Years' War in Europe between England and France (1756–63) had ended the tranquillity in Bengal. The English in Calcutta decided to occupy French Chandernagore. Nandakumar, who was ordered by the nawab to prevent English military actions, but was secretly in conspiracy with the English, did nothing and virtually allowed Clive's men and Watson's ships a walkover. On 23 March, Chandernagore surrendered.

The nawab put up with Nandakumar's open defiance of his order to resist Clive in his attack on Chandernagore and even congratulated Clive on his occupation. Thereafter, once again revealing his inherent contradiction, Siraj-ud-Daula refused to hand over Jean Law, head of the French factory at Cossimbazar, and other Frenchmen whom he had given shelter, to the English. But in a few days, vacillating once again, he asked Law to leave his custody and to fend for himself in order to avoid antagonizing the English. Perhaps Siraj was seriously looking at the possibility of the English supporting him against a possible attack by the Afghan king, Ahmed Shah Abdali.

The nawab, even after formally giving consent to British action, changed his mind and ordered Rai Durlabh to march to Chandernagore to relieve the French. His behaviour in allowing the destruction of the French who were

his natural allies against the English, while in the same breath acting on his hostility and suspicion against the English, was inexplicable. He congratulated the English and at the same time annoyed them by giving shelter to Law and the fugitives from Chandernagore.

Events moved fast after the decimation of the French. By April, the conspirators in Murshidabad, viz., Mir Jafar, Jagat Seth, Rai Durlabh and Omichand finally selected Mir Jafar, rather than Yar Latif, their initial choice, to replace Siraj-ud-Daula and sent a secret message to the English in Calcutta requesting their support. The council in Calcutta readily supported this proposal which would mean a more pliable nawab on the throne of Bengal.

There was a formal treaty between the local conspirators and the foreign power, with the council signing it on 19 May 1757 and Mir Jafar signing it on 5 June. Just before the signature, Omichand threw a spanner by demanding 5 per cent of the amount found in the Murshidabad treasury and threatening to inform the nawab of this secret treaty if his demand was not met. As he was adamant, Clive and Mir Jafar decided to dump the greedy merchant through the subterfuge of a double version of the treaty, the false one containing Omichand's 5 per cent stipulation, and the other, authentic, version containing no reference to it. As Watson was unwilling to sign the fake version, Clive committed a second act of deceit by forging Watson's signature on it.

On 5 June Watts, the English resident at Cossimbazar, secretly visited Mir Jafar and obtained his agreement, taking oath on the Quran. Mir Jafar still maintained an outward ambivalence, refusing to meet the nawab when summoned by the latter and immediately thereafter meeting him when he came to his house in a departure from protocol and assured him he would not take an active part in the coming hostilities against the nawab. Why, in spite of this clear declaration of his motive and the refusal to attend the durbar, Siraj left for Plassey with Mir Jafar, still officially the commander-in-chief, remains an unresolved mystery.

Clive had also received the eagerly awaited message from Mir Jafar informing that he with his men had marched to Mankaura and that the

nawab would also march there; Mir Jafar advised Clive to march to Plassey and to send 'two or three hundred good fighting men' to the upper road towards Cossimbazar to attack the nawab's troops. Murshidabad at this time was going through the high drama of the nawab sending men to arrest Mir Jafar, but thereafter coming to an uneasy settlement in spite of Sinfrey's (a French factory chief) clear warning of the commander-in-chief's involvement in the treacherous plot. When the nawab visited Mir Jafar in his house to accept his show of loyalty, he gave him a written guarantee that if the nawab won the battle against the English, Mir Jafar would have a safe conduct for himself and his family members to go anywhere he chose.

On 19 June Clive reached Katwa on the west bank of the Bhagirathi River, about 40 miles downstream from Murshidabad. At a meeting of the war council held on 21 June, ten of the seventeen officers present, including Clive, voted against immediate military action. But Clive, on second thoughts, decided to act on Eyre Coote's minority view for immediate military action to retain the military initiative. On 22 June Clive's soldiers crossed the river and marched to Plassey.

Thus, by the end of 22 June, Clive's small contingent consisting of 22,000 sepoys, 800 Europeans and the artillerymen was face-to-face with the nawab of Bengal's army consisting of 35,000 infantrymen, 15,000 cavalry, fifty-three pieces of cannon and a small French artillery under Sinfrey. There were also 5,000 horsemen and 7,000 foot soldiers under Mohanlal and Mir Madan.

In the Battle of Plassey, three-fourths of the nawab's Bengal army under Mir Jafar's leadership did not take part and remained spectators. Only the forces under the command of Mohanlal and Mir Madan and the small French contingent under Sinfrey fought, and fought gloriously, until they were discouraged by a general loss of morale and conflicting orders from the nawab. The battle began with a cannonade from the Bengal army which was replied by the English from a mango grove in which they had taken shelter. Now Mohanlal, Mir Madan and Sinfrey launched a frontal attack on the English, although the main army stood inactive. At this time, Mir Madan was killed by an English shell. Also, a sudden monsoon shower

damped the Bengal army's ammunition. Taking advantage of it Killpatrick, in a daredevil mood, launched a frontal attack on the Bengal army and captured the water tank under the Bengal army's control. Now Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula, nervous as he had been all along, committed an incredibly childish act. He sent for Mir Jafar and placed his turban before him and appealed to him to protect his life and honour in name of his benefactor Alivardi. Mir Jafar, like a first-class actor, assured the nawab of his loyalty but advised the nawab to stop fighting as evening was approaching, saying that next morning he would himself lead the army against the English and that the nawab should also instruct Mohanlal to stop fighting for the day. Misled by Mir Jafar's false advice, the nawab sent word to Mohanlal to stop fighting. Mohanlal ignored the naïve instruction at first, but obeyed it on further pressure from the nawab who had by then lost all sense. Now Mohanlal's foreboding came true. His advancing men were on a victory trail. On getting this confusing order they thought that the Bengal army had been defeated and started running away from the battlefield.

What now began was not an orderly retreat but a general withdrawal of the small section of the nawab's troops that had been fighting, and Siraj-ud-Daula himself led the flight by leaving for Murshidabad on a swift camel. Thus he himself carried the news of his defeat at Plassey to Murshidabad. Mir Jafar openly joined the English with the main force. The English occupied the nawab's camp and seized a large booty. Mohanlal and Sinfrey valiantly fought a rearguard action till 5 p.m. and then left Plassey. Thus was won the Battle of Plassey which marked the end of Mughal rule in Bengal and the beginning of the process of British occupation of South Asia. The British losses were small: '4 English soldiers killed, 9 wounded, 2 missing, 15 sepoys killed and 36 wounded'. The Battle of Plassey turned out to be little more than a skirmish, although it is reckoned as one of the most decisive battles in world history.

Clive was absolutely correct in choosing the place and time for the battle, in his caution in sticking to the hunting lodge and mango grove thereafter, and in his leadership skills and rapid reinforcement. Had the nawab not demoralized his forces by ordering a retreat and fleeing from the scene,

Clive might have been beaten back. Clive and Watson's scheming was in the end vindicated.

In the end Siraj-ud-Daula's sense of 'defeatism' combined with Mir Jafar's betrayal combined to bring about the defeat of the nawab's army.

Clive now formally called on Mir Jafar and bowed to him as the subedar of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The victors, Clive and Mir Jafar, followed Siraj-ud-Daula into the capital. The formal ratification by the emperor of Delhi, Alamgir II, was to be obtained after some time on the basis of a strong recommendation from Clive in a communication dated 30 July.

Almost simultaneously the emperor granted Clive a *mansab*. The imperial firman stated that 'Colonel Clive, a European, be favoured with a mansab of the rank of 6,000 and 5,000 horses and the title of Zabdat-ul-Mulk Nasib-ud-Daulah Colonel Clive Shahat Jang Bahadur' (Flower of the Empire, Defender of the Country, the Brave First in War). He also subsequently got from Nawab Mir Jafar a jagir of the annual value of about £30,000. The validity of this grant began to be questioned in Britain soon thereafter, and thus it became for Clive the source of both his wealth and embarrassment. Mir Jafar gave large presents to the English as also his fellow conspirators to reward them. Meanwhile the defeated nawab, after an unsuccessful attempt to raise a new army with the cash left in his treasury, fled north-west towards Patna in disguise. But at Bhagwangola he was recognized and handed over to the English. Brought back to Murshidabad, he was assassinated by one Muhammad Baig at the behest of Mir Jafar's son, Miran. Such was the tragic end of Siraj-ud-Daula at the age of twenty-five.

End of Independent Nawabs of Bengal

On 29 June 1757 Clive himself went to the Murshidabad palace and seated Mir Jafar on the throne. At the same time a procession carrying the dead body of Siraj-ud-Daula on the back of an elephant was moving on the main road in Murshidabad. Also, about the same time the people on the river front in the city saw 200 boats sailing for Calcutta carrying the first instalment of the British loot. Mir Jafar was weak and indecisive, made further ineffective by his drug addiction and his addiction to the harem. The Murshidabad durbar therefore became a puppet show, the real authority of government having been already moved to Calcutta. Mir Jafar had to give the authorities in Calcutta huge sums of money that he had promised. But there were no funds available with the impoverished treasury. Jagat Seth the banker worked out an arrangement that half of the amount payable to the British would be paid at once and the other half would be paid in three annual instalments. Under this arrangement the nawab paid Rs 2.25 crore to the Company and Rs 59 lakh to the Company's main officials between 1757 and 1760. Also, Clive personally received another undisclosed sum of money as gift and a zamindari that gave him an annual income of Rs 3.5 lakh. Clive was subjected to questioning by the British parliament in 1772–73 on grounds of bribery, while in Bengal. Clive's simple explanation was that, considering the vast amount of treasure lying in vaults in Murshidabad, he was at that moment 'astonished at my moderation'. According to him Murshidabad in 1757 was as big as London, the only difference being that there were many more rich people in Murshidabad than in London.

Nearly all the zamindars accepted Mir Jafar as nawab. Only three still swore loyalty to Siraj's legacy. Raja Ramnarayan, governor of Patna, Raja Ram Singh of Midnapore and Hazif Ali Khan of Purnea. The latter two

were soon made to acknowledge Mir Jafar, and Ramnarayan, after defying Mir Jafar, requested protection from Clive. Mir Jafar, after leading his force towards Patna, had to allow Ramnarayan under Clive's pressure to retain his office and return halfway from his campaign. The new nawab also became suspicious of Rai Durlabh, the dewan, and conspired to have him assassinated. But once again Clive came to Rai Durlabh's rescue in spite of the fact that the latter had been dismissed from the post of dewan by Mir Jafar's son, Miran. Thus Clive built up his own coterie in the nawab's administration with people personally loyal to him. The ambiguity that surrounded Clive's position, being the de facto ruler but having no legal position even in the Calcutta Council, was ended in June 1758 when the Company appointed him formally as governor of Calcutta.

But all these internal troubles had to be put aside in 1759 when an unwanted invader, Prince Ali Gauhar, son of the Mughal emperor of Delhi, appeared on the borders of Bihar and Bengal with the support of Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula of Oudh. Raja Ramnarayan defended the city of Patna from his attack until Clive himself arrived with his soldiers after which the wandering prince withdrew to Oudh. Clive gave him a sum of Rs 10,000 in return for him to confirm Mir Jafar in the subedarship of Bengal. But shortly thereafter he invaded Bengal once again, with the self-proclaimed title of Emperor Shah Alam II, and advanced up to Bishnupur on his way to Murshidabad. But he was defeated by the British in 1760 and chased up to western Bihar where he was joined by the veteran French general, Jean Law. He was defeated once again in Hazipur in August 1760. This was the end of Shah Alam II's ambition in Bengal, and he returned to Delhi. Taking advantage of the situation, the Maratha General Shivbhatta occupied Orissa early in 1760 and proceeded as far as Midnapore. Once again, Mir Jafar asked for help from the English and the English army chased away the Marathas. The naib nizam of Purnea, Khadim Hussain, revolted, pledging loyalty to Emperor Shah Alam. Miran along with the new English commander, Caillaud, defeated him.

Left to himself Clive might have liked to leave Mir Jafar alone without much interference. But this remained a pious wish. With Mir Jafar's

inefficiency and with the greed of the Englishmen there was a series of interventions by the Calcutta Council, reducing the nawab of Murshidabad to a figurehead.

Bengal came briefly under another external threat in 1759, viz., the Dutch with their base in Indonesia. The Dutch felt aggrieved on account of loss of some trade privileges in comparison with the British. Their export of opium to China from Bengal and of textiles to Indonesia too was affected on account of the pressure exercised by the British. When the British insisted on the Dutch ships cruising on the river Hooghly using English pilots, they treated it as an affront and tried to seek a military solution of their political humiliation. In fact they were in secret negotiations with Mir Jafar and his son, Miran, who thought they could uproot the English with the help of another Western power. The Dutch in June 1759 sent a fleet of seven vessels carrying 300 Dutch and 600 Malay soldiers. The Dutch fleet arrived in the Hooghly River in 1759 via south India and reached Falta, detaining some English ships, and setting fire to English houses. On 21 November 1759, the Dutch disembarked near Chinsura and met the English forces under Ford at a place called Bedara between Hooghly and Chinsura. They were routed and surrendered to the British, their ambition of conquering Bengal having been dashed to the ground.

Nearly all the contemporary English sources and several subsequent authorities believe that Mir Jafar and some of his courtiers, viz., Rai Durlabh and Nandakumar, were secretly in league with the Dutch, with a view to reducing the influence of the English in Bengal. Clive, by his prompt action ensured that the challenge from a second European power to the British in Bengal was crushed and thus the British were to remain in a position of predominance for years to come. By the time Clive handed over the charge of governorship of Calcutta to Holwell (on a temporary basis) on 20 February 1760, and sailed to England on completion of his phenomenal period in India, Mir Jafar was fully secure on the throne of Bengal, although very much a puppet in the hands of the English. That Clive's vision went much beyond the Company's dewan in Bengal is clear from his letter to

Pitt, his admirer, one of the most powerful men in England, advocating the incorporation of Bengal under the Crown.

But Mir Jafar's position became quite insecure after Clive's departure. Faced with demands for more and more money from the English, Mir Jafar's rule was always in a state of turmoil. After Miran's death by lightning on 3 July 1760 (as God's punishment, as the saying goes in Bengal, for killing Ghasiti Begum and Amina Begum by drowning them in the Buriganga at Dhaka), Mir Jafar was further weakened. At this stage Mir Qasim, Mir Jafar's son-in-law, started negotiations with the English, staking a claim to the throne.

Vansittart, Clive's successor, entered into a secret treaty with Mir Qasim under which Mir Qasim would assume royal authority as naib subedar, while Mir Jafar would stay nominally as nawab. Mir Qasim also promised to pay all the dues to the Company in instalments.

On 20 October 1760 Vansittart and Mir Qasim entered into the palace at Murshidabad with soldiers and confronted the nawab with their demands. Mir Jafar abdicated, inviting Mir Qasim to accept the throne. Mir Jafar also opted to reside in Calcutta rather than in Murshidabad where he felt insecure. On 22 October 1760 Mir Jafar left for Calcutta and Mir Qasim became the nawab of Bengal with an agreement to pay Mir Jafar a monthly pension of Rs 15,000.

MIR QASIM'S ASSERTION OF INDEPENDENCE

Nawab Mir Qasim (1760–64) wanted to rule and not just to reign. The relationship between the new nawab and the English was therefore uneasy from the beginning. Mir Qasim had to pay as present a huge sum for ascending the throne (Rs 17.5 lakh), including Rs 5 lakh as a gift to Vansittart and Rs 2 lakh to Caillaud, the commander of the forces. He also had to pay the English army Rs 75 lakh in cash. Another reason for uneasiness was that except Vansittart, and one or two other members of the Calcutta Council, the rest had been completely in the dark about the secret arrangement between Mir Qasim and the English. Also, they did not have a share in the bribes paid. They therefore protested against the replacement of

Mir Jafar by Mir Qasim and opposed the latter. Mir Qasim also had to face a rebellion of several zamindars such as those of Burdwan and Birbhum and the Raja of Karakpur near Munger.

Mir Qasim knew from the beginning that he would have to fight the English eventually and that his army was in no condition to do so in terms of equipment, discipline and military techniques. He therefore appointed several Europeans such as Walter Reinhard, nicknamed 'General Samru', Margar, an Armenian mercenary, and yet another Armenian mercenary named Gregory known as Gorgin Khan, to impart training to his army. The new-look army showed its strategy in conquering Bettiah and invading Nepal where it defeated the Nepalese army in an open battle but could not hold on to the conquest on account of the guerrilla tactics followed by the Nepalese. In order to make himself independent of day-to-day contact with the English and day-to-day surveillance from Calcutta, Mir Qasim shifted the capital from Murshidabad to Munger in Bihar. The old fort at Munger was repaired to enable the nawab's court to move there. He also started training his forces in full swing and manufacturing ammunition and gunpowder. But soon trouble arose between the nawab and the English.

Three unsettled questions soured Mir Qasim's relations with the British. Firstly, the continuous presence on the north-west border of Prince Ali Gauhar and Mir Qasim's suspicion of his intrigues with the British. Ali Gauhar had assumed the imperial title on his father's death. He was neither confident of marching to Delhi, nor could he give up his ambition of controlling the rich province of Bengal and Bihar where he wanted a foothold before marching to Delhi. The East India Company was committed to accepting his imperial title and assisting him in physically occupying the imperial capital of Delhi; but Mir Qasim was suspicious of both the British and the self-proclaimed emperor. Apprehending that there might be an arrangement between the two behind his back regarding the future of Bengal, he refused to acknowledge Shah Alam as emperor unless he actually left Bengal for Delhi. He stuck to it despite strong pressure from the British and only formally accepted the sovereignty of Shah Alam under

threat from Eyre Coote, the new commander of the British forces in place of Caillaud.

The second flashpoint was the fate of Raja Ramnarayan who had been deputy governor of Bihar from the time of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula. The British had protected him from Mir Jafar's wrath and he was allowed to continue his deputy governorship at Patna. Mir Qasim was suspicious of him as well. Apart from the fact that he wanted to extort as much money as possible, Mir Qasim also wanted to remove him from his post. The British resisted the nawab's efforts to chastise him until 19 June 1761, when Vansittart, in a departure from Clive's policy, overruled Coote and agreed to Ramnarayan's suspension. In August 1761 a new deputy governor was appointed at Patna and Ramnarayan was handed over to the nawab, only to be executed after extraction of as much money as possible. Thus the nawab scored on the first two issues of confrontation. But on the third issue, viz., allowing East India Company servants the right to carry on private trading without paying tax as in the case of the Company's official trading, the relations steadily soured, leading to a war that ended in Mir Qasim's overthrow and the return of Mir Jafar. The history of this dispute goes back to the days before the Battle of Plassey when the imperial Mughal firman conferred on the English East India Company the right to trade without paying the customs duties imposed by the government. The Company's officials had always interpreted this to mean that this exemption also applied to their private trading in articles such as salt, betel, tobacco and textile without the payment of the customs duties. The nawab's officials had insisted that this exemption covered only the Company's seaborne official trade.

After Plassey the Company's officials proceeded to take advantage of their political and military supremacy to interpret the exemption in the widest sense to cover all their private trading and to engage in private trading in a wide variety of articles in full steam. Clive was apparently unhappy about this large-scale abuse but preferred to keep his eyes shut. On the other hand, the Calcutta Council appears to have decided in favour of the maximum possible relaxation and the practice of private trade therefore

mushroomed. Mir Qasim himself did not initially raise this during his negotiations with the British. He raised it for the first time in December 1761 when the nawab's officials started demanding full payment of the customs dues in respect of all private trading by the Company's officials on the strength of dastaks, or official permits. In May 1762 came the first formal protest from Nawab Mir Qasim alleging misconduct on the part of the Indian agents of East India Company's officials.

This practice not only defrauded the treasury, but gradually put out of business the indigenous businessmen, who had to pay duty on their goods and, therefore, could not compete with the English merchants. The practice could not be stopped as the top officials of the Company were themselves involved. The governor and the members of the council used to take enormous bribes and, as a result, amassing of wealth by illegal means was the order of the day. Mir Qasim made repeated appeals to the governor drawing his attention to the sorry plight of the people, but in vain. In a letter dated 26 March 1762, he wrote:

The English Commissioners of Calcutta, Patna, Dhaka, Cossimbazar and other factories with their *gomastas* and *talukdars* are ignoring altogether the officers of the nawab. In every district and pargana and in every market and village, the *gomastas* and other officers of the company trade in oil, fish, straw, bamboo, paddy, betel nut and other articles and claim the privilege of the company on production of permits issued by the company.

That the nawab had considerable force in his argument is clear from Warren Hastings's impartial opinion in a letter of 25 April 1762:

I have confidentially cautioned the oppressive English officers but not having succeeded in bringing about any improvement I have placed the matter before a meeting of the board. The members of the board, however, paid no heed to it, they being under the impression that the nawab was circulating false rumours only to pick up a quarrel with us. I was taken to task for giving credence to the nawab's allegations and I am now treated as an enemy. The allegations are mounting every day, but far from there being any redress, not even an inquiry has been undertaken in any single case to ascertain the truth.

Both the Company and the English officers also traded in other goods—tobacco, betel nut, salt and so on—which had nothing to do with export or import, and evaded duty thereon on the strength of the permits issued by the Company. The Indian traders were virtually thrown out from the salt trade

and a monopoly was established by the Company's merchants. No interference by the nawab's officers in these disputes was tolerated.

The growing dispute between the nawab's officers and the English officials led to a clash at Patna between the nawab and Ellis, superintendent of the English factory at Patna. An angry Ellis sent a force against the nawab's officers and had their chief, Akbar Ali Khan, brought to Patna under arrest. Now the nawab, in a mood of retaliation, withdrew inland customs duty on all goods so that the indigenous traders did not suffer from any discrimination. This extreme step, just to spite the English, halved the revenue of Bengal, but the nawab was prepared to bear this loss to avoid discrimination, oppression, humiliation and anarchical conditions. But the English factories would have none of this and insisted on continuance of their privileged status.

Having reached this decision the Calcutta Council sent two representatives, Amyatt and Hay, to the nawab at Munger suggesting a new treaty with the following demands:

1. The orders issued to officers in terms of the arrangement arrived at with Vansittart be withdrawn and proper compensation be paid to the English merchants affected by the orders.
2. The order withdrawing all duty be rescinded.
3. Disputes between the nawab's officers and the English merchants or their gomastas or the Company's officers would be decided by the English chief of the Company's factories.
4. The districts of Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong be given to the English Company in absolute right or as jagir by cancelling the existing lease.
5. Acceptance by the local mahajans of the Company's rupee without any discount be ensured. The Company be permitted to mint three lakh rupees at the Dhaka and Patna mints of the nawab.
6. An English resident be maintained in the nawab's durbar.

The nawab did not agree to the second and third terms. He said that the English had entered into many treaties and broken all of them while he himself had never broken the terms of any treaty. A fresh treaty was thus pointless. He handed over a blank paper to the Company's representatives and said he would sign any terms that might be written thereon, but only on one condition, viz., that all English soldiers would be moved out of Bengal.

As the nawab did not accept the terms of the new treaty, Amyatt and Hay left Munger. On the night of 24 June, Ellis attacked Patna. Though the Patna Fort could not be conquered, the town was occupied by Ellis. The English soldiers indulged in unrestrained looting and murder. Mir Qasim's patience was exhausted. He sent a force to reoccupy Patna. They occupied the city and attacked the English factory. The English surrendered.

The nawab informed Vansittart of the sudden attack on Patna by the English and claimed compensation. Amyatt, in the meantime, having failed in his mission, was returning to Calcutta from Munger. The nawab sent orders to Murshidabad for the detention of Amyatt's boat. Amyatt, when served with the orders, refused either to surrender or to leave his boat, and ordered the English soldiers accompanying him to open fire on the nawab's boats that had come to detain him. The fire was returned and after a little skirmish Amyatt's boats were captured. One havildar and a few sepoy of the English managed to escape. Some were captured, and the rest, including Amyatt, were killed. British historians have described this incident as diabolical murder, but it cannot be denied that it was Amyatt's order to fire on the nawab's boats that initiated the armed conflict that was responsible for the regrettable occurrence.

The council in Calcutta, on getting news of the murder of Amyatt, declared war on Mir Qasim and reinstalled Mir Jafar as nawab of Bengal. Mir Qasim was also prepared for war, but rivalry among officers and lack of loyalty on the part of the foreign commanders foredoomed his military efforts. The nawab's forces were defeated at Katwa (19 July 1763) by the English despite a show of great bravery by Mir Qasim's commander Taki Khan, and at Giria on the way to Murshidabad (2 August). Two Armenian commanders, Samru and Margar, were present in the battlefield at Giria but did not take any part in the battle. The next show of strength was at Udhuanala Fort where the nawab's forces had taken shelter. Initially, the English could not break through the defence of the fort in spite of heavy shelling and this made the nawab's soldiers confident and careless. This was the time when the three foreign generals Arratun, Margar and Gorgin Khan

secretly intrigued with the English and fled away without a fight, enabling the English to capture the fort through treachery.

Mir Qasim now felt that all was lost and in desperation committed a heinous atrocity. He had a number of noblemen of the court like Jagat Seth, Raj Ballabh and Swarupchand imprisoned in Munger Fort and mercilessly killed them by throwing them into the Ganga from the ramparts. After this he left for Patna on 1 October. The British surrounded the fort of Munger and occupied it. Then the nawab indulged in another act of cruelty when he had all the English prisoners killed at Patna. On 28 October, the English army reached the outskirts of Patna, but before that Mir Qasim had escaped with his well-trained cavalry. Demoralized by repeated reverses, Mir Qasim decided to leave Bengal. He wrote to Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula of Oudh requesting his help and protection. Reaching the bank of the Karmanasha River he received a reply written by Shuja-ud-Daula himself on the cover of a copy of the Quran, assuring him of shelter and protection. Assured by this Mir Qasim pitched his camp at Allahabad with his family, his forces and his enormous wealth. Emperor Shah Alam was also living under Shuja-ud-Daula's protection at the time. The trio entered into a treaty to launch a combined invasion to recover Bengal for Mir Qasim.

Mir Qasim, together with the nawab of Oudh, advanced to Buxar, but soon misunderstandings developed between the two. Shuja-ud-Daula started behaving like an overlord and ill-treated Mir Qasim for failure to provide sufficient funds. Samru left Mir Qasim's service and joined Shuja-ud-Daula with his soldiers, arms and ammunition. He looted Mir Qasim's camp, captured his former master and took him to Shuja-ud-Daula. Shuja-ud-Daula continued to prolong his stay at Buxar, in the midst of a life of luxury and ostentation. Even on the eve of battle the trio was divided, with Mir Qasim being held captive by Shuja-ud-Daula and Shah Alam being indifferent.

Finally, a battle took place at Buxar on 22 October 1764 between the British forces led by the new commander Hector Munro and the combined forces of Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-Daula and Emperor Shah Alam. The combined Mughal army was defeated by the superior strategy, equipment

and motivation of the British forces. Buxar, more than Plassey, was the real foundation of British conquest of Bengal, and for that matter, India. It was a battle in the true military sense unlike Plassey, which was more of a puppet play. Buxar left a foreign merchant company in military and political control of the territory from Ayodhya to Chittagong. In military skill and strategy the English were clearly far superior to the forces of the nawabs and this enabled them to overcome the combined forces of Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-Daula and Shah Alam.

Shah Alam at once joined the victors, Shuja-ud-Daula fled to Rohilkhand, carrying Mir Qasim as a captive and seeking the help of the Marathas. Munro chased him up to Allahabad. Mir Qasim, after his release from the Oudh nawab's custody, lived in Rohilkhand for some time and some years later, probably in 1777, he died a poor man in a dilapidated hut at Delhi.

We have an assessment by Saiyid Ghulam Hussain, a contemporary historian 'who was intimately known to some of the members of Mir Qasim's court, and who described him as a man made up of both good and evil'. His fairness in the administration of civil and criminal justice and in upholding the prestige of the learned may very well earn for him the distinction of an ideal king. Two days a week he used to occupy the seat of judgment and he also supervised the administration of justice by the subordinate judiciary. He himself used to try cases by listening to the facts and arguments put forward by contending parties and their witnesses. During his time no officer could be bribed to act to the detriment of a citizen. He used to consider it his sacred duty to give protection to the poor against the oppression of the zamindars.

Mir Qasim's principled stand in relation to the wide-scale abuse of private trading by the British East India Company's officials, his efforts to make himself independent of the de facto British overlordship which Plassey had brought about, the humiliation and insult to which the British officials subjected him and his spirited though unsuccessful fight with the foreign occupiers of Bengal make him stand out in the history of Bengal. Governor Vansittart paid a tribute to his sense of justice and fair play and

the loyalty of his subjects, and placed the responsibility for the war fairly and squarely on the English.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his novel *Chandrasekhar* has portrayed Mir Qasim in glowing terms and has called him the last independent nawab of Bengal. No doubt Mir Qasim had his failings. His treachery to his father-in-law and his cruelty to his nobles whom he suspected of treachery have been highlighted by some historians. But these black spots have to be viewed along with his qualities, not the least important of which was his courage. His sad end only heightens the contradictions of his life.

BENGAL FROM 1764 TO 1772

Mir Jafar was now called back to the throne of Murshidabad. Under a treaty signed with the Company he gave to the Company zamindari of the three districts of Midnapore, Burdwan and Chittagong in addition to 24 Parganas (near Calcutta), which was already with the Company. Also, the Company and its officials were to be permitted to trade freely within the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa without payment of tax, except the tax of 2.5 per cent on salt. Also, an agent of the Company was to be stationed at Murshidabad. This treaty was the first in a chain of treaties which resulted in reducing the nawab of Murshidabad into a puppet pensioner, at the same time taking Bengal outside the fiction of the Mughal emperor's sovereignty. When Mir Jafar died on 5 February 1757, the Company tightened its noose by accepting his son Najam-ud-Daula as nawab on the condition that the actual administration would be carried on by the naib sultan appointed with the approval of the English in Calcutta. This meant that for all practical purposes the English assumed the effective power of administration, although the puppet play went on at the Murshidabad durbar. As things deteriorated very fast, Clive was sent back as governor in 1765 and stayed as such for two years. During his second governorship, popularly called a dual administration, Clive tried his best to maintain the dignity of the nawab but allowed Bengal to be ruled by his own subordinates, who while outwardly maintaining a high moral tone, practised a great deal of oppression and immorality. Clive formally ended the war with Shuja-ud-

Daula and restored him to Oudh kingdom. He also had prolonged negotiations with the fugitive emperor Shah Alam culminating in a formal treaty at Allahabad. On 12 August 1765, the emperor, in a formal durbar held at Allahabad, conferred the dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company, while at the same time accepting Najam-ud-Daula as the titular subedar of these three provinces. The granting of the dewani to the Company was to become the legal foundation for British rule in Bengal. Clive returned to England in 1767 only to face allegations of corruption and bribery despite his prestige in Parliament, of which he had become a member, and committed suicide on 22 November 1774, a tragic end of the man who had conquered Bengal for Britain.

There were two shadowy and ineffective governors at the time—Verelst and Cartier. The deteriorating conditions in Bengal caused largely by the misrule of Reza Khan, the naib dewan, and his deputy Raja Sitab Rai for years, culminated in the calamitous famine of 1770, the so-called *Chhiattarer Manvantar*, named after the Bengali calendar year 1176, on account of which nearly a crore of people, about one-third of Bengal's estimated population, perished. This miserable and uncertain phase ended with the assumption of governorship by Warren Hastings in 1772.

Era of Warren Hastings

This period of Bengal's history (1772–85) can be legitimately named after Warren Hastings not only because he was the first Governor General of British India (from 1774) and for his victories over the Maratha Confederacy and Mysore, but because of his contribution to stabilizing things in Bengal and giving a fillip to cultural and intellectual developments.

Warren Hastings was no doubt an inveterate conquistador who believed in Britain's divine right to conquer and rule India. But he was also a great orientalist and not only knew Bengali but also Hindustani and Persian. He established the Fort William College for training the Company's officials and supported the efforts of Chief Justice Sir William Jones to set up the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The same ruthless person who tyrannized the begums of Oudh, Raja Chait Singh of Benares and the Rohillas of Rohilkhand, had the Hindu scripture Gita translated by Charles William (1784).

Warren Hastings came to Bengal as a teenager, attracted Clive's attention and was appointed the Company's representative to the nawab's court after Plassey. He openly protested against the plunder of Bengal by the Company's officials and was recalled to Calcutta. He resigned and returned to England, but was recalled by the Company and, after a short stint as governor of Madras, he became governor of Fort William in Calcutta in April 1772. Bengal was recovering from the disastrous famine of 1770. The Company's coffers were empty while the Company's servants had enriched themselves at the expense of the Company. Clive's experiment of 'dual administration' had proved a failure. People were groaning under the oppressive rule of the Reza Khan–Sitab Rai duo. **Warren Hastings came**

with a mandate to end the infamous 'dual administration' by directly taking over the dewani (revenue collection) functions of the Company. His first order was to dismiss Reza Khan and Sitab Rai and to instruct the Company's officials to 'stand forth' as the dewan. British officials with the title of 'collector' were appointed in each district. They were to give annual settlement of land to the highest bidder called *ijaradars*. But as the *ijaradar*, not having any long-term interest in the estate, extracted forcibly during the year as much land revenue as he could from the ryots, the condition of the Bengal ryots only worsened. Then Hastings experimented with five-year settlements. The collector also served as the civil judge for the district and appeals would go to the Sadar Dewani Adalat in Calcutta. Criminal justice, theoretically a function of the *nizamat* and thus a preserve of the nawab, would be administered by Bengalee magistrates in the districts. Appeals from them would go to Sadar Nizamat Adalat which Hastings shifted from Murshidabad to Calcutta. In November 1773 Hastings further experimented by transferring revenue collection functions to five provincial councils, each consisting of five British officers and located at Murshidabad, Dhaka, Burdwan, Dinajpur and Patna. Members of the council would by turn visit districts in their charge and hold circuit courts to supervise justice for a month.

REGULATING ACT, 1773

Meanwhile, public opinion in Great Britain was getting restive from time to time on receiving news from Bengal of oppression of the people and mismanagement by the Company. The absurdity of the situation, where a mercantile company helped no doubt by the king's government had become ruler of a country, was gradually being realized by the British people. There were demands that the Company's empire needed to be brought under some degree of control and supervision by the British government and Parliament. It was in response to this that the Regulating Act of 1773 was passed by the British parliament, the first intervention in a series of interventionist laws, the last of which was in 1858 by which the British Crown took over India's administration from the East India Company.

Under the 1773 act the governor of Bengal became Governor General of India with supervisory authority over the governors of Bombay and Madras. He was to preside over an executive council of four members. Also, a Supreme Court was established in Calcutta with a chief justice and three other judges for the trial of only British residents and officers of the Company.

THE MARATHA AND MYSORE WARS

Warren Hastings had his first encounter with the power play outside Bengal soon after he became Governor General largely on account of the wayward acts of the irresponsible governors of Bombay and Madras. By the time Hastings took charge of Bengal, the Mughal Empire had largely become a fiction, its authority being limited only to the city of Delhi. The Maratha Confederacy, the strongest military power in the subcontinent, was lying somewhat dormant after its disastrous defeat in the third Battle of Panipat (1761) with the Afghan invader Ahmad Shah Abdali. Warren Hastings was forced to intervene in the highly indiscreet meddling by the governor of Bombay in the disputed succession for the Peshwa's throne at Poona where he had supported Raghunath Rao, the uncle, against his nephew Narayan Rao. The overwhelming defeat of the Bombay forces by the Marathas at Wadgaon resulted in a humiliating treaty dictated by the Marathas. Hastings disowned this treaty and overruled the action of the Bombay governor. He sent two armed detachments to western India, and eventually the Treaty of Salbai (1782) emerged, by which the English agreed not to support any pretender and both sides agreed to return occupied territories.

Almost simultaneously, Warren Hastings had to deal with Haider Ali, the powerful ruler of Mysore, on account of some misadventure by the Madras governor. In 1780 Haider Ali, angered by the Madras government not assisting him against the Marathas contrary to promise, marched to Madras and defeated an English contingent. Warren Hastings, as Governor General, took the command of this war in his own hands. He sent Sir Eyre Coote, the commander-in-chief in Bengal, to Madras to take command of the forces. Coote had several victories against Haider and his son, Tipu, the most

important of them being Porto Novo, but also suffered some reverses. The war was still inconclusive when Haider Ali died in 1782. He was succeeded by his son Tipu. The war continued for two more years indecisively until the treaty of Mangalore (March 1784) brought peace. Both in the Maratha war and in the war with Mysore, Warren Hastings showed his great capacity for crisis management. Both the Marathas and Tipu Sultan of Mysore remained powerful until they were crushed by Cornwallis, Wellesley and Lord Hastings.

TUSSLE WITH THE COUNCIL

Warren Hastings did not have smooth dealings with the new council. The members of the new council were General Clavering, Colonel Monson, Philip Francis and Richard Barwell. The new councillors arrived in Calcutta on 19 October 1774. Very soon, two groups were formed, the three newcomers from England being on one side and Hastings and Barwell being on the other side. The two groups disagreed almost on every issue. While Bengal groaned under economic misery, Hastings and Francis in particular engaged themselves in six years of personal quarrel, mud-slinging and vendetta, leading even to a duel between the two at Belvedere at Alipur in Calcutta in which both survived. Elija Impey, the chief justice and a friend of Hastings in general, tried to help Hastings wherever possible. Bickering between the two groups continued to bedevil Warren Hastings's administration till the death of Monson in 1776 and of Clavering in 1777, after which Hastings had the opportunity to enforce his will on official decisions of the colonial government.

In 1781 Warren Hastings reintroduced the office of collector for collection of revenue in suppression of provincial councils in the districts. Simultaneously, the judge of the civil court was combined with the post of the magistrate. Only English officers were appointed to this combined post. This meant that the administration of criminal courts, nominally under the nawab, was in effect brought under the control of the Governor General. This process was to be carried further by Lord Cornwallis who formally withdrew criminal justice from the naib nazim and vested it in the circuit

courts that were manned by English magistrates. This made the descendants of Mir Jafar sitting on the throne of Murshidabad simply pensioners. Soon, the coins bearing the figure of Emperor Shah Alam remained the only relic of Mughal rule. By 1793, when the Permanent Settlement took place in Bengal, the new nawab of Murshidabad, Nasir-ul-Mulk was given a joint credential by the East India Company and Emperor Shah Alam. This was to continue till 1880 when the nawab of Murshidabad formally abandoned the office of naib nazim and also his right to interfere in any matter connected with the administration of Bengal. In return he was paid Rs 10 lakh and an annual allowance of £1,000. On his death in 1894, his son Syed Hasan Ali was only given the title of nawab of Murshidabad and declared the foremost of the aristocracy in Bengal. The practice of the titular emperor in Delhi formally endorsing the nawab had already fallen in disuse. The last vestige of Mughal rule in Bengal was formally abandoned when, after the occupation of Delhi, Governor General Wellesley did not enter into a treaty with Emperor Shah Alam II, but simply fixed an allowance for him.

Maharaja Nandakumar Episode

One fallout of the infighting within the council was the trial and execution of Maharaja Nandakumar, a well-known nobleman from Siraj-ud-Daula's time who has been glorified by nationalist historians almost as the first martyr for freedom under British rule. Nandakumar formally complained to the council through Francis (1774) that Warren Hastings had taken bribe from Mir Jafar's widow Mani Begum for some consideration. The majority of three in the council sided with Nandakumar and wanted to try Hastings in the council, but an unscrupulous Hastings used his official position not to allow this complaint to be raised in the council. Instead, he had Nandakumar framed on a charge of forgery. One Mohan Prasad filed a complaint of forgery against Nandakumar in the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Impey, Hastings's friend, held a speedy trial, found Nandakumar guilty and sentenced him to death in accordance with the provisions of English law, although, according to the Indian law in force at that time, this

charge did not call for death sentence. Nandakumar was hanged. The Governor General had the power to suspend the death sentence, but he did nothing. This led to a lot of commotion in Calcutta at that time, since Nandakumar was a Brahman and the manner of his hanging was resented by the local gentry. Clearly, the manner in which Nandakumar was found guilty and hanged in accordance with the newly introduced English law, with which the people in Bengal were not familiar, left much to be desired. On the other hand, there is no justification for treating him as a martyr as some nationalist historians have done. We have earlier observed how Nandakumar betrayed Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula in not resisting Clive's attack on Chandernagore. His treachery definitely facilitated the decline and fall of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula and the rise of East India Company's power in Bengal. Thus he was no different from others of his times; but the fact remains that he was a victim of judicial high-handedness. Not only that his complaint against Hastings was ignored, but Hastings took revenge on him by using the system to bring about a judicial murder.

Warren Hastings's original term as Governor General was for five years. With the American war of independence, France's declaration of war on Britain in 1778 and, in India, the wars against the Marathas and Mysore, the authorities in London extended his tenure after 1779 from year to year till 1785. During this period wars occupied almost all his attention, although Philip Francis, determined as ever to be a watchdog for integrity and against extravagance, and suspicious of every motive of Hastings, continued to trouble him till he left for England for a month after the famous duel. But now trouble came from most unexpected quarters. His old friend Impey, the chief justice, was determined to preserve the independence of the judiciary while Hastings was impatient with the judicial process. There was a running battle between the executive and the judiciary of which one curious example was the Cosijura case when the Supreme Court sent its own bailiffs to resist government soldiers who had been sent to enforce a government decision against a restraint order of the court, and the two sides were on the verge of an armed conflict. Hastings attempted to solve the problem by appointing Impey concurrently as the chief justice of the Sadar

Dewani Adalat and offering him an extra salary of Rs 5,000 per month. But the court of directors in London overruled this. Impey resigned and sailed home in 1780.

PITTS INDIA ACT, 1784

A second parliamentary act—Pitts India Act—was passed in 1784. It established an administrative authority in England termed the Board of Control to supervise the affairs of the East India Company. Within a few years, the president of this board virtually became the supreme authority as far as the East India Company's Indian empire was concerned, and only some minor powers remained with the Company. The act further underscored the subordination of Bombay and Madras to the Governor General and his council in Calcutta in matters concerning war, revenue and foreign affairs. This act also took away the power of the Governor General and his council to launch war without the approval of the Board of Control.

CHAIT SINGH, OUDH BEGUMS AND ROHILKHAND

Warren Hastings's rule is also associated with atrocities on Chait Singh, the raja of Benares, and the begum of Oudh and the unjust annexation of Rohilkhand. Dangerously short of funds as a result of the long wars with the Marathas and with Mysore, Hastings decided to squeeze the cash-rich Oudh nawab and the raja of Benares. Ever-increasing demands on Chait Singh and his inability to meet those demands led to the latter's imprisonment in his own palace and a revolt by the raja's troops which were personally crushed by Hastings who replaced Chait Singh by a new raja. On similar demands being made on Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula of Oudh who had succeeded Shuja-ud-Daula, the former told Hastings that his father's wealth had passed on to his mother and grandmother and that he had no money to pay the Company's dues. This led to the atrocities on the begums who were taken captive and made to part with their wealth. The immoral invasion of Rohilkhand and the atrocities on the people at the behest of the nawab of Oudh is yet another blot on Warren Hastings. All these atrocities hardened

opinion in London against him. He was asked to rescind the measures against Chait Singh in February 1785. Shortly after Pitt's India Act, Hastings resigned and returned to Britain, where he was impeached before Parliament on a number of charges of which the atrocities on Chait Singh, the begums of Oudh and those on Rohilkhand were the three most prominent ones. During the impeachment proceedings that lasted for seven years, some of the best orators in England like Burke and Sheridan spoke eloquently against Warren Hastings, but he was eventually acquitted (1795).

Firebrand orators and sober scholars like Macaulay and Mill have downright condemned Hastings. Others have hailed him as the real founder of the British Empire in India. A balanced view should steer clear of both the extreme positions. But it should surely highlight Warren Hastings's patronage of oriental learning and literature. He was fluent in several languages, including Bengali. He founded the Calcutta Madrasa (1781), encouraged Sir William Jones, the new chief justice, to establish the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784), which became a premier centre for study and research of oriental history, literature, art and science, and also patronized Jonathan Duncan to set up a Sanskrit College in Benares (1782). Under his direction Halhead wrote a Bengali grammar, which was published in 1777 in Bengali type from the printing press started by Charles William with support from Hastings. He also had the Gita, by far the most important Hindu scripture, translated into English by Charles Wilkins and published in London. He declared in the Foreword that 'those lofty philosophical principles contained in this wonderful text would remain even after the last vestige of British rule in India were removed and that reading this book would benefit not only the Englishmen but the entire world, even the Christians'.

It is a pity that these were only isolated examples and did not become a tradition with the alien government until the middle of the next century. We must also recall that he had the insight and foresight to announce that India was not just 'the investment of shareholders on a remote island off the coast of Europe, but an obligation requiring sympathy and understanding, the essence of good government'. This anticipates Kipling's 'white man's

burden' by at least a century. It was under Hastings that the outlines of the British Indian Empire took shape and an attempt was made to introduce a proper management system of *central government* with provincial governments and subsidiary princes, which became the basis of British rule in India. Also, he declared his resolve to make Calcutta 'the first city in Asia'. A rare combination of a great war leader and a wise peacetime administrator, he was undoubtedly one of the most competent men Britain ever sent to the East.

During the century between Plassey (1757) and the great revolt of 1857 against British rule, Bengal's history moved away from the medieval age and the vestiges of Mughal Empire, and in their place the outlines of modern Bengal emerged, a Bengal that promised much, but belied these promises in the next century. During this century, and till the beginning of the twentieth century, the history of Bengal and the history of the Indian subcontinent became nearly identical. For one thing, Calcutta having become the headquarters of British power in India, Bengal became the driver's seat for British imperialism in Asia. It was here that almost all major geopolitical decisions were taken under Governor Generals like Cornwallis, Wellesley, Lord Hastings and Dalhousie, such as the forward drive in Afghanistan and Central Asia against the Russian threat, or the sending of Younghusband in 1904 to subjugate Tibet or Lord Moira dispatching Raffle to conquer Singapore, Penang, Malaccus and the Dutch East Indies. It was using Bengal as a base and with Bengal's resources that the British conquered the whole of India. For another, it was Bengal which was the nursery for the growth of the great Indian Renaissance, the mighty religious reformation that followed and, eventually, the nationalist movement that engulfed the whole subcontinent and ultimately drove out foreign colonial rule. The first half-century saw the consolidation of British rule in Bengal (including Bihar and Orissa) and the next the growth of the British Indian Empire covering a vast land mass from the Khyber Pass to Burma and from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. This was the high noon of the 'John Company', the extraordinary phenomenon in all history of a mercantile company finding itself in possession of an empire until the

displacement of the Company's rule by the rule of the British Crown in 1858. It was also during this period that the rough outlines of the borders of the Bengal Presidency were formed as a result of a series of border wars to the west, north, east and south-east.

MODERN BENGAL

Agrarian, Industrial and Economic Changes

As a result of a series of crucial economic changes during the first hundred years of British rule, Bengal, traditionally a prosperous country, was transformed into an economically depressed, low-income country. It became a typical colonial economy, which supplied raw materials for industries in Great Britain and also served as a market for British goods. Some of these changes were no doubt due to global developments, such as the change from mercantile capitalism to industrial capitalism, the advent of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and the pervasive sway of the doctrine of free trade. But along with these the ruthless colonial regime adopted certain policies that specifically favoured British industry and hurt indigenous industries. There was a significant degree of drainage of wealth from Bengal through both East India Company's trading and also private trading by the erstwhile officials of the Company, as a result of which surplus wealth flowed to Great Britain. No longer was there import of bullion into Bengal, but in its place, another system developed whereby the profits earned by the Company, and privately by its servants through merchandising in Bengal out of profits earned here, led to a net outflow of wealth from Bengal. The drainage theory, first formulated in modern times in 1867 by Dadabhoy Naoroji and Digby and more completely by R.C. Dutt in his *Economic History of India*—published during the closing years of the nineteenth century—has graphically described how Bengal was bled white

by ruthless plundering and merchandising: 'So great an economic drain out of the resources of a land would impoverish the most prosperous country's life. It was reduced to a land of famines very frequent and more widespread and more fatal than in any nation before in the history of India or of the world.' To quote Karl Marx, 'Treasures flowed back to the mother country were thus formed into capital.' Also, goods taken from India were sold at a considerable profit in the West. Thus capital accumulated in Great Britain from exploitation of Bengal contributed significantly to the advent of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain. It was not mere coincidence that the Industrial Revolution started in England shortly after Plassey.

PERMANENT SETTLEMENT, 1793

Economically and socially, Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement of land revenue in 1793 caused great inequality. Through this he wanted to replace nearly three decades of short-term settlement of land or *ijara* of land revenue (which had caused large-scale misery in Bengal's countryside) with a system of landholding through large estates that prevailed in England. Land revenue to be collected from the landlords was fixed for all time to come so that the colonial government, technically the *dewan*, or the collector, of land revenue, could know in advance how much revenue it could collect. But there was no restriction on the landlord's power to raise revenue. Although the colonialists felt that Permanent Settlement would give the landholders or the zamindars a permanent interest in developing the land and agriculture, in practice the majority of the landlords were simply interested in raising the revenue that they levied on the *prajas*, or actual cultivators. This had a ruinous effect in the long run, although its short-term effects might have looked attractive. The majority of the zamindars were not philanthropists, only some were. Condition of the *prajas* went on from bad to worse until the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1898 tried to provide some relief to them, followed by the efforts made by the Fazlul Huq government half a century later. There was no noticeable capital investment in agriculture by the British in Bengal, even at the end of the

eighteenth century, except for stray examples like the Midnapore Zamindari Company.

Another visible change was the gradual disappearance of many of the domestic industries in the wake of the Permanent Settlement. Spinning and weaving, next to agriculture, had been the great national industries. Production of salt, saltpetre and raw silk also provided employment to large groups of people. Slowly but surely, most of these industries languished and then disappeared thanks to the policies initiated by the alien rule. Another aspect of the changed economic situation was that indigenous capital disappeared from trade and industry. The scope of indigenous banking shrank. At the same time, after the Charter Act of 1833 ended the East India Company's trading monopoly, the new free merchants from the West and the agency houses no longer relied on native banians but on British agents.

In fact one of the major effects of Permanent Settlement was to divert native capital from the uncertainties of industries and trade on to the certainty of holding zamindaris and earning some regular income. This, in a way was what Cornwallis had intended as indicated by his letters.

By far the most important reason for the decline and extinction of nearly all the indigenous industries was the conscious policy pursued by the imperial government to shut out the British and the European market for Indian cotton and silk goods by direct prohibition or by creating very high export tariff barriers and thus destroying India's existing textile exports market. On the other hand, laissez-faire dictated them to follow an open-door policy in India in respect of textiles and other goods imported from Britain. Thus British silk goods imported into India during the nineteenth century were charged a duty of only 3.5 per cent while a duty of 20 per cent was levied on Indian silk goods imported into Britain. In case of woollen goods the situation was worse. In 1831 the corresponding duties were 2 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.

Needless to say the Industrial Revolution gave industry in Britain a new technological efficiency and competitive advantage in relation to the traditional industries in Bengal based on individual craftsmanship. With the political unification of India and abolition of internal transit duties by 1836–

37, the foundation of a national market was laid and the subcontinent was opened up to unrestricted flow of goods from Britain. This process was facilitated by the end of East India Company's monopoly in 1833 and the entry of a new class of British traders. These traders came essentially to secure the entry into India of goods manufactured in Britain and had no vested interest, as in the days of the Company, in maintaining existing industries in India in which the Company had a stake. Thus, with industry in Britain rapidly getting unbeatable competitive efficiency and the existing industries of Bengal becoming uncompetitive, Bengal steadily fell behind the West in industrial and commercial development. This process is described in picturesque details by R.C. Dutt in his *Economic History* and also by Karl Marx in his writings on India.

From time to time educated public opinion in India criticized this policy of free trade vigorously pursued by the government on the ground that an open door was favoured by the British to protect the narrow commercial interests of Britain. The following passage from a petition by some wealthy inhabitants of Bengal, quoted in R.M. Martin's *Anglo-Eastern Empire* illustrates this:

The Petitioners, and more especially the labouring and manufacturing classes of natives, are already suffering grievous hardships in consequence of those principles in trade and commerce which the Petitioners are told are now actuating the English councils, not being extended to the produce of that country, while every encouragement is held out to the exportation from England to that country of the growth and produce of foreign as well as English industry, and while many thousands of the natives of that country, who a short time ago derived a livelihood from the growth of cotton and the manufacture of cotton goods, are without bread in consequence of the facilities afforded to the produce of America and the manufacturing industry of England; and the article of sugar, to the production of which the lands of the Petitioners might be turned is, loaded with such heavy duties in England as effectually to shut the market against the industry of the East-Indians when turned to this particular commodity.¹

The way in which Lancashire was allowed to meddle frequently in British Indian government's fiscal and industrial policies strengthened this attitude of suspicion. The memories of bygone days when Bengal was famous for the products of its industry added a touch of piquancy to the natural regret felt by patriotic people who demanded protection for Indian

industry. It was pointed out that countries like the United States, Germany and Japan appeared to have prospered industrially only after adopting the policy of protecting their infant industries and that Britain itself had discarded protection and gone all out for free trade only after her pre-eminence in industry was established. But all these murmurs failed to create any impact on official policy until well after the twentieth century had begun. Industrially and commercially backward Bengal was made to compete with the vast resources of technical skill of imperial Britain which had also become the most advanced industrial country in the world.

The disappearance of domestic handicrafts was a very quick process. Population increased but manufacturers disappeared. The weaver-cum-cultivator became merely a cultivator. The *malangi* or the salt worker who had his patch of land had to depend entirely on it for his subsistence. Thus was created a great underemployment problem. Millions of farmers were doomed to idleness for half the time.

The Charter Act of 1833 opened a new outlet for British capital and British commercial enterprise in India. The Court of Directors' dispatch on the Charter Act insisted on the Company's servants keeping in view the Parliament's intention of opening of the interior of India to Europeans. They emphasized that the regulations must not be such as to harass the Europeans with unnecessary restraints. Casual misconduct must not be made the occasion of harsh legislation. The restraints which the regulations of 7 May 1824 and 17 February 1828 laid on the acquisition and ownership of land by Europeans were, according to the directors, partly intended for the protection of the European buyers rather than for that of the 'natives'. Bengal Chamber of Commerce, which was formed in 1834, became the spearhead of British capital in India. British capitalist enterprise entered in silk, indigo, tea and coffee. Gradually, the agency houses gave place to the managing agency system. This opened India to the full impact of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Transit duties were abolished in 1835 as a result of Charles Trevelyan's famous report. Thus was created a huge Indian market for British goods. There was no longer free import of surplus capital from England. Larger and cheaper banking facilities for European business

could be organized in India. The system of production was completely geared to the needs of industrial Britain. Commercial policy was calculated to ensure production of raw materials in India for British industries and the consumption of British-manufactured goods in India.

The right given to Europeans to own land by the Charter Act of 1833 led to the plantation system. Oppression and lawlessness became associated with the plantation system. It was too much to expect moderation from those who were intent only on making money and who had no moral restraints or enlightened views. Famine was considered to be a problem of distribution. Famines occurred with unfailing regularity throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, except for fifteen years between 1880 and 1895. Strangely enough, in the famine prevention public works, priority was not given to irrigation, but to railroad construction. English merchants naturally looked to the opening of distant markets in India. New lines of communication were therefore opened, giving concessions to British companies. The Bengal peasant was practically without any savings. After paying his dues to the zamindar in the zamindari areas and after meeting his obligations to the village moneylender, the cultivator had very little left to him above his subsistence even in years of good harvest. Land revenue was in many areas 50 or 60 per cent of the rental. The bulk of the revenue was drawn from the rural districts.

The system established by Cornwallis was based upon the principle of getting everything done by European agencies. Only very inferior public services were manned by Indians. Lord William Bentinck substituted this for a system by which public business was transacted by native agencies under European superintendence. Bentinck started recruiting 'native' deputy collectors in 1833. The new middle class looked for a career in the public services and in the new professions. Some of them were also based on land and had no roots in indigenous commerce and industry. During the first century of British rule, the principal businessmen in Calcutta were mostly higher-caste Hindus. In a petition presented by ninety-five of the principal 'native' inhabitants of Calcutta in 1766 against hanging a man for forgery, more than eighty were high-caste Hindus with such surnames as

Mukherjee, Banerjee, Sarma, Tagore, Dutta, Mitra, Ghosh, Sen, etc. Most of them were Calcutta banians. This class of people disappeared from business by the beginning of the first half of the nineteenth century. There were no more Mutty Seals, Hidaram Banerjees or Ramdulal Sarkars.

Modern industrial enterprise in Bengal developed only after 1850. Its earliest manifestation came in the wake of the construction of railways, which made it essential to have modern workshops for repair and maintenance of the rolling stock. The effects of the introduction of railways vis-à-vis industry are described by Marx in the following words:

I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other raw materials for their manufactures. But when you have once introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country, which possesses iron and coal, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with the railways. The railway-system will, therefore become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry ... Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power.²

The development of railways broke down the isolation of the villages, made the world market available to the Indian producer, facilitated both foreign and domestic trade, and created the necessary conditions for the growth of large-scale factory industry. It was no coincidence that this was followed in the later decades of the century by the establishment and quick growth of jute, cotton, textile and coal mining industries, and also of new forms of business organization in the shape of joint stock companies and managing agency. 'Indeed the Company's rule became,' to quote Marx again, 'the unconscious tool of history in bringing about a social revolution accomplished by means of robbery and slaughter.'

Jute industry started after the Crimean War had interrupted the supply of hemp and flax from Russia to Great Britain, at first in competition with the Dundee Mill owners who protested vigorously against allowing the growth of manufacturing industry in a colony suitable only for commercial

exploitation. But the natural advantage offered by Bengal was immense, and from the opening of the first jute mill at Rishra near Calcutta in 1855 the industry rapidly grew until it became the most important export industry in undivided India.

Similarly, the government had little or no role to play in the spectacular growth of coal mining in the 1860s and 1870s, after the introduction of railways and steamers and increased use of steel had created a market for Indian coal. All early efforts at establishing an iron and steel plant in the late nineteenth century failed, thanks largely to governmental apathy and lack of support. The first modern steel mill was the Bengal Steel Mill near Asansol. This preceded the setting up of the Tata Iron and Steel Company in 1907.

One unfortunate consequence of British rule directly and indirectly was the sharp decline of the cotton spinning and cotton weaving industries of Bengal. These had occupied a very important position in Bengal's economy. It had great ramifications in rural areas as this had contributed significantly to income generation there. Following disappearance of the *dadani* merchants (who did business on advance payments—or *dadan*), the paid gomastas unleashed a reign of terror on the cotton spinners and cotton weavers. While the story of the East India Company cutting the thumbs of cotton weavers so as to prevent them from doing anything else may be apocryphal (although it is obliquely mentioned in Bolt's *Considerations*, which says that the weavers were obliged to work 'against their will at whatever prices are arbitrarily imposed upon them'), what is historically established is that the oppression reduced large classes of weavers of Bengal to misery and ruination.³ The great famine of 1770 also dealt a severe blow to the cotton weaving industry of Bengal. Similar was the story in respect of silk winders and cocoon growers, saltpetre manufacturers and workers, and the flourishing salt industry of Midnapore. Also, the second half of the eighteenth century saw the gradual dwindling and eventual elimination of French and Dutch commerce in Bengal which had posed some degree of competition to the British East India Company. After the Charter Act of 1833 had removed the monopoly of East India Company in

Indian trade, free merchants came in large number. The cut-throat competition introduced by them also had an impact on Bengal's economy.

One significant change during these decades was the decline of the Armenian community which had occupied a very important position in the commerce of Bengal in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. The Armenians traded mainly in silk and cotton piece goods and were both overseas and inland traders. They came after they were scattered from their homeland by the Persian rulers who occupied it in 1604. They were among the early settlers in Calcutta and served as agents of the East India Company. There were also Armenian communities in Dhaka, Chinsurah, Chandernagore and Saidabad near Murshidabad. Some of the important Armenians were Khojah Phanoos Kalandar who entered into a trade agreement with the East India Company in London in 1688 and Khojah Israel Sarhad who helped the English in negotiating and getting the zamindari of Calcutta from Azim-ush-Shan and was a member of the Surman embassy to Emperor Farrukh Siyar's court.

The first open emphasis on the need for a conscious industrial policy to be pursued by the government was made by the report of the Famine Commission in 1880. It took the view that in order to ward off famine which lifted its head from time to time, the government should foster the inception of new industries and introduce scientific methods of production in existing industries. Government was also urged to carry out experiments to guide and educate private trade and to assist people desiring to develop new industry by obtaining for them technical advice and information. Finally, the Commission also advised the government to buy its own requirements from India rather than from Europe wherever possible. But beyond these points the Commission's report once again swung back to the laissez-faire doctrine.

Otherwise than indicated above, we do not think it desirable that the government should directly involve in any manufacture or industry in an experimental way. Such experiments to be really successful or valuable must be carried out on commercial basis.

In the prevailing all-pervasive laissez-faire culture even the modest recommendations of the Commission were not taken care of.

INDUSTRIAL AND INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

The first century of the British rule in Bengal had seen the rise of a class of affluent Bengalee merchants as banians of the East India Company or its servants. The banian had been described as ‘interpreter, head book-keeper, head secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash-keeper’. Some of them like Hidaram Banerjee, Akrur Dutt, Gokul Ghoshal, Manshur Mukherjee, Krishnakanta Nandi, Maharaja Nabakrishna and Gangagobinda Singh were fabulously rich, according to contemporary evidence. Some of them did a lot of inland trading. Cornwallis’s Permanent Settlement created private property in landed estates and diverted, by a conscious design, much of their capital to investment in zamindaris. Thus the merchant princes of the eighteenth century became zamindars in the nineteenth century. This coincided with the rise of the British agency houses that controlled the country trade, mostly in silk, cotton textiles, opium and indigo. They also undertook government contracts, financed indigo and sugar plantation and ran the banks and insurance companies of Calcutta. Many of them turned later on into well-known managing agency houses of the second half of the century. Bengalee merchants could no longer hold their ground and gradually gave way in the face of cut-throat competition and unethical practices backed by an unfriendly colonial regime. Some of them, however, took valiant rearguard action. We know of several Bengalee shipowners — Ramgopal Mullick, Madan Dutt, Pancho Dutt and, the most famous of them, Ramdulal Sarkar. Ramdulal did a lot of trading with America but was ruined when American traders started preferring European agency houses as partners. By 1813, he had only one ship in the port of Calcutta, ‘the last tragic gesture of the Bengal ship owners before complete annihilation’.

The most remarkable Bengalee industrialist of the period was Dwarkanath Tagore, grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore. He established indigo factories, sugar plantations, mining, banking, insurance, shipping and shipbuilding companies. He was also among the promoters of the Calcutta Steam Tug Association which purchased a ship, the *Forbes*, in 1836, and competed with British companies in river steam navigation. It was jokingly nicknamed ‘the Thug Association’ by the *Samachar Darpan*

on account of its profits which were Rs 3,000 a month. Dwarkanath, to quote Blair B. Kling, 'envisioned a future India that was westernized and industrialized and whose inhabitants enjoyed without discrimination the rights and liberties of Englishmen. He would lay the foundation of this new India in his own day by promoting an all-compassing inter-racial partnership of Britishers and Indians'.⁴ He promoted Carr Tagore & Co., by far the earliest example of an Anglo-Bengali partnership in business. His career illustrates the transition of a whole generation from business to landholding. It would be correct to say that Rabindranath's creative multiplicity or Debendranath's spiritual sadhana were, to a considerable extent, made possible because of the foundation of leisure provided by Dwarkanath's wealth. Other examples of Indo-British business ventures were Oswald Sea & Company and Rustamji Turner & Company, both of which did sizeable international trading. But Dwarkanath's industrial enterprises collapsed in his lifetime, illustrating in a way the promise and the collapse of the economic aspects of the Bengal Renaissance. The commercial turmoil of 1830–33 seriously affected nearly all major agency houses; Dwarkanath had to fall back on his landed estates, but to quote Kling again, 'When the giants had stumbled and fallen he appeared as one of the leading commercial men in the period 1834–46, if not the leading one.' Bengal Coal, after much vicissitudes, was to pass on under the managing agency of Andrew Yule (1908) and was to become one of the largest producers of coal until the nationalization of coal industry in 1973.

After the Charter Act, 1833, the old agency houses collapsed in general. On the ruins of the earlier European agency houses and the Bengalee banian-turned businessmen, in the second half of the century, rose the magnificent edifice of the British managing agency houses like Andrew Yule (1873), Gillanders Arthbutnot (1882), Balmer and Lawrie, Jardine Henderson, Bird & Co., Heilgers & Co. and Macneill & Barry. They all illustrated the unique system of group management that evolved in British India where one company, under a management contract, managed a large number of companies operating in different fields such as jute mills, coal mines, engineering, inland navigation, cotton textiles, tea, insurance and

banking. They perceived business opportunities and responded through the creation of business enterprises to which they provided both management and finance. On the whole, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the European managing houses had come to dominate trade and industry in Bengal with their presence in jute, tea, coal mines, transport and engineering works. Indigenous enterprise was confined to cotton mills, tannery, pottery, chemical works, banks, insurance companies and small-scale cottage industry. In a way, history, geography and economics combined to create the giant managing agency system with its emphasis on group control over separate segments of industry and trade.

Unfortunately, Bengalee entrepreneurs could not take advantage of the opportunities that arose. There were only isolated cases of Bengalees following the merchant prince tradition of Dwarkanath Tagore. In 1855 Bysumber Sen, in collaboration with George Auckland, set up the first jute mill as another example of multiracial business. An area where the Bengalees showed much promise was banking. Dwarkanath himself was a director of the Union Bank. Among the promoters of the Commercial Bank (1819), the Calcutta Bank (1824) and the Dacca Bank (1846) we come across the names of Suryakumar Tagore, Raghuram Goswami, Khaja Alimullah, Khaja Abdul Gani and Nand Lal Dutt. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar was a promoter of the Hindu Annuity, a pioneer insurance company in the country.

There were some more isolated efforts. Kishorilal Mukherji of Howrah founded the Shibpur Iron Works in 1867, the first Bengalee to start an iron mill. Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy promoted the Bengal Chemical & Pharmaceutical Works in 1892. Sitanath Roy, Raja Sreenath Roy and Raja Janakinath Roy promoted the East Bengal River Steam Service Ltd in 1897. Its steamers regularly plied between Calcutta and stations in East Bengal. Mutty (Moti) Seal and Chandranath Paul (after whom the Chand Paul Ghat in Calcutta is named) were two other well-known merchant princes. Mutty Lal Seal (1792–1854) was by far the most eminent banian of his time. Without any background of family wealth and with only elementary English education at Nityananda Sen's English school at Kalutollah he started as a

clerk at Fort William supplying articles to the Englishmen, became *darogha* and customs-in-charge at Ballykhal and soon made both money and a name for business intelligence. In 1820 he became banian to one Smith and thereafter to eight top mercantile companies. He supplied articles like sugar, silk, rice, soda and indigo to ships and also exported them. He imported textile and iron goods. From this he logically diversified into shipping, competing with foreign liners. When he died in 1854 his obituary in the *Hindu Intelligencer* described him as 'the richest and the most virtuous Baboo' of Calcutta. He also spent much of his wealth on charity, and the magnificent building that housed the Mutty Seal's Free College still survives on Chittaranjan Avenue.

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution in the West, Calcutta also entered the machine age in the first half of the nineteenth century. The installation of a windmill at Kidderpore by Col. Watson around 1780; the setting up of shipbuilding yards by Watson and Col. Kyd; the advent of the steam engine and along with it of steam boats, which revolutionized water transport; the extensive use of steam power for drawing up water and running cotton textile and jute mills (Bauria Cotton Mill in the 1820s); the manufacture of evidently the first steamboat in the East by McNaught at Fort Glouster Mill in 1829; and the setting up of a paper plant by Carey at Serampore in 1865 cast a lot of influence on contemporary Bengali press. The commissioning of the first steamboat (named *Diana*) manufactured by Kyd & Co. Dockyards in 1823 was a major event for the contemporary press. The widespread use of paddling steamers on the Bengal rivers soon changed the landscape. Hanef Sareng was the first Bengalee to be given charge of a steamer (*Nazira* in 1876 and *Sultan* in 1882) by the General Steam Navigation Company. It was from his name that the whole profession of *sarengs*, or steamer pilots, came to be known as such. The launching of the river steam navigation opened up East Bengal and Assam to the fast-growing jute mills along the Hooghly River on both banks near Calcutta under the British managing agency houses. The East Bengal Merchants Association threw itself whole-heartedly in supporting the Roys of Bhagyakul (Dhaka). Another company was the Cooperative Navigation

Ltd, promoted in 1908 by a host of well-known people, notably Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya, Manindra Chandra Nandi, Brajendra Kishore Chaudhuri of Mymensingh, A. Rasul and Ashwini Datta. Pramathanath Pramanik ran the Caledonian Docks, Howrah, to service the steamships. In fact, the entire Howrah area became full of small-scale engineering enterprises to serve the needs of jute mills, inland navigation and British-run heavy engineering works in and around Calcutta.

The swadeshi movement from 1905 onwards was to give a real boost to industrialization within India. With the setting up of the Bangalakhmi Cotton Mill in 1906 with a capital base of Rs 12 lakh, a new phase opened—that of Bengal venturing into large-scale machine industry. It produced both yarn and dhotis and saris. Among the first directors were Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi, Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya, Raja Sitanath Roy, R.N. Mukherjee, Krishnachandra Dey and Upendra Sen. This mill was a commercial success within a short time, thanks to the swadeshi atmosphere. In 1908 the Mohini Mills started at Kushtia with an authorized capital of Rs 141.5 lakh. The entrepreneur was a retired deputy magistrate, Mohinimohan Chakrabarti. This also became commercially successful within a short time. A.H. Guznavi (zamindar and businessman), Ahmed Musaji Salaji, Bhupendranath Bose and Radhacharan Pal were some other prominent names in this field.

Apart from the swadeshi movement with its slogan 'buy Indian', the First World War also gave a fillip to these swadeshi industries. Cotton weaving and silk rearing spread in several districts. Indigenous entrepreneurship spread into many consumer goods, e.g. matchboxes and cigarettes. Some Bengali entrepreneurs also developed interest in banking and insurance. The Bengal National Bank was formed in 1908 with an authorized capital of Rs 50,000. Its board of directors included Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya, Maharaja of Darbhanga, Raja Sreenath Roy, Raja Pearemohon Mukherjee of Uttarapara, Janakinath Roy and Upendranath Sahoo. Another group of landlords and merchants, notably the Maharaja of Koch Bihar, Maharaja of Natore, Maharaja of Cossimbazar, A. Choudhury, barrister, and Ashwini Datta, the swadeshi leader of Bengal, promoted the Hindustan Bank which

was soon renamed Cooperative Hindustan Bank, the first cooperative bank of undivided India with an authorized capital of Rs 2 crore.

These were encouraging signs of indigenous capital—which, a century after the collapse of the Union Bank, had withdrawn itself to the safe haven of zamindari—returning to the risk-taking field of commerce and industry. But, on the whole, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, educated, middle-class Bengalees had given up business and opted for desk jobs, allowing upcountry businessmen to race past them. The other fields that attracted their attention were life insurance and inland steam navigation. Following the lead of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's Hindu Annuity, two insurance companies were formed, viz., India Equitable Life Insurance and the Hindustan Cooperative Insurance, with share capital of Rs 10 lakh and Rs 1 crore, respectively. The first of them had Raja Peareemohan Mukherjee, J.N. Roychowdhury of Taki, Prasad Boral, a share-broker, and Abdul Rasul, a leader of the swadeshi movement, as directors. The second one was promoted by Surendranath Tagore and Brajendra Kishore Chaudhuri, among others.

The Roy family of Bhagyakul promoted the Bikrampur Flotilla Service which was later on amalgamated with a bigger company floated by them, viz., the Eastern Bengal Mahajan Flotilla Company, with an authorized capital of Rs 15 lakh. Soon the river traffic was to be supplemented by the opening of the railways. Starting with the East India Railways connecting Calcutta with the Raniganj coalfields in 1854, several almost entirely foreign railway companies soon constructed railways that covered various parts of Bengal radiating from Calcutta. They were all private-sector companies which operated under licence from the government.

Weaving began with renewed vigour in some of the districts. 'There is at present not a village in Bengal where the handlooms are not busy weaving cotton fabrics,' states the *Bengalee* of 24 February 1906. To quote L.S.S O'Mailley in *Hooghly District Gazetteer* (98), 'The cottage industries in Bengal would have been extinct but for the impetus provided by the Swadeshi movement.' Hosiery industry also began in Bengal at this time. The Bengal Hosiery Co. was started by some Muslim landlords and

merchants like Nawab Abdus Sobhan of Bogra, A.H. Guznavi and Ahmed Musaji Salaji. Footwear and tannery, flour mills, pottery and soap-making, etc., were some other industries into which Bengalee entrepreneurship ventured. Some leading examples were the Calcutta Pottery Works (1909) promoted by Baikunthanath Sen of Baharampur, Boot & Equipment Factory Co. Ltd (1908), Globe Cigarettes Co. (1910), Calcutta Cigarette Co. and the Calcutta Flour Mills Association (1905) whose mills were spread all over Calcutta. Bengal Chemical of P.C. Roy paid a dividend of 6 per cent in 1908. All these factories imported latest technology and machinery from Britain and Germany.

The Marwari industrialists closely followed the managing agency houses and were eventually destined to take over from them after Independence in 1947. Among them, the Birlas, Goenkas, Kanorias, Dalmias and Sahu-Jains were already very prominent by the second and third decades of the twentieth century. The Bengalee capitalists were still relatively weak. The formation of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce during 1913–15 provided an example of their coming together. This followed the setting up of the European-dominated Calcutta Chamber of Commerce (1837) by about three-fourth of a century. Among its office-bearers were Raja Rishikesh Law (president), Raja Peareemohan Mukherjee, Janakinath Roy, Srinath Paul and Hari Ram Goenka (vice-presidents).

If one has to sum up the industrial and mercantile developments during the nineteenth-century Renaissance one could say that it was non-fulfilment of the earlier promise of Bengalee entrepreneurship, missed opportunities for Bengalees in the economic sphere and surrender to domination by foreign capital and industrialists from outside Bengal. Unlike Bombay, Calcutta, while becoming the industrial nerve centre of the subcontinent, still remained primarily a colonial metropolis where the Europeans dominated trade and business. The position that the Bengalees had earlier occupied as agents of the British business houses was slowly surrendered to businessmen who came from outside. An important factor that contributed to the growth of a generally anti-business psyche among the Bengalees was the education system introduced by the British which glorified desk work

and taught people to dislike the practice of dirtying hands. This bred a value system that discouraged risk-taking and preferred the security of a white-collar job.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the upcountry business classes, mostly Marwaris, had already begun to challenge the traditional dominance of British business houses in nearly all types of industry: jute, tea, shipping, banking, import and export business, and coal. Helped by the stimulus received from the swadeshi movement and subsequently the First World War, which made imports to India difficult, they established themselves as the junior partners in the industrial and commercial life of Calcutta. There was also a certain clear understanding, not so much formally but tacit and indirect, between the leaders of Indian business and the leaders of the Indian National Congress. In some cases British business interests obstructed the growth of indigenous entrepreneurship. Thus the attempt by G.D. Birla to establish jute and cotton mills in Calcutta was obstructed by all possible means by established British houses like Andrew Yule.

As accurately summed up by Rajat K. Ray:

The big Indian houses which came to dominate the corporate sector as monopoly concerns after 1947 showed remarkable similarity of development over time. Most of these houses began in a dependent capacity, servicing foreign interests by trade, speculation and agency business of various sorts. At some point they switched over from so-called comprador activities to industrial investment, and finally the most successful among them, having acquired large financial assets in trade and consumer industries, turned their surplus funds to hitherto untried engineering, chemical and metallurgical industries of an advanced type ... The popular distinction between comprador and national bourgeoisie was somewhat blurred. Nor is it easy to relate the political attitude of Indian businessmen to their economic role so precisely.⁵

THE ADMINISTRATION OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNORS (1854–1904)

The Bengal Presidency was under the direct administration of the Governor General from the time of Warren Hastings. By the middle of the century, the British Empire in India had reached the borders of Afghanistan in the west and Burma in the east and covered nearly the whole of the subcontinent. Nearly all the annexed territories contiguous to the Bengal Presidency had been added to it. In 1936, however, the north-western provinces were

separated under a lieutenant governor. The Governor General was preoccupied with the external responsibilities which had increased enormously. Also, after the annexation of Punjab, Simla became the summer capital and the practice developed of the Governor General and the Government of India migrating to Simla for around six months a year. The administration of Bengal did not receive the direct attention it deserved. It was, therefore, thought necessary in 1854 to relieve the Governor General of the direct responsibility of the administration of Bengal Presidency and to appoint a lieutenant governor for the Presidency covering Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam in order to impart greater efficiency in the administration. On 28 April 1854, Sir Frederick James Haliday became the first lieutenant governor of Bengal.

The notable events of this half-century were the establishment of Calcutta University (1857); the construction of the first railway line, the East Indian Railways in 1855; the great revolt of 1857, popularly called the sepoy mutiny; the consequent replacement of the rule of East India Company by direct rule by the British Crown (Queen Victoria); the enactment of the Widow Remarriage Act passed at the instance of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar; the passing of the Rent Act of 1859; the revolt by the indigo cultivators; the establishment of the Calcutta High Court in 1868, taking over the functions of both the Supreme Court and of the Sadar Dewani and Sadar Nizamat Adalats of East India Company; and the passing of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 giving occupancy right to the ryot if he possessed any land in a village.

THE 1857 UPRISING AND CREATION OF ASSAM

A development of catastrophic proportion that hit British India was the great anti-British uprising of 1857—the so-called sepoy mutiny, also called India's first war of independence. The direct cause of the mutiny was said to be the compulsory use of bullets that were said to contain both cow and pig fat calculated to humiliate the religious feelings of both Hindus and Muslims. The real reason was a variety of economic, social and political factors. The extension of the British rule to areas like Oudh and central

Bihar had led to widespread disaffection of those who were deprived of their land and their rights. Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse led to the British takeover of a large number of princely states, such as Jhansi and Nagpur in central India, and the denial of the pension due to Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the deposed Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao. Some of those affected, like Nana Sahib and Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, joined the ranks of the rebels. The introduction of some modern reforms had antagonized the orthodox sections, both Hindu and Muslim. The revolt started in Bengal at Baharampur (Murshidabad) and thereafter at Barrackpore (Cantonment) near Calcutta. At Barrackpore, a sepoy named Mangal Pandey protested against the use of cartridges and attacked an English officer (29 March 1857), but thereafter Bengal was quiet. The real uprising started in Meerut on 10 May and spread to nearly the whole of upper India and central India. The rebel sepoys from Meerut stormed into Delhi and had Bahadur Shah, the last of the Mughal imperial dynasty, proclaimed as emperor of India. By the middle of 1858, after fierce fighting at Delhi, Kanpur, Gwalior and Jhansi, the rebellion was, by and large, suppressed all over the subcontinent. The retribution of the British was no less than the initial massacre by the rebels. After such a massive uprising the British government felt it unwise to leave the governance of India to a commercial company and decided to assume direct power of governance. Under an act passed by the Parliament on 2 August 1858 the British Crown took over the Indian empire from East India Company — 'the most remarkable institution of private enterprise that the world has ever known'. Queen Victoria was proclaimed the Empress of India.

The mutiny did not have any impact on Bengal except for some isolated incidents at Chittagong on 18 November 1857 and at Dhaka on 22 November. The people of Bengal, both Hindus and Muslims, by and large sided with the British rulers. The educated Bengalees treated the revolt as only a sepoy mutiny and not as a nationalist uprising or a freedom movement. The contemporary press in Bengal, both English and Bengali, supported the British and opposed the rebels.

Bengalee public opinion had too much vested interest in the continuance of the British rule, its liberal tendencies and the opportunities it had opened up for professional classes, and did not therefore fancy the prospect of a return to the medieval order in the form of restoration of the Mughal Empire. In this respect Bengal stood along with Punjab, western India and southern India that had also opposed the great revolt.

In 1876 Assam was separated from Bengal and formed into a separate province under a chief commissioner. But three predominantly Bengali-speaking districts, viz., Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara were included in Assam, the first instance of the vivisection of the Bengali-speaking territory.

After the experience of anti-government uprising by the peasants in many parts of Bengal, the government also took some half-hearted steps to improve the lot of the ryots, for instance by passing the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. This conferred occupancy right to the ryot if he possessed any land in a village for twelve years. This provided considerable relief to the ryots. In spite of the reliefs granted, periodical clashes between ts. In spite of the reliefs granted, periodical clashes between the tenants and landlords continued in several parts of the country, as, for example, the Pabna disturbances in 1872.

Anti-Government Popular Disturbances

During the first century of British rule there was a series of rebellions against the British Raj in various corners of Bengal, specially among the peasants and the tribal population. They were at times joined by dispossessed feudal elements and disgruntled religious elements among both Hindus and Muslims. This process was accelerated by the laundering of Bengal's wealth through various means by small but ruthless bands of expatriates aided by local agents, e.g. the squeezing of the ryots by the land revenue collectors, the exploitation of the people by the pernicious system of private trading by the East India Company's officials, the dislocation and unsettling caused in various outlying areas among the forest-based tribals, and by the introduction of a fast pace by a heartless alien administration causing uncertainty and threatening established lifestyles. Many of these armed encounters between the rebels and the government forces in various parts of Bengal were actuated by the highest motive of freeing the common people from the exploitative colonial government and its hangers-on, and were to that extent socialistic in nature. These days it is fashionable for socialist historians to call it 'subaltern' history. Part of it was distinctly religious. But it was also economic and social in other aspects. They illustrate the validity of Toynbee's thesis that 'the reception of a foreign culture is a painful as well as hazardous undertaking' and that 'the victim's normal attitude towards an intrusive alien culture is a self-defeating attitude of opposition and hostility'.¹

By far the earliest of these movements was the Sanyasi Rebellion during Warren Hastings's administration, closely followed by the Fakir Rebellion. Taking advantage of the collapse of the nawab's administration and the non-assumption of real control by the British, bands of armed Hindu sanyasis from Bihar and upper India intruded into the fertile districts of north Bengal like Rangpur, Dinajpur, Malda, Pabna and Bogra and systematically plundered anything they could lay their hands on. They took full advantage of the normal Hindu veneration for mendicants in saffron robe, and initially people would not even cooperate with the government forces by giving them information about the whereabouts of those marauders. Sometimes, these sanyasis would even kidnap young boys to swell their ranks. Their raids got a definite impetus after the 1770 famine. In 1772, at Rangpur, these sanyasis defeated a regular military detachment led by Captain Thomas who was killed. The sanyasis, moving in several formations, occupied different areas, some of them even moving towards Dhaka. In 1773 they had another military success when a force of 300 sepoys led by Captain Edwards was defeated and largely massacred. Warren Hastings launched a full-scale military operation with assistance from Bhutan and Raja Chait Singh of Benares. It took several years before the sanyasis left Bengal and withdrew to the Maratha territory.

Interestingly, the Sanyasi Rebellion had its echo, although in a somewhat different form, in Bankim Chandra's novels, *Debi Chaudhurani* and *Anandamath*. Bhabani Pathak, a dacoit leader in *Debi Chaudhurani* and his female compatriot, Debi Chaudhurani, are both historical figures according to official records, and carried on operations by the river in coordination with each other in the districts of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Bogra and Mymensingh. Pathak was killed in 1787 in an encounter, leaving seven boats full of arms. His associate, Debi Chaudhurani, perhaps a Bengalee and of zamindari lineage, used to take part in these raids. The following summary from official records is interesting:

In 1787 Lt. Brenan led an expedition against Bhabani Pathak, the notorious dacoit. Twenty-four sepoys led by an Indian officer were sent and they attacked Bhabani Pathak and his 60 followers who were in their boats. There was a naval fight which ended in the

Fakir
Sanyasi
Rebellion

Debi Chaudhurani

death of Bhabani Pathak and three of his men, injuries to eight others and the capture of 42 men. Lt. Brenan's report discloses that Bhabani Pathak had contact with a female dacoit by the name of Devi Chaudhurani who lived in a boat and used to be accompanied by a host of paid fighters. She would take part in the raids herself and was allotted a share of the plunder of the Pathak's gang. From the surname, Chaudhurani, it appears that she was a zamindar. On receipt of Lt. Brenan's report, the Collector of Rangpur wrote to him (12th July 1787) informing him that it was not necessary to arrest Devi Chaudhurani just then and necessary directions would be given on receipt of further information regarding her.²

But the sanyasi rebels in actual history were far removed from the idealized picture of both Debi Chaudhurani and the Santans of *Anandamath*. They were from upper India while Debi Chaudhurani and the Santans were Bengalees. Also, they were generally devotees of Shiva while the latter were Vaishnavites. The principal motivation of the real sanyasi rebels was looting while the characters of Bankim were highly motivated patriots.

Despite the halo of patriotism bestowed on the sanyasi and fakir rebels, the real sanyasis and fakirs, to quote Jadunath Sarkar, 'were plunderers though some of them were zamindars of Oudh. Freedom of the country, suppression of the wicked and protection of law-abiding people were ideals unknown to them and the attribution of these to them is only born of Bankim Chandra's imagination'.

Bhabani Pathak was also reported to be operating in collaboration with Majnun Shah, a leading figure of the fakir insurgency which also rocked north Bengal about the same time. Like the sanyasi rebels, the Muslim fakir rebels moved in armed bands and looted villages. They made zamindars their special targets. Shah had his base in Bogra district (Madarganj) and Mahasthan and operated in Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur districts. He was defeated by Captain Williams in 1773 and again in 1775 and went underground. In 1793 he surfaced in Mymensingh district and continued his depredations until he died in 1797.

Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement did introduce some element of certainty and long-term horizon in place of the misery caused to zamindars and ryots alike by the practice of short-term settlement that prevailed between 1765 and 1793. But the inability of many zamindars to pay their due revenue by the sunset of the appointed day (the so-called Sunset Law)

cost them their zamindaris and brought about a new uncertainty. Many of them, as also ryots in their turn, could not adjust themselves to the newly introduced precepts and practices of the British common law and, in consequence, became victims of high-handedness. The resumption of land by the revenue authorities became rampant. No doubt courts were set up, but litigation was costly and beyond the means of the ryots. The anger of the Bengal peasantry found expression in a number of peasant revolts against both the zamindars and the foreign rulers. The most notable among them are the following:

1. The Dhalbhum uprisings (1769–74)
2. The Rangpur rebellion (1783)
3. The Bishnupur rebellion (1789)
4. The Chuar rebellion (1799)
5. The Sylhet insurgency (1799)
6. The movement of Titu Mir at Barasat (1831)
7. The Kol rebellion (1831–32)
8. The Bhumij revolt led by Ganga Narayan in Manbhum (1832)
9. The Pagalpanthi uprising in Mymensingh (1833)
10. The Ferazi insurgency (1838–47)
11. The Santhal revolt (1855–56)

DHALBHUM UPRISINGS

There was a series of uprisings, almost as soon as British rule began, by the zamindars in the Jungalmahal areas to the west of Midnapore, invariably supported by the people who were resistant to the extension of alien rule. Lieutenant Fargmon led a campaign in 1767 and subdued many of them including the raja of Jhargram and the raja of Dhalbhum, who proved particularly troublesome. Both the forts of Jhargram and Ghatsila (Dhalbhum) were taken by assault. The Dhalbhum raja was replaced by his nephew Jagannath Dhaj. But he too proved recalcitrant and with the help of his brother, Nimu, carried on a harassing jungle warfare for years. Jagannath continued to defy the company's authority till 1774 when the government was compelled to reinstate him on a permanent basis in his estate.

RANGPUR REBELLION

The mass uprising in Rangpur and Dinajpur against the oppressive ijaradar for that region, Raja Devi Singh, was a major event. Devi Singh was a friend of Warren Hastings and carried on for years a reign of terror until the ryots got together and revolted under the leadership of Durjoy Narayan. The rebels stormed the prison at Dakaliganj, set free the prisoners who looked like 'skeletons', to quote from a report by Charles Grant, a senior official, and attacked Gaurimohan the gomasta at Dimla after he had refused to redress their grievances. In the resultant clash, the gomasta was killed. The insurgency spread, reinforced by hundreds of ryots joining it. In Dinajpur the insurgents looted the *kachehri*, took away the arms and confronted government soldiers. A commission of three appointed by the Governor General inquired into the causes after the suppression of the revolt and attributed it to the boundless oppression and extortion by Devi Singh's men. Warren Hastings's failure to control Devi Singh became a major issue during his impeachment in the British parliament. Burke's fiery eloquence graphically describing Devi Singh's oppression which devastated north Bengal reportedly made many of the ladies present in the Parliament swoon.

BISHNUPUR REBELLION

The insurgency in Bishnupur and Birbhum can be traced to the havoc caused by the 1770 famine, the mindless extortion by the Company officials and the looting of villages by marauders. A graphic description is given in W. W. Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal* and *Bengal Manuscript* records. Initially the local people made common cause with the marauders against the government. 'All traces of English rule for the time being faded away.' Both Rajnagar and Bishnupur went under the occupation of the rebels, and Birbhum, the governmental headquarters in this region, came under their threat. But in the end the local peasantry, which a year ago had welcomed the insurgents from the hills, fell out with the latter for their atrocities and attacked them. The government took advantage of this to restore peace by 1790. According to Hunter, property worth 70,000 pounds was lost during

this insurrection and its pernicious effects were visible along the whole course of the Ajay River for many years. Birbhum was to remain quiet until the Santhal rebellion.

CHUAR REBELLION

The Chuars inhabited the hills and forests of Manbhum, Midnapore and Bankura and generally lived off the jungles and primitive agriculture, 'but were not attached to the soil, being always ready to change the plough for the club at the bidding of their turbulent jungle chiefs or *zamindars* who could not be coerced into paying revenues'.³ They rose in a series of insurrections between 1771 and 1809 generally under the leadership of dispossessed zamindars like Durjan Singh of Raipur, Mangat Shah of Panchet, Dubraj Singh of Birbhum, the rani of Karnagar and Raja Madhu Singh of Manbhum. The district collectorate records of Midnapore and Manbhum contain many accounts of such outbreaks. The collector wrote to the magistrate on 10 March 1799 that the Chuars were planning to attack and plunder the town of Midnapore 'either tonight or tomorrow' and Salboni was plundered in 1799. The Chuar insurrection had become a tidal wave by 1777, sparked off by large-scale resumption of jagir lands.

SYLHET UPRISING

The Sylhet uprising (1799) led by Agha Muhammad Reza who assumed the prophet-type title of Imam-um-Mahabri also showed the characteristics of a dispossessed nobility and poor peasantry victimized by the heartless revenue system making common cause against the government of the day. It was put down, but similar disturbances continued even afterwards.

BARASAT UPRISING

By far the best-known among these civil rebellions was the uprising led by Titu Mir around Barasat. This movement, an offshoot of the fundamentalist Islamic movement of north India, combined Wahabi fundamentalism with radical anti-zamindar agitation among the ryots. It arose around 1827 in

Barasat in 24 Parganas district under a preacher, Mir Nisar Ali, or Titu Mir, who was deeply influenced by the Wahabi teachings of Syed Ahmad of Bareilly (1785–1831), the founder of the movement in the subcontinent. Soon it became almost a new faith that preached resistance to zamindars as well as to foreign rulers. To the extent that most of the zamindars were Hindus, this movement acquired a kind of anti-Hindu complexion. Krishna Roy, a zamindar around the Ichhamati River, levied a capitation tax on each of the peasants who had joined this movement. Attempts to collect this levy led to violence which was started by the burning of a mosque. Charges and counter-charges were made in the magistrate's court.

Soon the movement, seeking to restore Muslim domination in the country and the peasantry trying to shake off the exploitative hold of the zamindars, spread to the districts of Nadia and Faridpur. While the Hindu zamindars and their supporters became the special target, some Muslim landlords and others who refused to join the insurgents were also attacked. On 23 October 1831, the insurgents barricaded themselves behind a strong bamboo stockade at Narikelbaria near Barasat in the 24 Parganas district. On 6 November, 500 of them marched out, attacked Purnea, a small town, destroyed a temple and killed the priest. Thereafter, they proclaimed the end of the British rule and the re-establishment of Muslim power. This became a general uprising covering the districts of 24 Parganas, Nadia and Faridpur. The district magistrate, unable to cope with this situation, called for military help. A small detachment was immediately sent which was defeated by Golam Masum, one of Titu Mir's lieutenants. The government sent regular troops consisting of cavalry, artillery and infantry. They occupied the bamboo stockade and drove away the insurgents. Eighteen sepoys were killed, and about 300 of the insurgents, including Titu Mir, died fighting. Many of Titu Mir's followers were sent to prison. But Titu Mir remained a legend among the oppressed Muslim peasantry of Bengal for years to come.

Despite the overtly communal fringe of the Barasat peasant rising, we also have to note the statement by W.W. Hunter that the Wahabi peasants opposed both the Hindu and the Muslim landlords.

KOL REBELLION

The rebellion of the Kols (1831–32), although it affected only some western fringe areas of Bengal—Mayurbhanj, Singhbhum and Manbhum districts—was also essentially a movement of the tribals and the peasantry rising against the evils of both the foreign rule and the exploitation caused by the system of land settlement that was foisted upon them by the East India Company's rule.

BHUMIJ REVOLT OF GANGA NARAYAN

Closely following the Kol uprising was the revolt by the Bhumij tribe in Manbhum led by one Ganga Narayan (the so-called 'Ganga Narayan hangama' in popular parlance). He was a pretender to the zamindari of Barabhum and had a long family feud with the ruler of the estate, Ganga Govinda and his dewan, Madhav. Ganga Narayan championed the cause of the exploited peasantry, built up a strong force, killed Madhav and took possession of the district, including the important town of Bara Bazar. By June 1832, the government forces had to retire to Bankura leaving Barabhum to the rebel chief, who formally assumed the title of Raja. By November 1832, the 34th Native Infantry was brought in and it overpowered the rebels.

Ganga Narayan fled to Singhbhum where he was killed in an encounter with the raja of Kharswan. The ease with which Ganga Narayan could bring the entire populace on his side showed how resentful the people must have been of the Company's policy of setting up vast zamindaris governed by irresponsible zamindars and conferring on them powers of life and death over the ryots. That the wrath of the people was directed against the government is an illustration of how angry the people were with the government and all those who represented the system. By and large, this movement united the zamindars and the peasants alike on a common platform against a heartless system of administration imposed by the foreigners that affected both the parties.

PAGALPANTHI UPRISING OF MYMENSINGH

The next flashpoint was the insurrection of the so-called Pagalpanthis around Sherpur in Mymensingh district (1833). The founder of the sect of Pagalpanthis was Karam Shah who established a strong influence over the regional tribes of the Garo and the Hajongs through his simple doctrine of equality, fraternity and truthfulness. These tribes had also been exploited by the local zamindars. Karam Shah petitioned to the collector of Mymensingh in 1802 for taking possession of a whole estate to the north-east of Sherpur pargana on condition of the payment of tax to the collector. Although the collector recommended this case very strongly, this did not find favour with the Board of Revenue. After the death of Karam Shah in 1813, his second son Tipu assumed his mantle and collected a small army. He declared a 'no rent' campaign against payment beyond four annas per *kud* ($\frac{1}{3}$ acre). In January 1825 he attacked and looted the houses of the zamindars of Sherpur and made Garijaripa, an ancient fortified place, his headquarters. He issued orders in the name of the 'Royal Court of King Tipu Pagal' and enforced these orders with the help of his officers. He was soon arrested by Dampier, the deputy collector, but was released after some time. He was arrested again in 1827. The government decided to put an end to this agrarian trouble by providing for equitable assessment of rents and summary settlement of all land disputes. This did not satisfy Tipu's followers, who made frontal attacks on the police. As reported by Dunbar, the local magistrate, the insurgents had taken complete possession of the country between Sherpur and the Garo Hills and were demanding contributions from the ryots. The main rebel group consisted of 3,000 men armed with spears, swords, bows and matchlocks. The government decided to launch a full-scale military operation. The military detachment proceeded against two main rebel groups, one led by Janku and the other by Dobraj. The stronghold of the rebels was destroyed and their homes burnt. After prolonged operation, they were driven to the hills. By April 1839, the so-called Pagalpanthi insurgency came to an end.

The next mass civil disturbance was the Ferazi rebellion (1838–47). The Ferazi sect, an offshoot of the Wahabi movement, was founded by Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur who united the Muslim peasantry in the name of putting an end to exploitation of the zamindars and the rule of foreigners. The simplicity of his doctrine and the basic Islamic tenets of equality and direct worship of God made an easy impact on the peasantry. Shariatullah preached the simple doctrine that men were equal and that nobody had the right to impose taxes on God's land. He also proclaimed himself as a pir, and became the symbol of both religious and temporal authority to his devotees. He established village courts presided over by experienced old faithful peasants and discouraged people from going to the British courts. He also opposed all payments demanded by Hindu zamindars. On the whole he became a great opponent of both British officials and landlords. But his movement soon degenerated into a movement of lawlessness and violence which perverted its original anti-exploitation character. In 1830 a serious riot was started by him, which took a communal turn requiring the help of the forces to settle it. From a letter published in the *Samachar Darpan* of 22 April 1837, it appears that the movement started by Shariatullah was viewed as hundred times greater than the movement of Titu Mir and that even the clerks and mukhtars of the court of the magistrate of Faridpur belonged to this sect and helped them in their anti-government and anti-Hindu tirade. This letter shows that Shariatullah was alive in 1837. On his death, his son Muhammad Mohsin (1819–60), popularly known as Dudu Mian, became the leader of the sect. He made Bahadurpur his headquarters and divided the whole of East Bengal into a number of *holkas*, or zones, with a *khalifa* in charge of each. He declared that all land belonged to God, and the zamindars were usurpers to whom no rent was payable. He discouraged ryots, Hindus or Muslims, from approaching the government courts and encouraged them to approach him for relief. Social boycott and punishment were in store for those who disobeyed. In a way, this anticipated the non-cooperation movement of the twentieth century. Apart from zamindars, he also targeted the indigo planters for violence. They all complained to the government against him,

and he was repeatedly arrested and prosecuted, but had to be acquitted on each occasion for want of evidence against him. In 1846 he burned the indigo factory of Panchar owned by one Dunlop for which he was again tried in 1847 and convicted. In 1857 he was again arrested. In 1860 Dudu Mian died at Bahadurpur. The Ferazi uprising continued for several years after his death before it finally disintegrated.

SANTHAL REBELLION

The last of the civil disturbances was the great Santhal rebellion of 1855–56. The simple, harmless Santhals living in the hills and valleys of the Rajmahal Hills had no complaint against the system of land assessment. But they bitterly resented the extortion of moneylenders, landlords and revenue agents. The following paragraph in W.W. Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal* describes the genesis of the Santhal rebellion:

During the cold weather of 1854 and 1855 the Santhals appeared to be in a strange, restless state. They had gathered in an excellent crop, and the influx of capital had enhanced the local price of agricultural produce. Nevertheless, the highlanders continued excited and discontented. The truth was that the rich Santhals had determined to be no longer the dupes of the Hindus who intercepted these high prices, the poorer agriculturists had determined to be no longer their serfs, and the day-labourers had determined to be no longer their slaves.

Soon the Santhals, enraged by the exactions of the moneylenders and landlords, rose up in rebellion under leaders like Sidho and Kanu. A band of 30,000, armed with axes and poisoned arrows, marched in several directions, roasting Bengalee babus and attacking every European bungalow they came across. They murdered all government officials. The flame of revolt spread over the entire countryside and the greater part of Birbhum district. Thus the Santhal rebellion, essentially a revolt of the peasants,⁴ noticeably took the form of an anti-British uprising. The rising was suppressed with ferocity with the killing of Sidho and Kanu. But it remained a very painful memory among the Santhal tribes throughout the years of British rule in India.

Bengal Renaissance

The nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance was the product of a variety of circumstances: the advent of settled British rule, the so-called Pax Britannica, the economic boom brought about by the growth of Calcutta as a major world hub of industry, the introduction of English education and, along with it, the influence of Western science and philosophy, the revival of the study of ancient Indian Sanskrit literature and philosophy, and the growth of a new middle class and a professional class. It was indeed a remarkable phenomenon of which there are few parallels in history of a small region blossoming into a whole range of creative activities—literary, cultural, social and economic. It produced a large number of stalwarts who changed the face of Bengal.

Renaissance means rebirth and is used in European history in the context of the revival of the Greco-Roman learning in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, after a long winter of the dark medieval period. For historians like Burchardt, Michelet and Symonds, who specially studied this phenomenon, it was a total transformation of lifestyle, a new humanism reflected in arts, literature and attitude to life, and a new value system. Whether this value system could be transported to other countries or cultures, as Burchardt felt it could be, is a debatable question. But surely nineteenth-century Bengal was as close an approximation to fifteenth-century Italy as it could be although no two nations in history can ever be identical. A serious comparison was started by the dramatis personae of the Bengal Renaissance themselves—intellectual leaders like Keshab Chandra Sen, Bipin Chandra Pal, and later on by M.N. Roy in *India in Transition*. In comparatively recent times came the study by Susobhan Sarkar (initially

under the pseudonym ‘Amit Sen’)—*Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*—by far the most comprehensive and objective scholarly analysis of the period.

For about a century, Bengal’s conscious awareness of the changing modern world was more developed than and ahead of that of the rest of India. The role played by Bengal in the modern awakening of the subcontinent is thus comparable to the position occupied by Italy in the European Renaissance. It is described in a different vein, but very forcefully, by Jadunath Sarkar in his *History of Bengal*, Vol. 2:

If Periclean Athens was the school of Hellas, the eye of Greece, mother of arts and eloquence, that was Bengal to the rest of India under British rule, but with a borrowed light which it had made its own with marvellous cunning. In this new Bengal originated every good and great thing of the modern world that passed on to the other provinces of India. From Bengal went forth the English-educated teachers and the European-inspired thought that helped to modernize Bihar and Orissa, Hindustan and the Deccan. New literary types, reform of language, social reconstruction, political aspirations, religious movements and even changes in manners that originated in Bengal, passed like ripples from a central eddy, across provincial barriers, to the farthest corners of India ... It was truly a renaissance, wider, deeper and more revolutionary than that of Europe after the fall of Constantinople.

Also, Bengal produced in about three quarters of a century a large number of luminaries which few countries had produced in history in such a short period. This great movement started around the 1820s and continued till the first two decades of the next century. It can be said to have gradually petered out thereafter. For this great phenomenon, the Bengalees as a race cannot claim any special credit. They became the beneficiaries of a conjunction of developments with which time endowed them, and therefore, played their history-directed role as change agents during the century.

It has been said in recent times that the Bengal Renaissance was not a movement of mass awakening in the sense in which the Italian Renaissance was one. Also, it was not quite like the Italian Renaissance in which the revival of ancient Greek and Roman learning played a major role. But this is not an entirely accurate appreciation. Neither the Italian Renaissance nor the French Revolution were mass movements in the sense that all sections of the population were moved by them. The Italian Renaissance was certainly confined only to the upper classes and to the towns, and did not

affect the masses at large; but it affected the people who mattered. In this sense, the nineteenth-century renaissance in Bengal was no less a peoples' movement. However, the Bengal Renaissance suffered from two great limitations. First, it was primarily an upper-class movement and did not percolate downwards to the common people. Thus, it had a very narrow social base. The peasantry and the working classes remained untouched except in isolated cases. Secondly, the Muslims who had replaced the Hindus as the majority community around the same time when the gigantic thought movement was taking place were, by and large, outside the main focus of this ferment except in the fringes. It was only during the earlier years of the twentieth century that substantial sections were drawn into it. Though the nineteenth-century renaissance was the culmination of the process of emergence of the cultural characteristics of the Bengalee people that had started in the age of Hussain Shah, it remained predominantly Hindu and was only partially Muslim. On the whole, it remained an elitist movement restricted to the Hindu bhadralok (gentry) and zamindars.

Some indirect influence did trickle down to people lower down, but this was not strong enough to really transform the lower classes into modern elements in a renascent society. This was noticed by perceptive thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore and Vivekananda. In his *Ghare Baire* Tagore showed how the national movement had an extremely narrow social base and failed to enthuse the common masses. In a remarkable statement, Vivekananda observed that the reform movement of the nineteenth century had limited social impact, affecting only a fraction of the populace; and as long as the common masses were not enthused by the spread of education and awakening among them, the reform movement in various aspects like sati abolition or widow remarriage was bound to be a microscopic phenomenon. From a strictly Marxist historian's point of view, the renaissance was a movement confined within the bourgeois class. But then, how broad-based by this yardstick was the European Renaissance of the fifteenth century? Was it also not confined, by and large, to the middle classes or the bourgeoisie in towns and only a section of clerical scholars? How many of the peasants or the artisans in the towns could be said to have been truly

influenced by the gigantic intellectual and social movement? From this point of view, one cannot minimize the importance of the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance in history. With all its deficiencies, it was a great intellectual and social upheaval which did take the society in Bengal forward very significantly and made for an all-round transformation.

The Bengal Renaissance reached its climax in Rabindranath Tagore and, after drawing in sections of the Bengalee Muslim upper and middle classes —although many of them differed politically from their Hindu compatriots —meandered along and eventually petered out, but not before it had uplifted and emancipated the Bengalee people in a dramatic and comprehensive manner. For those who only know the Bengalee society after Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Vivekananda it is difficult to realize the low levels to which the Bengalee Hindu society had sunk before these reformers came on the scene. The growth of a large number of sects like Kartabhaja and various tantrik and *bairagi* groups encouraged loose morals and permissiveness in the spiritual garb of Vedantic unity. The society was characterized by the most oppressive form of tyranny and exploitation by the upper castes, the denial of an honourable status to women, the prevalence of evil practices like sati and all sorts of superstitious beliefs and practices, polygamy, untouchability, prostitution and permissiveness, widespread drinking, slavery in its cruellest form and the prevalence of pseudo-religious practices like *charakmela*, child marriage, and the compulsion of wasting money beyond what a person could afford on functions like *shradh*, births, marriages and Durgapuja. To know how degrading Hindu society in Bengal had become one needs to go through *A Survey of the Contemporary Hindu Society and Religion* by W. Ward, one of the Serampore trilogy written in 1818. This depicts a deplorably low level of the then Hindu society. All this changed dramatically in one generation, thanks to the leaders of the great nineteenth-century Renaissance in Bengal, who took many pioneering steps, such as Vidyasagar's heroic struggle for widow remarriage, Brahmo Samaj's efforts for women education and uplift, and the attempts to eradicate the evils of caste system.

The Great Pioneer and Helmsman

The Bengal Renaissance started with Raja Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), in many respects the founder of the movement, and ended with Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). According to Susobhan Sarkar in his *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*, this great movement can be divided into five parts:

- (i) From 1815, when Raja Rammohan Roy settled in Calcutta and launched his academic and reformation blitzkrieg, till 1833 when he died. There would be several other years which would be strong contenders for the title of zero year, e.g. 1817, the year of founding of Hindu College and the School Book Society by David Hare, or 1826 when Derozio started his career as a teacher in Hindu College and shortly afterwards launched his famous Academic Association.
- (ii) From 1833 to 1857—from Raja Rammohan's death to the great upheaval of 1857.
- (iii) From 1857 (the great revolt) to 1885 (the founding of Indian National Congress).
- (iv) From 1885 to 1905, i.e., from the establishment of the Congress to the first partition of Bengal.
- (v) From 1905 to 1919—from partition and the swadeshi movement to the non-cooperation movement and the advent of Mahatma Gandhi's overwhelming leadership.

After Rabindranath Tagore the renaissance period can be said to have ended although a large number of stalwarts still remained in the firmament radiating their creative talents, e.g. Abanindranath Tagore, Satyen Bose, Satyajit Ray, Muztaba Ali, Humayun Kabir.

Raja Rammohan Roy has been aptly described as the 'first modern man of modern India' by K.M. Pannikar and 'one of the greatest benefactors of mankind' by Romain Rolland. He was born in 1772 in the small village of Radhanagar in Hooghly district and grew up in an environment which was medieval and decadent. He was sent to Patna to study Arabic and Persian and, thereafter, to Benares for studying Sanskrit and the Upanishdic philosophy. But he had serious disagreement with his father on the observance of rituals and left home. Even after his father's death in 1803 there was no reconciliation with the family. Later he moved to Benares and to Murshidabad, the capital of Bengal, where he brought out his first book entitled *Tuhf-ul-Muwahuddin* (A Gift to Monotheists), which was very much influenced by Islamic monotheism transplanted against his

Upanishadic background. Then followed about ten years of service under the East India Company under various collectors, among them John Digby, the collector of Rangpur, who was the first proponent of the theory of drainage of wealth from Bengal. In between, Roy also studied English and Western philosophy and carried on a relentless controversy with the orthodox Hindu pundits. In his teachings he referred directly to the Upanishads with emphasis on one Supreme God and the right of man to directly approach the Godhead without the medium of the priests and their meaningless rituals.

By 1815, he took retirement from the government and settled in Calcutta after several fruitless attempts at reconciliation with his mother and brothers. A significant incident in his early life, viz., the forcible burning of the widow of his dead brother on the funeral pyre by the relatives had made a great impact on Rammohan Roy's mind. He took a vow that he would never rest until this inhuman practice of sati was abolished. After settling down in Calcutta he published some of the Upanishadic and Vedic sutras in Bengali at his own expense so that people could directly read the shastras instead of depending on the Brahman priests. In this respect, his role in Bengal was similar to that of Guru Nanak in Punjab. In 1817 he published in English a work named *Defence of Hindu Theism*. He also learnt Greek and Hebrew and commenced translating the original Gospels into Bengali. In 1820 he published *The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness*. He now had a new enemy—the Christian clergy who objected to his interpretation of the teachings of Jesus. The Baptist missionaries of Serampore attacked him with vehemence.

Rammohan Roy carried on a lifelong crusade in favour of emancipation of women, referring to ancient shastras to show how women enjoyed freedom in ancient India. He vigorously opposed the precepts of Manu and advocated complete equality of women in terms of education, right to property and other rights. His biggest achievement was the great public campaign he started against the inhuman practice of sati and the success he achieved when the government passed a law banning this evil practice.

There was hardly any aspect of life that Rammohan Roy did not take up;

advocating rights of women in education and property, pressing for the citizens' inherent right for freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, the right of deprived castes to social equality and better treatment, the right of the agriculturists to freedom from excessive renting, equal treatment of white and coloured races, and the right of all subject people to freedom. He started two fiery journals, *Sambad Kaumudi* and *Miratul-khabar* (in Persian). He also wrote in Bengali and was one of the founders of modern Bengali prose. He established several educational institutions, sometimes with the help of Christian missionaries. He was one of the pioneers of the famous Hindu College which was set up in 1817 but, with his characteristic wisdom, he voluntarily agreed to withdraw his name from the list of promoters to make sure that orthodox Hindus did not oppose the establishment of this college on the ground of his being one of the promoters.

Rammohan Roy may also be called the 'Father of Indian Politics', but his politics was far away from the concept of freedom of the country, was truly cosmopolitan, and supported freedom everywhere in the world, irrespective of the barriers of race, creed, colour or country. Whether it was the fight for freedom of the people of Naples or Ireland or the anti-Spanish rebels in Latin America, the French revolutionaries of 1830 or establishment of constitutional government in Spain, his active sympathies were with all such movements for freedom and against oppression.

He took a fearless stand against the 1823 ordinance, which forbade the publication of a newspaper without prior licence from the government. He also opposed the Jury Act of 1827 which discriminated against local people. He fought for the rights of landholders against an oppressive regulation in 1828 that sanctioned arbitrary disposition of land by the landlords. His answers to the numerous questions put to him during his stay in England by the Select Committee of the House of Commons on a variety of subjects reveal not only his deep knowledge of administration and its working in the country, but also deep sympathy for the common people.

Along with fighting for the rights of the landholders, Rammohan Roy was conscious of the miserable plight to which the peasantry had been

reduced under the Permanent Settlement. He therefore wrote with equal vehemence against the exploitation of the ryots. He pleaded for amelioration of the poverty of the ryots and the conferment on them of their legitimate rights over the land they tilled. This was long before socialism made its advent in India. He had a vision of the dynamic role of the middle class. In his journal, the *Bengal Herald*, he wrote:

A class of society has sprung into existence that was unknown before. These are placed between aristocracy and the poor and are daily forming a most influential class—it is a dawn of a new era. Whenever such an order of men has been created freedom has followed in its train ... these middle class of inhabitants of Bengal afford the most cheering indication of any that exists at the present moment.

Rammohan Roy also left his mark in history as a pioneer of the Brahmo Samaj. Deep in his mind was the desire to bring together all those who believed in worshipping only one God common to votaries of all religions rather than only for the so-called believers. In 1815 he informally organized an Atmiya Sabha, an inner circle of liberal-minded friends who used to gather together at regular intervals and discuss spiritual matters. Slowly he gravitated towards bringing together people of all races and creeds on a common platform of worshipping one God. His efforts culminated in establishing a temple of universal worship on 23 January 1830. This was the beginning of the Brahmo Samaj movement, although Rammohan Roy never intended it to be a separate movement outside Hindu society. He called his organization the 'Brahmo Sabha', i.e., the meeting of those who believed in Upanishadic Supreme God and not in the so-called gods and goddesses in the Hindu pantheon, which to his mind was a degradation of the original essence of Vedantism. He tried to restore the pristine glory of Vedantic monotheism influenced by the West's rational philosophy and science, and by Islamic monotheism and brotherhood. Apart from his strong feelings against idol worship and priestly rituals he did not want to split Hindu society and preferred to carry on a sort of protestant movement within the parent society. It was only later that the Brahmo Sabha became the 'Brahmo Samaj' and assumed the character of a separate religious sect,

some of whose members claimed themselves to be non-Hindus. Even a formal process of initiation into Brahmoism came into being.

Rammohan Roy's crusading zeal in preserving the gains of abolishing sati and undertaking other reforms encouraged him to go to England in the last phase of his life when an opportunity arose. Also, the East India Company's charter was due for renewal in 1833 and this would provide an opportunity for projecting before the Parliament the need for safeguarding the rights and privileges of the Indian people. The Mughal Emperor of Delhi, Akbar II, requested Rammohan Roy to place his grievances before the King of Great Britain for redress. Rammohan Roy was appointed Imperial Envoy to the British Court with the title of Raja. He sailed from Calcutta on board the *Albion* on 15 November 1831 and landed in Liverpool on 8 December. In a way this visit itself was his rebuff to the orthodox tradition which forbade sea voyages. During his two years' sojourn in England Rammohan Roy made a profound impression on the intellectual and aristocratic sections in Britain.

Rammohan Roy, during these two years, did much more than discharging the counsel's role for the Mughal emperor. He threw himself in all seriousness into great political movements of the day. He presented before the House of Commons a counter-petition against the renewal of sati. He was invited to give evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons to consider the renewal of the East India Company's charter in 1833. In a series of communications to the East India Company, he expressed his authoritative views on the conditions of people of India and the revenue and judicial systems of the country. That the 1833 charter converted the East India Company from a trading concern into a governing body was in no small measure due to his efforts. He took keen interest in the passage of the First Reforms Act (1832) which converted England into a true democracy. The East India Company formally entertained him at a dinner. Also, at the coronation of King George IV, he was placed among foreign ambassadors. King William IV gave him a formal audience and so did King Louis Phillipe of France in 1832 in Paris. The Royal Asiatic Society and the British Unitarian Society invited Raja Rammohan Roy to

speak at their various annual functions. All this strain told on his health and he died after a short illness at Bristol on 27 September 1833, but not before he had awakened and galvanized the educated masses in Bengal as never before and paved the foundation for the great renaissance of the nineteenth century.

In recent times there have been some regrettable attempts by a section of self-declared progressive scholars to criticize both the Bengal Renaissance and its principal star, Raja Rammohan Roy. Bengal Renaissance has been criticized on account of its limited class character and its loyalism to the British Raj, and Rammohan Roy on a charge of essentially reflecting landlord and bourgeois class interests. Both must be dismissed with the contempt they deserve. No serious student of history treats the Italian Renaissance and the Bengal Renaissance as identical happenings. There were qualitative differences between the two, depending on the distinct historical backgrounds. But if one has to be critical of the Bengal Renaissance because of its limited upper-class character, one should also note that the Italian Renaissance was no less so. It was confined to the upper class of society and contained many who were as partisan as some of those who were the main *dramatis personae* during the Bengal Renaissance.

It is important to note in passing several of Rammohan Roy's contemporaries, some of them his strong supporters, others bitter critics of his thoughts and reforms. Among his strong supporters was Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846), Rabindranath Tagore's grandfather, who represented the new aristocracy based on business and stood by Rammohan Roy in all his reform activities although he never formally joined the Brahmo Sabha. Another supporter was David Hare (1775–1842), the Scottish watchmaker who left his trade in 1816 and established a network of schools and educational bodies, notably the Hindu College (1817), the School Book Society (1818) and the Medical College (1835) and devoted his entire life to bringing up a whole generation of educated Bengalee young men till he died in 1842. In some respects he stood between Rammohan Roy and Derozio. Before Hare was struck down by cholera in 1841 he had created a network of formal Western-style education and earned tremendous goodwill

among the people of Calcutta, so much so that even a century and a quarter later, when there was a general movement for removal of statues of the British from public places none would touch David Hare's statue.

DEROZIO

The Iconoclast and the Stormy Petrel of Young Bengal

A diametrically opposite side of the Renaissance was illustrated in the life and work of Derozio, an Anglo-Portuguese, who was a firebrand poet and a strong critic of the norms and practices of the decadent Bengal society of his times. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1808–32), by far the strangest figure in the Bengal Renaissance, was educated in a school run by the Scotsman Drummond, a poet and scholar, in Dharmatala Street of Calcutta. He developed an interest in English poetry and philosophy and became a poet in his own right. Derozio was a child prodigy and imbibed the philosophical traditions of the West and the ideas of the French Revolution. After finishing school and a spell of clerkship in his father's office, Derozio blossomed into a poet contributing to the *Indian Gazette*. One of his early works was the *Fakir of Jhungeera* in which he struck a patriotic note which was not only astonishing for a European, but extremely rare for his age even among educated Indians:

My country! in the days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled around thy brow
And worshipped as a deity you wast,
Where is that glory where that reverence now?

Appointed to Hindu College as a teacher in May 1826 on the basis of his fame as a poet and a scholar of philosophy, he very soon attracted to himself a number of upper-class boys who adored him and were deeply influenced by his freethinking and free expressions. They frequently visited his house and used to celebrate their emancipation by taking forbidden food and drink. These excesses would shake Rammohan Roy's sense of propriety and decency, but they had an incidental role in shaking the orthodox society of those times. Derozio started the Academic Association with a monthly

journal, *Athenium*, in which both he and his friends and students published articles ridiculing Hinduism and its practices. He is also said to have edited *Calcutta Literary Gazette* and another journal called *Hesperus*.

An insight into the young teacher's mind is provided by the following lines from one of his poems:

Expanding like petals of young
I watch the gentle opening of your minds
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
Your intellectual energies and powers.
What joyance rains upon me when I see
Fame in the mirror of futurity.
Weaving the chaplets you have yet to gain,
And when I feel I have not lived in vain.

To quote Radhanath Sikdar, one of his disciples, known more for his measuring the height of Mount Everest, 'He has been the cause and the sole cause of that spirit of inquiry after truth and that contempt of vice which cannot but be beneficial to India.' Derozio preached against the existence of God, about the evils of idolatry and priestcraft, the necessity of inexpensive justice, the evil effects of colonialism and the significance of the July Revolution of 1830 in France. Needless to say that all this antagonized the orthodox sections in society.

Things were coming to a head. Newspapers like *Sambad Prabhakar* and *Samachar Chandrika* started a tirade against the wayward firebrand atheist. Stories were carried by word of mouth about how one student, when asked to pay homage before Goddess Kali one morning, greeted the image with the words 'Good morning, Madam'. Also, another refused to swear by the holy Ganga water in a court. The addiction to alcoholic drinks of many Derozians became a subject of widespread gossip. Eventually, a special meeting of the directors of Hindu College decided on 23 April 1831: 'Derozio being the root of all evils and the cause of public alarm, should be discharged from the college; that all those students who are publicly hostile to Hinduism and the established customs of the country should be turned out; that if any of the boys goes to see or attend public lectures he should be dismissed.' The resolution also condemned the attempt to unsettle the

beliefs of the boys in the great principles of national religion and condemned the practices inconsistent with Hindu notion of propriety.

On Wilson's suggestion, in a compromise bid, Derozio sent a resignation letter in which he stated that 'unexamined, and unheard, you resolve to dismiss me without even the mockery of a trial'. His answer to the question whether he had undermined his pupils' faith in God epitomizes the spirit of the Young Bengal component of the Bengal Renaissance:

If it be wrong to speak to all upon such a subject, I am guilty, for I am neither afraid nor ashamed to confess having stated the doubts of philosophers upon his head, because I have also stated the solution of those doubts. Is it forbidden anywhere to argue upon such a question? If so, it must be equally wrong to adduce an argument upon either side, or is it consistent with an enlightened notion of truth to wed ourselves to any one view of so important a subject, resolving to close our eyes and ears against all impressions that oppose themselves to it?

Derozio was compelled to leave the college, but the spell he had cast on his students persisted. He himself remained active and established a daily, the *East Indian*, in which he preached amity between the Anglo-Indian community and other Indians, and attacked the celebration of Durgapuja by Prasanna Kumar Tagore who called himself the follower of the theistic Rammohan. On 17 December 1831 he was struck down with cholera at the age of twenty-four and died on Christmas Eve (24 December 1832).

Derozio—philosopher, a successful teacher and a notorious freethinker of his times—did not live and die like an average Eurasian of his age, unknown to posterity. But in a short life of intense activity he galvanized the intellectual and academic life of Calcutta of those days as few have done in history. His students in the Hindu College, only slightly younger in age, challenged the established beliefs and practices, questioned the very basis of the society that had remained unchanged for many centuries and wanted to resuscitate it on the basis of Western science and rationalist philosophy. This provoked a sharp orthodox reaction. But before he died Derozio witnessed the beginning of the crumbling of the bastion of conservatism brick by brick, and the dawn of Bengal Renaissance. His students carried on a crusade for reform through an English periodical, the *Inquirer*, a Bengali one, *Jnananveshan*, and two associations, the older

Academic Association (till 1839) and the Epistolary Association, a newer body.

Some of his students like Krishnamohan Banerji and Mahesh Chandra Ghosh sought refuge in conversion to Christianity. Krishnamohan became Christian in 1832 and a Christian missionary in 1837, but kept his radical thoughts alive. Some of them like Rasik Mallik gravitated to government jobs open to Indians after the Charter Act of 1833.

The Young Bengal arranged a series of anti-slavery public lectures by George Thompson, a progressive British politician. Some of the Derozians can be traced in the founding of the Bengal British Indian Society in 1843 and the British Indian Association in 1851, the two earliest examples of political association in India.

The Derozians were ridiculed by contemporary traditionalists. While some questioned their sincerity and integrity, it became almost a tradition to belittle Young Bengal as a trend. Rajnarayan Basu's dry comment in 1875 that 'the light from the West had turned their heads' can be taken as the representative opinion of contemporaries on Young Bengal.

The charge of extreme Anglicism has also been overemphasized. Besides the cliché of a sudden exposure to the wealth of advanced Western rational philosophy and science, there is enough evidence that the Derozians did not forsake their country or people as so many later 'Anglicized' Indians did. It was Derozio's patriotism which stirred Young Bengal minds; Krishnamohan showed fierce patriotism even as a Christian priest.

Peareychand Mitra in 1846 pleaded for the protection of ryots and argued at the level of theory that 'it is private property which gives rise to government, and not government to private property' (echoing Locke's thought introduced by Derozio) and that 'the opulent and powerful do not require so much of its constant care and anxiety as the poor and the helpless'.

The Academic Association was kept alive till about 1839. David Hare accepted its presidency after Derozio. Ramgopal Ghosh and Radhanath Sikdar recorded experiences and reflections in the form of diaries, and the former's house was the regular headquarters for the circle of friends. On 20

February 1838 was launched the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge with the Derozian Tarachand Chakrabarti as president, Ramgopal Ghosh as vice-president and Peareychand Mitra and Ramtanu Lahiri as secretaries. The society elected David Hare as honorary visitor. It published three volumes of papers read between 1840 and 1843 including the *Nature of Historical Studies and Civil and Social Reform* (Krishnamohan); *Interests of the Female Sex* and the *State of Hinduism* in five parts (Peareychand); *Sketch of Bankuja* (Harachandra Ghosh); *Notice of Tipperah, a New Spelling Book* and *Notices of Chittagong* in four parts (Gobindachandra Basak). In 1844 Kishorichand Mitra founded The Philanthropic Society.

We need also to emphasize the contribution of Derozians to the Bengali language. *Jnananveshan* was published partly in Bengali. Ramgopal hailed the Bengali prose of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*. Peareychand and Radhanath, two intimate friends, brought out the *Masik Patrika*, a monthly magazine in simple colloquial Bengali, understandable by ordinary housewives. Finally, Peareychand ('Tekchand') Thakur was an important contributor to Bengali literature in both the popular and the scholarly styles.

The accusation of being irreligious is again not entirely correct. The Derozian aim was in truth 'to summon Hinduism to the bar of reason'. As early as 1832, Maheshchandra and Krishnamohan turned Christian; Sibchandra in later life became the president of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and Ramtanu Lahiri was drawn to the same faith. The Derozian criticism of early Brahmoism was not pointless. Krishnamohan commented that it came 'as far as half the way in religion and politics'. Radhanath's decision, in the teeth of family opposition, not to marry a minor wife and saintly Ramtanu's heroic renunciation of the 'sacred thread' were cases in point.

Many of Young Bengal's true limitations were not peculiarly its own, but shared by the entire Bengal Renaissance. The educated community of the nineteenth century failed to see the exploitative character of the foreign rule in India, looking mainly at its immediate benefits. The protagonists of our 'awakening' had little understanding of the toiling, exploited masses who

lived worlds apart. The obsession with Hindu traditions kept at a distance the entire Muslim community who only watched silently. Those narrow class aspects of this renaissance heritage seriously handicapped the democratic progress of the country. The real failure of the Young Bengal movement was the failure to build up a sustained mass movement. Thus Young Bengal remained more in the nature of an episode in Bengal's history rather than a self-sustaining, continuing movement. In the light of such reflection, one can at least appreciate the balanced assessment of Kishorichand Mitra in 1861: 'The youthful band of reformers who had been educated at the Hindoo College, like the tops of Kanchenjunga, were the first to catch and reflect the dawn.'¹

SPREAD OF WESTERN EDUCATION

In the transition from medieval to modern Bengal, the spread of the English language and, for that matter, Western education played a very important catalytic role. The establishment of British rule made it necessary for Bengalees to learn English. Initially, the government did not play a very active role in promoting English language and Western learning. It patronized colleges that taught Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian and, in fact, established new ones. The work of propagating English was taken up by Christian missionaries who often learnt Bengali and incidentally encouraged local people to learn English in the process of preaching Christianity. The first English school was established in Calcutta in 1731, twenty-six years before the Battle of Plassey, by the Presbyterian Church. A few other missionary schools were also set up where English was taught along with the Bible and some lessons in Western sciences and arts. However, many professional Bengalees, through their contacts with the British or through the opportunity provided by their professional activities, learnt English. Some well-known examples were Dwarkanath Tagore, grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, a well-known lawyer of that time, Neelmani Dutta, a banian of an English firm and his son Rashomoy Dutta who became a judge of the small causes court in

Calcutta. The establishment of the Supreme Court and the growth of the legal profession also helped the spread of the English language and knowledge of British law. Slowly, the number of missionary schools that taught English grew in Calcutta and other towns. In 1800 Jagamohan Basu started an English school in Bhawanipore and an Englishman by the name of Drummond started the Dharmatala Academy soon afterwards.

Drummond was a rationalist who influenced his students deeply. Among them was Derozio. In 1814 another English school was established at Chinsurah by Forbes, the district magistrate.

Interestingly, attempts by the well-known missionary William Carey to start a primary school in Calcutta shortly after his arrival in 1793 met with hostility from the East India Company, which did not want missionaries to preach their religion and thereby antagonize indigenous people against British rule. Carey shifted to Serampore, which was under the control of the Danes in 1800. He was joined by two other missionaries of the Baptist Church—Joshua Marshman and William Ward. The three came to be known in the history of Bengal as the ‘Serampore Trinity’. They started a school and compiled a book on Sanskrit and Bengali grammar. They also started a printing press in Bengali, the first of its kind, with the help of a Bengalee blacksmith called Panchanan Karmakar. This printing press rolled out many books, not only on Christianity, but also on literature and science. As a result of Carey’s efforts, schools were established at Hooghly, Jessore and Dinajpur. In these schools, in order to make up for the paucity of teachers, senior students were often encouraged to teach students of the junior classes. This practice came to be known as the Bell system, named after its originator Andrew Bell. By 1817, more than 100 schools of this type had been started and about 6,700 students studied in these schools.

The monthly government grant of Rs 600 to a school, started by Robert May of the London Missionary Society at Chinsurah, was the first example of government aid to schools in Bengal under British rule. May established thirty-six schools before he died in 1818. In 1816 the Free Missionary Society started a school at Kidderpore and around the same time Captain Stuart started some schools in Burdwan, followed by several other schools

at other places. A society for promoting Christian theology that came into being around the same time also established a number of schools in Calcutta and its suburbs. These schools numbered sixteen by 1823. In all these schools English was taught as a compulsory subject from the primary level, although in some of them the medium of instruction was Bengali. In these schools students were also taught arithmetic, history, geography, science and Western literature, according to modern teaching methods. While preaching the superiority of Christianity, the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses and social customs and practices of the Hindu society were criticized in an indirect and subtle manner.

In 1817 the School Book Society was set up with the objective of printing and publishing of English and Bengali school textbooks. These books were priced low and were sometimes even distributed free. The other key society that was established in 1818 was the Calcutta School Society, with the objective of improving the quality of the books used in *pathshalas* in Calcutta. David Hare, as already noted, a Scottish watchmaker who abandoned his profession to take on the mission of spreading modern education among the Bengalees, played a leading role in the activities of the society. Interestingly, there was a move among a section of the local people to set up separate schools almost in competition to meet the challenge of missionary schools. Many zamindars set up their own schools. Sometimes villagers came forward to construct school buildings with their donations. Leaders of society like Radhakanta Dev, Kali Sankar Ghoshal and Rashmony Dutta made handsome contributions towards the maintenance of missionary schools.

The establishment of the Hindu College in 1817 was a very important landmark. It was the result of a great collective effort by a number of leaders of the then Calcutta Society along with some officials, who came together with support from the authorities. A meeting was convened by Hyde, chief justice of the Supreme Court, on 14 May 1816, which was attended by over fifty prominent Hindu gentlemen including some Sanskrit scholars. At the meeting donations of about Rs 50,000 were collected and a decision was taken to purchase land and construct a building. Among the

subjects to be taught would be 'the Bengali and English languages in particular; next the Hindustani tongue as convenient [sic] in the upper provinces; and then Persian, if desired, as ornamental; general duty to God, the English system of morals (the pundits and some of the more sensible of the rest bore testimony to and deplored their national deficiency in morals), grammar, writing in English as well as Bengali, astronomy, mathematics; and in time as the fund increases, English belles-lettres, poetry, etc.'. 'No other institution,' to quote R.C. Majumdar, 'exerted even a small fraction of the influence that this college wielded in bringing about the new awakening of Bengal in the 19th century.' Both Raja Rammohan Roy and David Hare were associated with the founding of the college, although they formally kept themselves away from it so as not to antagonize orthodox Hindu sections of the population. After four decades of many-splendoured existence, the college was renamed Presidency College in 1855. It was destined to play a catalyst's role in Bengal's awakening for nearly a century thereafter.

The government's education policy oscillated for a long time between the two extremes of encouraging the traditional system of education on one hand, and introducing the Western system of education on the other. A number of Englishmen who served in India became conscious of India's ancient history and civilization, and felt that nothing should be done to uproot the people from their own history and traditions. The setting up of the Calcutta Madarasa by Warren Hastings in 1771 and the Sanskrit College at Benares by Duncan, the resident, were examples of this trend of thought. The Charter Act of 1833 formally permitted the entry of Christian missionaries and also provided a grant of rupees one lakh annually for the advancement of Western knowledge in India. Many British officials influenced by Bentham's utilitarianism wanted Western education to be introduced in India for the 'upliftment' of the people. Bentham's disciple, Mill, was at that time a high functionary of the East India Company's head office in London; and under his influence the Court of Directors issued an order on 18 February 1824 in support of the policy of education based on Western sciences and arts instead of the traditional system based on Hindu

or Muslim scriptures. This policy received a fillip with the coming of Lord Bentinck, 'an admirer of Bentham and Mill', as Governor General in 1828. In the controversy raging in Calcutta at that time between those who pleaded for Western-style education on one hand, like Macaulay supported by Raja Rammohan Roy, and Indian scholars and the so-called orientalist who emphasized the need to continue educating Indians in their traditional lines on the other, like H.H. Wilson, Bentinck gave his decisive support to the Anglicists. On 7 March 1835, by a government resolution, he gave the official seal of approval to Macaulay's policy and directed that government-aided institutions would thereafter only support the teaching of European arts and sciences through the medium of English, and that all government funds earmarked for the spread of education would only be spent in this way. The resolution stated that 'the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and sciences among the natives of India and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone'. This helped the Company in hiring clerks, scribes and petty officials, who knew how to read and write English, to run the empire, which was one of Macaulay's intentions. Bentinck's crucial decision also paved the way for the renaissance that swept Bengal during the next half-century. In this context, the next important landmark was the Education Dispatch of Sir Charles Wood, Secretary of State, in July 1854, which led to the founding of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1858, and also the founding of many vernacular mission schools. The University of Calcutta along with the Presidency College (formerly known as Hindu College) were to become major catalysts in the process of Bengal's transformation. The Calcutta Medical College and the Bengal Engineering College were pioneering institutions in initiating Bengalees to the study of modern medicine and engineering. By the time of the mutiny, mass indigenization of the lower and middle ranks of the administration and the judiciary had already been achieved. This coincided with the replacement of Persian by English as the official government language.

Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* dated 2 February 1835 is a very important document in connection with these changes. In it, Macaulay ridiculed India's ancient heritage, but also envisaged as a long-term possibility that Western education would lead the Indian people to independence. 'Come what may, self-knowledge will lead to self-rule, and that would be the proudest day in British history,' said Macaulay, almost prophetically.

GROWTH OF THE PRESS

An essential aspect of the Bengal Renaissance was the growth of an independent press—both newspapers and periodicals—in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The beginnings of the press in India can be traced to an eccentric Englishman by the name of James Augustus Hickey, who in 1780 founded the *Bengal Gazette*, a fiercely independent journal which exposed the scandals of British colonial rule and its repression.

The Bengali periodicals, along with the dailies, also played an important role in building up an organized public opinion and serving as vehicles for anti-government feelings in the nineteenth century. Starting with the *Bengal Gazette* (1818), edited and published by Gangakishore Bhattacharji, and *Samachar Darpan*, which was published in the same year, Bengali periodicals grew from strength to strength. Other important periodicals were Rammohan's *Sambad Kaumudi* (1831), Bhabanicharan Banerjee's *Samachar Chandrika*, Ishwar Chandra Gupta's *Sambad Prabhakar* (1830), the *Tatvabodhini Patrika* (1843), Rajendra Mitra's historical and encyclopedic monthly, the *Bibidhartha Samgraha* (1851), Bankim Chandra's *Bangadarshan* (1872), subsequently revived by Rabindranath, *Bharati* (1877), *Sadhana* (1891) brought out by the Tagore family of Jorasanko and the education gazette *Saptahik Bartabaha* (1856–68), of which the poet Rangalal Banerjee and Pyaricharan Sarkar were editors. All of them contributed enormously to the growth of a freethinking press.

There were also two Bengali fortnightlies run by Muslims, *Mihir* and *Sudhakar*. They were soon merged into a weekly, *Mihir o Sudhakar*. It supported the partition and had a circulation of 10,000 copies per week.

There were several other journals owned and published by Muslims. Of them, the fortnightly *Ahmadi* (1886), published from Tangail and edited by Maulavi Abdul Hamid Khan Yusufzai, stood for Hindu–Muslim unity on all common issues.

Significantly, many of the journals were published from *mofussil* towns indicating the gradual spread of modernity in the outlying areas of Bengal and the growth of public opinion. According to a list of journals compiled in 1873 at the suggestion of Lieutenant Governor Campbell, there were thirty-five journals published in Bengal (thirty-three in Bengali), of them nineteen being published from Calcutta and sixteen from mofussil districts. Slowly but surely, the Bengal press was becoming stridently national and anti-moderates.

ISOLATED RIPPLES AMONG THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

As already noted, this great intellectual movement influenced only a fringe of the Muslim community. At the beginning of the British rule, the Muslims were a sullen community withdrawing themselves in general from Western influence. They did not take part in the process of modern education that started in the 1830s, nor in the process of social reconstruction that followed. They still lamented their loss of political power with the advent of the foreign rule in the country which they had ruled for centuries. The British rulers, on their part, looked upon the Muslims with a great deal of suspicion and tended to keep as far away from them as possible. They encouraged the Hindus, whom they found to be loyal subjects and eager to learn English and adopt modernity. The Muslim subjects were generally viewed as seditious and untrustworthy. The Hindus adopted Western education in large numbers, got the lion's share of government jobs and the opportunities of career and professions that British rule offered. This created a counter-tendency among the Muslims to keep themselves away from foreign rule, its value system and the modernity of the nineteenth century. In between, there took place the great revolt of 1857 in which Muslims all over north India took part with a great deal of enthusiasm, clearly aiming at the revival of the Mughal Empire. This further aggravated



the great divide between the Muslims in general on one hand and the British rulers and anglicized Hindus on the other.

A significant change took place around 1870 with the coming out of an epoch-making book, *Indian Musalmans*, by W.W. Hunter. This study graphically described how British rule had distanced itself from the Muslim community, gone overboard in courting the Hindus, how the Hindus were gradually becoming seditious and clamouring for more and more reform, and how, in the changed context, the interest of the British rule lay in courting the Muslims and turning them into loyal subjects of the British Empire. From this started a new policy of the British rulers, gradually turning away from dependence on the Hindus and turning to the Muslims to provide a support base to colonial rule. This was to turn into a massive process of *divide et impera* (divide and rule) in the twentieth century, leading the Muslim separatist politics away from the national freedom movement. Paradoxically, the partition of Bengal in 1905 encouraged both the general freedom movement and a separatist movement among the Bengalee Muslims. The community remained, by and large, aloof from the British rule and the modernizing influence it had brought like the English language and education. But there were some Muslim intellectuals and social activists of this period, who genuinely wanted to change their community. The pioneer was a maverick Abdul Raheem (1785–1853), also called *dahri* (atheist), originally from north India, who came to Calcutta in quest of knowledge and learnt not only English but also modern science and logic. He became a freethinker and eventually became an atheist. After serving as tutor to Tipu Sultan's grandchildren in Tollygunge, he settled down at Tiljala where he lived in a tent and attracted a number of thinking intellectuals all around. The story goes that he avoided meeting Syed Ahmed who, on a visit to Calcutta, wanted to meet him. His disciple Maulana Obaidullah el Obaide (1834–85), who carried on this tradition of freethinking, was a friend of Raj Narain Bose, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj. Yet another Muslim leader in this tradition was Delawar Hussain Ahmed (1840–1913), the first Muslim graduate of India who passed from the Presidency College, Calcutta, in first division in 1861. He maintained



that the needs of the changing society could not be met by conservative religious laws of Islam and supported the efforts of Syed Amir Ali. The better known stalwarts among the Muslims were Nawab Abdul Latif (1828–93) and Syed Amir Ali (1849–1928), both of them wanting change in Muslim society, but the former wanting this change to come about through the institutions of madrasa and the latter wanting to bring about the change through English-oriented educational institutions. Amir Ali, barrister and honorary magistrate, maintained that the Quran should be read without the interpretation put upon it by the ulemas, who represented the unauthorized teachings of their ancient predecessors, and still lived in the nineteenth century. Delawar Hussain Ahmed, who has been described as ‘truly a renaissance personality’, believed the decline of the Muslims was due to their religious conservatism, absence of tolerance and the union of religion with the state. He also exhorted the Muslims to learn the Bengali language and strongly recommended that the Muslims of Bengal must adopt Bengali as their vernacular, to the exclusion of Urdu, which did not suit their requirements. As the majority of the Muslims were still away from English education, and as Delawar Hussain wrote exclusively in English, his ideas failed to reach the common people of his generation. They, therefore, remained very much outside these secular and modern thoughts and remained under total domination of backward and conservative mullahs. His following observation is refreshing: ‘We may multiply academies for Mohamadans. We may make them collectors, magistrates or judges, but we shall never enable them to advance as a body in social importance if the Mohamadans of India continued deliberately to ignore the real causes of their dissidences or obstinately refused changes in their laws and institutions.’ But he did anticipate the liberal and progressive sections in Bangladesh during the twentieth century fighting for Bengali and for independence against Pakistani colonial rule.² Among the other stalwarts who can be mentioned are Haji Mohammad Mohsin, who set up the Hooghly College primarily for educating Muslim students, Faqir Lalan Shah who lived around the Padma River in the nineteenth century and whose devotional songs still stir hearts of both Hindus and Muslims,

Mosharraf Hussain, the author of the classic *Bishad Sindhu*, and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932) who spent her entire life for the cause of education of Muslim girls and built the Sakhawat Memorial Girls School, a well-known educational institution of Calcutta. She firmly believed that Muslim women must be educated and made socially conscious if the community had to be uplifted. Rokeya fervently opposed the unequal and cruel treatment of Muslim women by the male-dominated Muslim society and pleaded for the removal of all civil laws and social institutions created in the name of religion and designed to treat women as slaves. She was critical of the purdah system and the women's excessive love for ornaments which were badges of slavery. She wrote extensively, advocating female education and economic independence of women and quoted from the Prophet of Islam to justify equality for women. Typical of her views is the following comment from her book *Motichoor*:

We shall do whatever is needed to be done to attain equality with men. If earning our livelihood independently ensures our freedom, we shall do that. If necessary, we shall be lady-clerk, lady-magistrate, lady-barrister, lady-judge—everything ... If we cannot get employment in the offices of the government, we will take to agriculture; why do you cry for not being able to find bridegrooms for your daughters? Give proper education to your daughters and let them earn their own livelihood.³

Unfortunately, she remained a lonely star in the horizon, whose ideas were given importance only when Bangladesh became independent. The efforts of these stalwarts failed to move the bulk of the ordinary Muslims and remained confined only to the microscopic upper classes. People down below continued to be in their narrow grooves and fell victim to separatist politics in the twentieth century.

The Muslim masses were not exposed either to Western education or to modernity as such, and remained on the whole steeped in medieval outlook and attitudes towards life. It was only during the early years of the twentieth century that, following general spread of Western education among them, large masses of Muslims were emancipated from the medieval mould of thought and belief, developed some kind of modern outlook and were, to that extent, drawn towards the great movement that had started among the

Hindus in the early nineteenth century. They also started taking pride in Bengali language and Bengali culture in a broad sense. Typical of the trend were poets Jasimuddin, Golam Mustafa and Sufia Kamal, intellectuals like Humayun Kabir, Wajed Ali and Qazi Abdul Wadud and the poet Nazrul Islam. But the mass of the community of Bengalee Muslims had to wait till the 1950s and 1960s when, following the creation of Pakistan and their inability to find a common identity with the West Pakistanis, they were driven increasingly to vigorous espousal of the Bengali image, eventually leading to their revolt against Pakistan.

Hindu Religious Reform Movements

In the second half of the nineteenth century religious reform movements continued vigorously. Rammohan Roy had founded the Brahmo Sabha, not as a sectarian organization but as an assembly of all those who believed in the Upanishadic concept of one God but also generally followed many of the Hindu religious and social practices, including the caste system. But Debendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore, who assumed leadership, turned Brahmo Sabha into Brahmo Samaj, almost as a new religion. He introduced a number of practices like formal initiation into Brahmoism which nearly broke away from the parent body of the Hindus. The influence of Brahmo Samaj was felt in many aspects of social life such as treating women as equal members of the society, with a right to education and property, eradication of vulgar rituals, the return to Vedanta, lessening of the rigours of the caste system and general exposure to Western sciences and liberal ideas. Paradoxically, however, idol worship and caste system, which Rammohan had fervently opposed all along, stood their ground and stayed as permanent features of the parent Hindu society. Debendranath's Brahmo Samaj was, in a way, a reaction against both Rammohan's westernized orientation as also the extreme Anglicanism of Young Bengal.

After Debendranath the mantle of turning the Brahmo Samaj into a broad-based dynamic sect fell on Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–84). Sen joined Brahmo Samaj in 1859 and infused a new life into this sleepy organization with the help of his great oratorical skill and attracted a large number of people. He started a Brahmo Vidyalaya in 1859 and a Sangeet Sabha for religious discussion in 1860 and became the editor of the journal *Indian Mirror* in 1861. He also started Brahmo Friends Society. He

travelled extensively in East Bengal and also outside Bengal, influencing a large number of people with his personal charm. But a rift soon developed between Keshab Chandra Sen's followers and the old guard on the issue of the former's demand that members of the Brahmo Samaj should give up the Brahman symbol of the sacred thread, that women be permitted to join the religious services and that intercaste marriage be permitted. In 1866 the Brahmo Samaj had its first split with Keshab Chandra Sen and his followers breaking away and founding the Brahmo Samaj of India. But slowly a personality cult was growing around Keshab Chandra Sen which even some of his own followers did not like. Keshab Chandra Sen openly following the Vaishnava style of kirtans and his coming closer to Ramakrishna Paramhansa added fuel to fire. A pretext for further split came when Keshab Chandra, at the request of the government, made a complete departure from the Brahmo tradition of not allowing marriage of minor girls and agreed to the marriage of his own minor daughter, Suniti Devi, with the young maharaja of Koch Bihar, according to the orthodox Hindu practice. His excuse was that he had received God's message. Many young Brahmos then revolted and established the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (1878) with a democratic constitution. This was the second split in Brahmo Samaj. Keshab Chandra's followers now became Nabobidhan Samaj focusing on a synthesis of all kinds of worship through bhakti or devotional fervour, but like the Adi Brahmo Samaj it also ceased to have much significance in terms of the number of followers. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj gradually took over the leadership role under leaders like Sibnath Shastri and Ramtanu Lahiri.

Though the Brahmo Samaj movement is seen to be a response to the Christian missionary challenges on Western lines, there were some schools of thought, like the followers of Swami Dayanand of the Arya Samaj in north India, who totally rejected westernism and stood for uncritical adoration of the Hindu past. This did not have much influence in Bengal although there were some weak trends on these lines. A synthesis between the two conflicting ideas was provided by the Ramakrishna–Vivekananda

movement which tried to harmonize Western influences with some of the ancient beliefs and traditions.

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMHANSA, THE SAINT OF DAKSHINESHWAR

Born into a Brahman family at Kamarpukur village in Hooghly district, Ramakrishna (1836–86) did not have any formal education. He lived the life of intense spiritual realization and cast a deep impression on Narendranath Datta, a modern young man and an atheist, who later became his disciple and the protagonist of his ideas and came to be known as Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna–Vivekananda movement formed a bridge between the westernized Brahmo Samaj and those who stood for infallibility of ancient Hindu scriptures. At the age of twenty, Ramakrishna became chief priest at the temple of Dakshineshwar, which was founded by Rani Rasmani, a rich lady of Calcutta belonging to a lower caste. The environment of the temple deeply influenced Ramakrishna's life and personality.

He was not a scholar in the conventional sense, nor had aristocratic legacy either of birth or of wealth, yet he possessed the power of attracting towards himself great intellectuals and thinkers of his time like Keshab Chandra Sen, Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Pratapchandra Majumdar.

Ramakrishna had a natural aversion to all kinds of dogmatism and bookishness. The important thing, according to him, was to cultivate devotion and love for God. He said that it was no use reading too many books and cluttering the mind with facts and opinions. He never formulated a well-defined and precise religion, nor did he preach one. He did not form any sect and yet he attracted great intellectuals of diverse faiths. He regarded different religious paths as different means of reaching the same goal. According to him, water remains the same whether one used the term 'jal' or 'pani' or 'aqua' to describe it. One can reach the roof of a house by scaling a wall, or with the help of a ladder, or with the help of a rope, or by climbing the stairs. But once the roof is reached, the means no longer have any importance. Ramakrishna did not propose any sort of synthesis of

religious systems, nor did he preach any universal religion as an eclectic form interrelating the basic elements of different faiths. Rather, he said that every religion is wholly true, for Truth is one and indivisible and as such it would be improper to say that different religions contained fragments of Truth.

According to Ramakrishna, renunciation of the world is not an indispensable condition for realization of God. A householder can realize God provided he can develop the amount of concentration and the intensity of love necessary for the task. One can remain in the world without being of the world. If one has developed a spirit of absolute surrender to God, it does not matter whether one leads the life of a householder or not.

In Ramakrishna's own time, however, there were some great intellectuals like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Sibnath Shastri who did not see eye to eye with him so far as his spiritual life was concerned, but they deeply appreciated his sincerity, devotion and catholicity.

He stripped religion of its theological and ritualistic garments and made it coexist with life. From the artificial domain of theory so long contained in dead prints, Ramakrishna rescued religion and gave it a new connotation rooted in life. He felt that there should be a marriage between the lofty spiritual height and the plains of the phenomenal world. Spirit without matter is empty, matter without spirit is blind. He would preach the most subtle Vedantic doctrines through easily understood fables. The gospels of Shri Ramakrishna (*Ramakrishna Kathamrita*) compiled by one 'M' (Mahendranath) became a popular book among Bengalees and all those who were influenced by Ramakrishna's teachings.

VIVEKANANDA

The First Socialist in Bengal

Ramakrishna's teachings were propagated worldwide by Swami Vivekananda, his main disciple. Vivekananda (1863–1902) did for Ramakrishna what St Paul had done for Jesus Christ. Born as Narendranath

Datta he joined the Brahmo Samaj and became an agnostic young man until he came under the magic spell of Ramakrishna. He became a monk and assumed the leadership of the followers of Ramakrishna on his death. He travelled widely all over the subcontinent and then proceeded to the USA to attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, representing the Hindu faith. His memorable speech on this occasion, by far the first effort to preach Vedanta in the West, received general appreciation because of its stress on the underlying unity of all religions and all mankind and the superficiality of external forms.

The social and economic thoughts of Vivekananda can be said to be epitomized in a couplet he wrote which, translated from Bengali, would read: 'Where are you seeking God, not recognizing Him in front of you in so many forms? Only a person who loves living beings serves God.'

Here he brought about a remarkable fusion between the Upanishadic doctrine of divinity in human life and the practical philosophy of service to humanity. Thus he brought together, in a way no one had done before, the ancient tradition of monasticism and the tradition of social services and improving the living standards of the masses by social action. In this way, he gave social significance to monasticism and spiritual significance to the life of the householder. Vivekananda was outwardly a monk in yellow robes, a preacher of Vedanta, but in his social and economic thoughts he was a revolutionary—one of the greatest in history whose teachings have deeply influenced our national life and culture ever since. His inspiring call for the abolition of caste privileges and untouchability, for establishing a classless society, for the education and uplift of the exploited millions, for giving the working classes and the underprivileged their due share in national wealth, for the emancipation of women, for establishing peasants' proprietorship in land and for achieving a truly harmonious international order where there will be no exploitation of one nation by another remains as relevant as ever.

It is a mistake to think of Vivekananda as a Hindu monk. He was much more than that. He was not just a religious saint, but a Vedantist preaching the concept of a universal religion for every human being, irrespective of

the formal religion in which a person was born. He was also India's first socialist, deeply committed to the eradication of poverty and the achievement of classless, casteless society. He was a firebrand nationalist with a strong vision of liberation from foreign rule and yet a true internationalist in his vision of an interdependent, mutually cooperative world far ahead of his time. He was a social reform activist, an educationist and, above all, a humanist who believed in the innate greatness of man.

It is important to emphasize that Vivekananda's social and economic ideals arose essentially from his Vedic perception of the unity of mankind and commonality of all religions. In his clarion call at the Chicago Parliament of Religion, he emphasized the fundamental unity of all religions deprecating the prevailing tendency to emphasize the greatness of one's own religion and decry other religions. He urged followers of various religions to be true to their fundamental tenets, and not to emphasize 'secondary details'.

One cannot but recall the stirring words:

The Christian has not to become Hindu or Buddhist, nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the other, and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. Every religion has produced men and women of most exalted character. If in the face of this evidence anybody dreams of exclusive survival of his own religion and destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart.¹

The Vedic concept of eternal universal religion could not be the exclusive property of the Hindus. Believing in the unity of all mankind and the same God manifesting himself through all beings, he felt that Islam as a religion had gone the farthest in achieving the Vedic concepts of Advaita (non-duality between God and man). 'How I would long to see India as an Islamic body with a Vedantic head' (letter to a friend, Sarfaraz Khan).

Again, 'If you are born Christian, be a good Christian, if you are born a Hindu, be a good Hindu. If you are born a Muslim, be a good Muslim.'

Different sects fighting for the exclusive right to worship the same God in different names was contrary to all that Vivekananda stood for. He would have liked to see both Hindus and Muslims offering prayer to God, called

by whatever name, at the same place and in harmony, without disturbing each other. 'Advaitism which looks upon all mankind as one's own was never developed among the Hindus universally. If any religion approaches this equality it is Islam alone.'

Vivekananda wanted the caste system to be completely eradicated, the poorer sections of the people to be given a fair deal and religion to be freed from priestly tyranny and vulgar ritualism. Man is an incarnation of God. If this is so, if God resides in every soul, there cannot be any high caste or low caste, any master or slave. For a true Vedantist there is no room for special privileges on the basis of the accident of birth, no room for difference between nations. Just as a body where blood does not flow through all the limbs equally becomes diseased, the same happens with a society where large sections of the people are kept backward and deprived of basic facilities and education. In his words again:

Think of the last 600 or 700 years of degradation when grown-up men have been discussing for years whether they should drink a glass of water with the right hand or the left, whether they should gargle five or six times. Our religion is in the kitchen. Our God is in the cooking pot and our religion is 'don't touch me, I am holy'.

With characteristic acuity, he preached against reactionary rules such as Manu's principles. 'Those social rules which stand in the ways of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily. Those institutions should be encouraged by which men advance on the path of freedom.'

For him the problem of caste was a part of the greater national problem. To remedy this he suggested free flow of spiritual and secular knowledge among the masses of the people and free flow of opportunities so that all could see the evils of the caste system and resist humiliation and exploitation. 'Religion is neither on book, nor in intellectual consent, nor in reason. Reason, theory, dogmas, doctrines, books, ceremonies are all helps to religion. Religion itself consists of realisation.'

For a true Vedantist all these rituals that the priests propagate should be meaningless. For centuries, according to him, these priests had been doling out ditch water as religion, overlooking the eternal foundation of amrit that

lies behind humanity. 'I consider the great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are well educated, well fed and well cared for. If we want to regenerate India we must work for them.' And again, 'So long as millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays no heed to them. I do not believe in a god who cannot give us bread here, giving eternal bliss in heaven.'

These thoughts were forged in the course of his fourteen years of travel on foot across India when he came to know hunger, starvation, shelter-less living, the misery of the poor and also their 'great potential'. His prescription was a programme of national regeneration in which education must play a major role. He addressed his appeals primarily to three sections: the youth, the women and the lower classes. He demanded that the task of educating the younger generation should be taken over from the hands of the foreign rulers and from orthodox religious institutions and given to society as a whole. He considered it necessary that education should be patriotic, useful and that the achievements of advanced technology should be mastered by younger people. Also, education should be carried to the farmer's field and the worker's factory. He wanted his sanyasis to teach rural children in the evening with the aid of a lantern. Again, he attached great importance to professional training and to further education and informal education, ideas which became fashionable only after a century. 'Spend no more money on the Brahman's education, but spend all on the Pariah.'

Vivekananda was one of the earliest among Indians who understood the social significance of labour and the fact that the entire superstructure of human philosophy—art and culture, sciences and all other branches of knowledge—is based on the labour of the toiling masses who are paradoxically subjected to exploitation and deprived of the privilege of entering the sphere of culture and knowledge. Not only did he describe himself as a socialist, but also used the expression 'the proletariat'.

‘The peasant, the shoemaker, the sweeper and such other lower classes of Indians have much greater capacity for work and self-reliance within them. They have been silently working through long ages and producing the entire wealth of the land without a word of complaint. You have so long oppressed these forbearing masses. Now is the time for their retribution.’ He came to the conclusion that ‘the only hope of India is from the masses. Upper classes are physically and morally dead’. A second conclusion was that, given the proper atmosphere and opportunity, the toilers were capable of higher intellectual activity.

He, therefore, appealed to the educated youth to spread education among the masses—education that included history, geography, sciences, literature as also the profound truths of religion. Vivekananda was also very familiar with the socialist writings in Europe of his time. In 1900 he met Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist leader, in Paris. In his book *Modern India* he mentions another Russian revolutionary leader, Bakunin. The following statement from his monograph, *I Am a Socialist*, is also revealing:

A time will come, when the Sudras of every country, with their inborn Sudra nature and habits—not becoming in essence Vaishya or Kshatriya but remaining a Sudra—will gain absolute supremacy in every society. The first glow of the dawn of this power has already begun to slowly break upon the Western world. Socialism, anarchism, nihilism, and such other sects, are the vanguards of the social revolution that is to follow.

Vivekananda attached tremendous importance to women. ‘With 500 motivated men it will take me 50 years to transform India, with 50 motivated women it may take only a few years.’ Again, in his perception, the state of civilization was to be judged by the way it treats its women.

In his programme of national regeneration he attached great importance to mass education, an education that was not religious in the conventional sense, but both spiritual and scholarly, and at the same time scientific and cosmopolitan. He preached what he called ‘practical Vedanta’ and a ‘man-making religion’. In his opinion all the social reform movements in India had failed to succeed because they were confined only to a handful of people in the upper rungs of society and never penetrated to the masses. Unless the masses could be transformed, all reform efforts were bound to be

confined to a very narrow base. The prescription of Vivekananda was that mass education alone could bring about true reform on a large basis. He also wanted that we should first flood the country with spiritualism and that will automatically solve all our social and economic problems. He assigned great importance to the youth, the women and the lower classes as catalysts in his scheme for national regeneration.

One can easily draw a causal connection between Vivekananda's teachings and the mighty nationalist movement that arose in Bengal a few years after his death in 1902. People were surprised to see how thousands of young freedom fighters went to prison, and sometimes even to the gallows, with Vivekananda's book in hand. Sir Valentine Chirol, author of the well-known book *Indian Unrest*, described Vivekananda's teachings as one of the major causes of the nationalist movement. Romain Rolland said: 'If the generations that followed saw, three years after Vivekananda's death, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi; if India to-day has taken part in the collective action of organized masses, it is due to the initial shock, to the mighty: "Lazarus, come forth!" of the Message from Madras [message from Vivekananda].'² Vivekananda was the spiritual precursor of the freedom movement in the same way as Rousseau and Mazzini were intellectual preceptors of the French Revolution and the Italian unification, respectively.

Beginnings of Political Awareness

Towards a Nation in the Making

The root of political consciousness in Bengal can be traced to that many-splendoured pioneer of the renaissance, Raja Rammohan Roy. Rammohan Roy shaped his ideas on the lines laid down by Western philosophers like Bentham and Montesquieu and by his keen awareness of India being a subject country under British rule and of the exploitation of poor people and the inflow of the West's liberalizing influence that went with it. True that Rammohan Roy was not in favour of establishing a legislative body in this country because he was afraid it would be dominated by the East India Company's officials. Also, he preferred lawmaking by the British parliament and wanted Indian public opinion to be reflected in the legislation. But clearly, he could not rise so much beyond his time as to even imagine the possibility of common people claiming a share in lawmaking. He was keenly aware of the sufferings of the common people under the East India Company's rule and, in particular, the ryots under the Permanent Settlement. He wrote at length of the abysmal conditions of the agricultural labourers and suggested abolition of the zamindars' prescriptive rights to increase rent. With his deep faith in the British sense of justice and fair play, Rammohan Roy stood for an 'enlightened government'. He wanted union between India and Britain to be permanent in a liberal system of administration. However, he also envisaged a time when the subjugated people might be freed from the colonial power and, if and when that happened, it was his hope that the separation would be peaceful and that India, aided by nations of Europe, would take up the great work of

‘enlightening and civilizing the surrounding nations of Asia’. His followers took keen interest in studying the various phases of the French Revolution (also known as the July Revolution) during 1830–48 and on one occasion even the French tricolour was hoisted on the Ochterlony Monument in Calcutta. Organizations like the Academic Association (founded in 1828), the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge (1838), the Hindu Theosophical Society and periodicals like the *Parthenon* (1830), *Jnananveshan* (1831), the *Hindu Pioneer*, the *Bengal Spectator* (1842) and the *Inquirer* carried on an endless campaign to educate public opinion about the evils of colonial oppression and the need for building a resurgent new country. Soon came the formation of the Landholders’ Society, the very first organization in Bengal with a distinctive political object. According to Raja Rajendra Lal Mitra, ‘it gave to the people the first lesson in the art of fighting constitutionally for their rights, and taught them manfully to assert their claims and give expression to their opinions. Ostensibly, it advocated the rights of the zamindars, but as their rights are intimately bound up with those of the ryots, the one cannot be separated from the other’.

In 1849 John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune, the then law member of the Governor General’s Council, prepared drafts of certain legislative measures intended to bring British-born subjects of the Crown under the jurisdiction of the courts and laws of the East India Company. The Europeans in Bengal, unwilling to tolerate any curtailment of their privileges, organized a powerful resistance against the proposals. This controversy was in a way a forerunner of the Ilbert Bill controversy that shook the country a few decades later. The leaders of the educated public in Bengal now appreciated the urgency of establishing a more effective political organization than the Landholders’ Society and the Bengal British India Society. As these two societies included European members, an organization with only local membership was considered desirable. Moreover, it was thought necessary to agitate for some constitutional and administrative changes in view of the impending termination of the Company’s charter in 1853.

All this led to the foundation of the British Indian Association on 31 October 1851, by the amalgamation of the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society. From the very beginning this association had an all-India outlook; it 'kept up a friendly correspondence with the Associations of the sister Presidencies' and its first annual report notes with satisfaction: 'The formation at Poona, Madras and Bombay, successively, of associations of a similar character, which, though they have elected to carry on operations independently of each other, cannot but largely contribute towards the important end of acquainting the British public with the state of feeling in India with regard to its past and future administration.' During the early years of its existence, the activities of the association consisted mainly of submission of petitions to the government and to the British parliament on public grievances. There was a pathetic trust in the good intentions of the rulers as shown by the following words of the association's secretary: 'There can be no doubt that, when the real state of things is understood, the British Parliament will not long delay justice in India.'

Most of the leaders of the British Indian Association at its early stage were conservative by tradition and temperament—Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Radhakanta Deb, Kalikrishna Deb, Satyanarayan Ghosal—although there were some progressive leaders like Ramgopal Ghosh and Peareychand Mitra. Although its activities embraced the interests of all classes of people, it made special efforts to protect the interests of the zamindars. But, in fairness, we have to admit that the British Indian Association was, before the 1857 uprising, a victim of its times. Bengal in 1857 was not prepared for systematic political efforts for the achievement of a well-defined political programme. There were, however, bold adventurers who could perceive dimly the inevitable trend in India's political evolution. Harish Chandra Mukherjee wrote in the *Hindu Patriot* on 14 January 1858, in connection with the proposal for transferring the Government of India to the Crown: 'Can a revolution in the Indian government be authorized by Parliament without consulting the wishes of the vast millions of men for whose benefit it is proposed to be made? The reply must be in the negative.'

The time is nearly come when all Indian questions must be solved by Indians.'

SURENDRANATH BANERJEE

Organized political activity had to wait till the appearance of Surendranath Banerjee between 1875 and 1885. In his public speeches on issues such as temperance, in his work as teacher and educationist organizing the Students' Association (1875) and in his memorable tour of northern and western India where he influenced local leaders like Sir Syed Ahmed in UP (the United Provinces that later became Uttar Pradesh), Dyal Singh Majithia in Punjab, Ranade in Bombay, Surendranath galvanized public opinion. This led to the formation of the Indian Association in 1876 which now became the mouthpiece of the educated community of Bengal. The objects, to quote Banerjee, were:

- (i) the creation of a strong body of public opinion in the country;
- (ii) the unification of the Indian races and people on the basis of common political interests and aspirations;
- (iii) the promotion of friendly feelings between Hindus and Mohammedans; and
- (iv) the inclusion of masses in the great public movement of the day.¹

The association spearheaded the agitation against the reduction of the maximum age limit for the ICS examination from twenty-one to nineteen and for holding the examination simultaneously in Britain and India. Surendranath travelled to many towns like Lahore and addressed public meetings on these demands. The impact of his whirlwind subcontinental tour is understood from the following assessment of Sir Henry Cotton, a well-known civil servant of those times who wrote: 'Twenty years ago it was inconceivable that a Bengalee could exert any influence in Punjab. But today Surendranath's name is one to conjure with from Dhaka to Multan, and it is the Bengalees who build up public opinion from Peshawar to Chittagong.'² Surendranath became the proprietor and editor of the *Bengalee*, a vocal political journal.

A Civil Service Memorandum was prepared for the British parliament and Lalmohan Ghosh, a gifted orator, was sent to London for presenting

this. The mission met with success as the demands were accepted by the authorities in Britain. The other reactionary measures—The Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act—both promulgated during Lord Lytton's viceroyalty provided fresh flashpoints. The first forbade Indians from owning firearms and was viewed by Bengal as a racist measure. The latter (1878) which muzzled the fast-growing and fiercely independent Bengali press met with instantaneous opposition in which the Indian Association took the leading role. So intense was the agitation that almost the first response of Lord Ripon, the next viceroy, was to repeal this act. Ripon's proposals for reform of the municipality met with support from the Indian Association. Proposals for representation for local self-government inevitably led to a vision for democratic government. Thus the Indian Association, along with its more moderate contemporary, the British Indian Association, played a catalytic role in building up political consciousness. We are told in Bipin Pal's memoirs that during the 1870s Calcutta's student community was a honeycomber with several societies.³ Next to Surendranath, there were several leaders like Kristo Das Pal, Rajendra Lal Mitra, Ramanath Tagore, Digamber Mitter, Rev. K.M. Banerjee and Lalmohan Ghosh.

ILBERT BILL CONTROVERSY

It remained for the Ilbert Bill controversy (1883) to galvanize local opinion to a boiling point so as to form the Indian National Conference. This logical measure proposed by Ilbert, law member of Lord Ripon's Council, provided for trial of European offenders by Indian magistrates. It provoked the British community in India which took an openly racist posture. They formed a Defence Association with branches in different parts of the subcontinent and raised funds (over Rs 1,50,000) to protect their special privilege. We have it on the authority of Henry Cotton that all sections of Englishmen, except government officials, ganged up against Ripon who on several occasions was insulted in public. Some of them went to the ludicrous extent of planning to kidnap Ripon from the Government House

in Calcutta and to forcibly ship him to Britain incognito from Chand Paul Ghat. Public opinion in Bengal and elsewhere mounted an agitation in favour of the bill spearheaded by the Indian Association. Meetings were held all over, the largest being in Calcutta.

But in the end, Ripon developed cold feet seeing the intensity of the agitation among the whites and removed from the bill, before its passage into an act, the most controversial provision of trial of European offenders by Indian magistrates. Shortly after the Ilbert Bill agitation, Surendranath was sentenced to imprisonment for two months on a charge of contempt of court for ridiculing a British judge, Norris, for directing a Hindu to produce a Salgram Sila (a special piece of stone which symbolizes Narayan, the titular family deity) in the court. This also provoked an agitation in Bengal.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1883 AND 1885

In the wake of the Ilbert Bill agitation and the agitation over Surendranath's imprisonment, the Indian Association convened an all-India National Conference, the first time ever that such a thing had been thought of. The association had already established contact with other regions of the subcontinent. It took advantage of a government-sponsored international exhibition in Calcutta in 1883 to request all its branches in northern India and the political associations in Bombay and Madras to send delegates to the National Conference to be held from 28 to 30 December 1883. This conference was held with great fanfare in Albert Hall in Calcutta. Well over 100 delegates including Muslims came from different provinces. The conference was inaugurated by a national song. The main subjects discussed were:

- (i) Repeal of Arms Act;
- (ii) The possibility and necessity of reducing the expenses of the army, general administration and home charges;
- (iii) Reform of the civil service examination and holding simultaneous examinations in India and London; and
- (iv) Separation of the executive from the judiciary.

With the object of giving a permanent shape to the conference and encouraged by this meeting, Surendranath again toured north India and preached the concept of a common political platform for all Indians at Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Rawalpindi, Ambala, Delhi, Agra, Aligarh, Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, Bankipur and other places. The object and ideal of the National Conference gained popularity and the tour paved the way for its further sittings.

The second National Conference was held two years later during 25 to 27 December 1885. Along with the Indian Association, the National Mohammedan Association and the British Indian Association were also the conveners of the second meeting. Surendranath moved a resolution on the reconstitution of the legislative council on democratic lines with a view to introducing a parliamentary form of government as in Great Britain. At its last session the second National Conference sent a message of goodwill to the 'Indian National Congress' that was being held in Bombay at the same time. It was a memorable act of humility on the part of the National Conference in relation to the Indian National Congress.

EARLY YEARS OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The Indian National Congress met first in December 1885. There is a theory that the Indian National Congress was a reaction to the Bengalee domination of the Indian National Conference although the Congress's organizers turned to a Bengalee barrister, W.C. Bonerjee, to be its first president. There is another theory, based on good research, that the founding of the Congress was with the blessing of the British Raj in order to create a moderate and a loyalist political body that could marginalize the extremist political associations that were on a rise in the country, posing a potential threat to the British Raj. The real founder of the Congress was a retired Scottish ICS officer, Allan Octavian Hume, who after retirement plunged into the politics of the country he had served and which he loved. He formed an Indian National Union with branches in all major cities. It was the representatives of these branches, all of them moderates, who met in Bombay in December 1885 to form the Congress. This event was hailed

by Governor General Dufferin who outlined the Congress's role as something on the lines of: His Majesty's Opposition in Britain making submissions to the government on various issues, but remaining fiercely loyal to the British Raj. Clearly the Raj was fearful of the spectre of anti-government movements bringing yet another mutiny. Hume himself had spoken of having seen seven volumes of reports warning of an impending revolt in India.⁴ The Indian National Congress was clearly intended to be a safety valve.

But soon things went beyond the government's reckoning. In 1886, when the Congress had its second session in Calcutta, it opened its doors to the members of the National Conference which, in a rare gesture of self-sacrifice in larger interest, resolved to liquidate itself and merge with the younger but more widely based body. Surendranath and all his associates joined in, and the official report emphasized that 'the leading characteristic of the Congress of 1886 was that it was the whole country's Congress'. But this drift away from 'moderation' was not to the liking of the authorities and Dufferin's displeasure was made known at the fourth session of the Congress at Allahabad (1888). The first two decades of Congress politics were very largely the politics of petitions and prayers. It protested against imprisonment without trial (1897), against Curzon's University Commission (1902), against excessive extravagance in the Delhi Durbar of 1903, against the oppressive plantation labour problems in Assam tea plantations (1896), and pleaded for representative institutions and for women's representation. Bengalee delegates were conspicuous in the Congress sessions, and seven out of the first twenty-one sessions were presided over by Bengalees—W.C. Bonerjee in 1885 and 1892, Surendranath Banerjee in 1895 and 1902, Anandamohan Bose in 1898, Ramesh Chandra Dutt in 1899 and Lalmohan Ghosh in 1903.

On the whole the Congress in its first phase largely fulfilled the role expected of it by its founding father. Year after year, the delegates would meet in December in some city or other and pass Westminster-style resolutions pleading for government action on various issues seeking to confer greater rights and privileges, including representational rights on His

Majesty's loyal Indian subjects. Occasionally, there were mild critical notes such as criticism of Indian government's extravagance, reduction of military expenditure or denial of rights to indentured Indian labour in British colonies, or inadequate Indian representation under the Indian Councils Act, 1892. Also, the Congress leadership gave much emphasis on making its voice felt in Britain through propaganda costing a lot of money.

From the beginning, the aloofness of Muslims towards the Congress was striking. There were two Muslims out of seventy-two at the first session, thirty-three out of 431 at the second session, fifty-four out of 784 in 1895, forty-five out of 1,663 in 1906. Only at Allahabad (1888) and Lucknow (1879) were the Muslims in noticeable number (222 out of 1,248 and 313 out of 789, respectively). But both these were cities with large Muslim population. Muslims by and large followed Syed Ahmed's lead that their true interest lay in accepting Western education and cooperating with the British Raj rather than engaging themselves in overtly anti-government activities.

However, parallel to this dominant 'moderate' line, another trend, one of aggressive criticism was developing slowly. By the turn of the century, it sought more demonstrative anti-Raj action than mere petitions and prayers, more of people's participation and less of hobnobbing with the government officials. Inevitably, the Bengalee delegates under Surendranath took a leading role in the process. In 1897 Ashwini Kumar Datta of Barisal ridiculed the Congress for being 'three days of annual tamasha'. Impatience with the Congress drove Bengal leaders to parallel channels of protest. The Bengal Provincial Conference met in 1888 under the presidency of Dr Mahendralal Sarkar. It was to become an annual event to articulate Bengal's special demands. Bipin Chandra Pal founded a periodical, the *New India*, in 1902 to express nationalist views. Sarla Devi's chain of Swadeshi Stores, Satish Mukherjee's Dawn Society (1903) and the angry agitation that followed Curzon's ridiculing of the Bengalee national character in his Calcutta University convocation address in 1905 were also straws in the wind showing how educated Bengal was moving in the direction of organized political movement. The inspiring speeches and writings of

Vivekananda exhorting his countrymen to recover national pride and spirit of self-help and to shake off all forms of bondage (by implication, foreign bondage as well) inspired a generation of young people to plunge into action. Thus Bengal was ready for full-scale political agitation when the partition of 1905 provided the spark to ignite what was already a powder magazine.

Growth of Muslim Separatism

A great limitation of the nineteenth-century thought movement and the political stirrs that followed it was its inability to attract the Muslims and lower-caste Hindus. Muslim separatism lifted its head almost from the inception of these movements. Its roots lay in the near-wholesale political, economic, social and educational downgrading that the Bengal Muslims suffered at the advent of British rule. Not only did they lose political power and the privileges and patronage that went with it, but the 1793 Permanent Settlement drastically reduced the number of Muslim zamindars and other large landholders. Nor could the Muslims in Bengal take advantage of the economic opportunities the new era offered. Inherently suspicious and conservative, they also denied themselves English education, thereby leaving the stage free for Hindu Bengalees who dominated government jobs and professions like law, medicine and teaching. Slowly, Muslims withdrew themselves into a cocoon, having little to do with the British and with things modern. Both Muslim aristocracy and professionals came to near extinction. Interestingly, Muslims in other parts of the country, including Bihar, did not quite undergo this experience. Nowhere else in the subcontinent were Muslims as worse off as in Bengal just as, paradoxically, few other communities derived as much benefit from British rule as the Bengalee Hindus. The following description of the state of affairs is given by Sir William Hunter, a well-known ICS officer, in his book *Indian Musalmans*:

My remarks apply only to lower Bengal, the province with which I am best acquainted and in which so far as I can learn, the Muhammadans have suffered most severely under British rule. I should be sorry to believe or to convey to the readers the belief that the following remarks were predictable of all the Muhammadans of India. If ever a people stood in need of a career, it is the Muslim aristocracy of Bengal. The administration of the

imperial taxes was the first source of income in Bengal and the Musalman aristocracy monopolized it. The police was another great source of income and the police was officered by Muhammadans and monopolized by them. Above all there was the army, an army not officered by gentlemen who make little more than bank interest on the price of their commission, but a great confederation of conquerors who enrolled their peasantry into troops, and drew pay from the State for them as soldiers. A hundred and seventy years ago, it was almost impossible for a well-born Muslim in Bengal to become poor. At present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich.¹

The publication of this book around 1870 was indeed a turning point for British policy. It marked a dramatic switch from a pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim policy on to a policy of appeasement of the Muslims and ignoring the Hindus. This also coincided with a dramatic change in the Bengalee Muslim attitude. The Bengalee Muslim, who had been aloof to the British Raj, now started breaking away from this isolation and learning the value of collaborating with the Raj.

Meanwhile, a massive demographic change was under way in rural Bengal—the ascendancy of the Muslims to numerical majority in relation to the Hindu community. Strangely enough, it took both the British rulers and the dominant Hindu urban elite nearly three quarters of a century after 1800 to realize that the Muslims had become a majority in Bengal. A typical observation was that of James Wise: ‘When the English magistrates first came in contact with the people of Bengal, they arrived at the conclusion that the Muhammadans only comprised one per cent of the population.’² A report on vernacular education by William Adams in 1839 revealed surprisingly that in Rajshahi district there were only 450 Hindus for every 1,000 Muslims although officials had treated it to be a Hindu district. Dr Sambhu Chandra Mukherji, a journalist writing in 1882, found it hard to persuade the so-called educated Hindu brethren of districts like Rajshahi that in those districts the Musalmans were more numerous than the Hindus. It was the 1881 census which convincingly showed for the first time that in the twenty-eight Bengali-speaking districts of undivided Bengal Presidency the Muslims numbered significantly more than the Hindus³ and that in Rajshahi, Dhaka and Chittagong divisions, they formed two-thirds of the population. The revelation of this momentous demographic change also

marked the starting point of a series of new attitudes. For British administration, there was a new appraisal of the importance of the Muslim factor. For the marginalized and inarticulate Muslim leadership, it was a realization of their own importance and an assurance that they could not be ignored any longer. Hunter's path-breaking book, *Indian Musalmans*, symbolized the former. The second phenomenon was illustrated by Nawab Abdul Latif's Muhammadan Literary Society and, a few years later, Syed Amir Ali's National Mohammedan Association of Calcutta (later the Central National Mohammedan Association).

The great intellectual awakening in Bengal in the nineteenth century left the Muslim community untouched except in the fringes. In the galaxy of famous names in early Bengal Renaissance, before the advent of the twentieth century, we come across very few Muslim names such as Haji Mohammad Mohsin of Hooghly, the maverick Abdul Rahim (1785–1853) who became an atheist, and Rahim's disciple, Maulana Obaidullah el Obaide (1834–85).⁴ The century from Plassey to the 1857 mutiny saw the Muslims in Bengal as a sullen community unreconciled to the loss of political power and withdrawing itself, so to say, into a shell of suspicion of both the British rulers and the new Hindu professional class. As the Hindu upper and middle classes vigorously went for Western education and for the new economic and professional opportunities, the Muslims withdrew more and more. The early British strategy of making friends with the Hindus and keeping Muslims at a distance accentuated this divide. Also, the fact that revivalist Wahabi movement of upper India cast a deep influence on a section of the downtrodden Bengalee Muslim peasantry, as illustrated in Titu Mir's uprising, made the Muslims suspect and this alienated the British rulers. Also, the Bengalee Muslims, despite their lack of support for the great 1857 uprising, had suffered from the hostility and displeasure of the British Raj for the sins of disloyalty among their co-religionists in upper India. The authorities shunned them.

In his book Hunter argued for more reliance on the Muslims and less on the Hindus because the Hindus were gradually turning seditious and therefore the authorities needed to look for new allies. Only Muslims could

provide this and the Muslim community could be won over through patronage in the form of job opportunities and educational support. Now began a new policy of appeasement of Muslims. In a government resolution in 1871 Governor General Lord Mayo regretted that 'so large and important a class possessing a classical literature replete with works of profound learning and great value, and counting among its members a section specially devoted to the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge should stand aloof from active cooperation with our educational system and should lose the advantages, both material and social, which others enjoy'.⁵ This coincided with the Aligarh movement led by Syed Ahmed who established the Aligarh College in 1874 and encouraged Muslims to take to Western education and make friends with the British rule. He was of firm opinion that there had been uneven development between the two communities and that this had led to Hindu domination, and that political emancipation without adequate safeguards for the weaker community could only mean further subjugation of the latter. This line of thinking inevitably found echo among Bengalee Muslims where leaders like Syed Amir Ali encouraged Muslim separatism.

But meanwhile, the Bengalee Muslims remained steeped in ignorance and illiteracy. So great was their apathy to modern education that in the Hooghly College, an institution started in 1836 with a large endowment fund by Haji Mohammad Mohsin, a great philanthropist, there were only five Muslim students out of a total of 409 as late as in 1850. Both the Indian Education Commission (1882) chaired by Hunter, and a committee appointed by the government of Bengal in 1885 dwelt extensively on the educational backwardness of the Muslims in Bengal and recommended generous and special measures. A memorandum submitted to Lord Ripon on 6 February 1882 and circulated by the Government of India to all provinces 'assumed a kind of national significance', to quote a contemporary source. The government responded by stating in a resolution (15 July 1885) that 'the very fact that a memorandum like that has been presented with the concurrence and approval of so many leading gentlemen in Bengal and elsewhere indicates that the Muhammadans themselves have

come to appreciate fully the necessity of moving with the times'.⁶ While the Bengal government had its reservations about the Education Commission's recommendation for exclusive schools or scholarships for Muslim students, the Government of India was more generous in its attitude and accepted most of the recommendations.

Unfortunately, the Bengal Hindu leadership, flushed with the new glory of the Bengal Renaissance and the new political awakening, remained unresponsive. It still failed to appreciate that the newly revealed numerical superiority of the Muslims in Bengal from the 1881 census onwards had introduced a new element of great significance in the situation and that it was necessary to carry the Muslims with the movement if it was to mean anything for the bulk of the common people. The following observation of the *Hindu Patriot* on the Education Commission's recommendations suggesting special measures for special classes reflects this impervious, almost hostile, attitude: 'But the bulk of the Hindus who pay for the whole machinery of government administration and education or, in other words, those who contribute the most and have done most for self-help should be denied the helping hand of the government, and their revenue contributions and savings ... must go to the benefit of the indolent, the discontented and the specially favoured. This is the upshot for which the Hindu population of India is to thank the government and the Education Council.'

A recurring controversy on whether Muslim school students should receive their education in ordinary Bengali-medium primary schools, or in *maktabs* where Urdu was the medium of instruction, also thwarted the progress of Muslim education. There was a clear divergence of interest between upper-class Muslims, most of whom spoke in Urdu, and the Bengali-speaking peasantry and lower classes, and on the other hand between largely Urdu-speaking West Bengal Muslims and overwhelmingly Bengali-speaking East Bengal Muslims. The Muslim religious books were generally in Urdu. There was a natural pull towards that language, all the more so because the Bengali literature in the nineteenth century was overwhelmingly loaded with Hindu polytheistic expressions, motifs and myths. Also, unlike the pioneers of Bengali literature like Rammohan Roy

and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, some of the leading writers of the next generation like Bankim Chandra came to be widely perceived by Muslims as anti-Muslim in nature. Muslims found it difficult to appreciate some of the comments, observations or attitudes in Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath*, *Rajsingha* and *Sitaram* where some of the characters made uncomplimentary references to 'Yavanas', or Muslims. This created scope for the fundamentalist forces among Muslims to create a prejudice against Bengali literature of that epoch which was described primarily as Hindu literature. Nonetheless, the fact remains that their efforts to make Bengali-speaking Muslims learn the unfamiliar Urdu script and language did not succeed. Bengali-speaking Muslims did not get over their psychological inhibition to learn Urdu and on the whole stuck to learning Bengali. Some of them concentrated on producing literature in Bengali to counter both the Urdu-based Islamic literature and the predominant Hindu influence in Bengali literature. Muslim writers like Mosharraf Hussain, author of *Bishad Sindhu*, played a significant role in filling this vacuum. Another aspect of this separatism was the predominantly Hindu character of the district boards which did not spend enough money on Muslim education. Also, the educational backwardness of the Muslims was reflected in their poor representation in government service. This was yet another sore point.

There was also a deep-rooted social cause. Socially, the Bengalee Hindu bhadralok looked down upon their Muslim neighbours. 'Muslims were in most respects untouchable to the Hindus,' stated Tamijuddin Khan in his memoirs. Not only was all cooked food thrown away as unclean, if a Muslim entered the room but 'Muslim tenants [were only seated] on the floor or planks or on *piris* [low wooden seats]' and not even allowed to smoke from the same hookahs as the Hindus. They were as good as 'two distinct communities in spite of fraternization in certain fields of activity'.⁷ In a way the Hindu lower castes also received the same treatment from the bhadraloks. The Muslims resented this unequal social treatment and the resultant anguish was to lead to an inevitable backlash as and when more and more Muslims joined the educated ranks and got the upper hand politically.

Nowhere else in the subcontinent were the Muslims as downtrodden, socially, economically and politically, as in Bengal. The entire movement of Sir Syed Ahmed in north India, where Muslims were much better off, had little or no effect in Bengal. Although Sir Syed spoke on behalf of the Muslims of the whole of India, his voice had little impact in far-off Bengal. It was only after the All-India Muslim Educational Conference (AIMEC) of northern India held its first session in Calcutta in 1899 under Amir Ali's chairmanship that the awareness for reorienting the education of Muslim youth in the madrasas on Western lines dawned on Bengalee Muslims. Muslims therefore, along with the Hindus, opposed Curzon's educational reforms, but for different reasons.

There was also a deep economic basis for Muslim separatism. The new zamindar class that Cornwallis created in Bengal was dominated by the Hindus. So too were the two other classes that British rule brought about, viz., the native bourgeoisie that sprang up with the growth of modern industry and commerce and the new professional groups—the teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, government officials and employees. Muslim zamindars were not many. But the overwhelming number among the downtrodden peasantry were Muslim. Hence any zamindar–ryot issue inevitably tended to take on a communal colour. Also, the fact that Muslims had by and large avoided Western education, industry and commerce only meant that Muslims in the new bourgeoisie and professional classes were exceptions, not the rule. Muslims in general did not identify a common interest with the Hindu aristocracy and professional classes clamouring for reforms and more rights.

The fact that Muslims by and large were agricultural tenants while the Hindus were the landowners was a major cause of difference. The 1881 census had revealed that cultivators among the Hindus were only 49.28 per cent of the Hindu population, while the ratio for Muslims was 62.81 per cent of the Muslim population. Among every 1,000 Hindus, 217 were landowners while among the Muslims it was 170 out of 10,000. In Bogra district there were only five Muslims zamindars, in a population where over 80 per cent were Muslims. In Rajshahi there were two Muslim zamindars in

a population where over 78 per cent were Muslims. In Mymensingh and Dhaka the zamindars were either Brahman or Kayastha while the masses were overwhelmingly Muslim. The miserable economic condition of the peasantry in Bengal, mostly Muslim, was graphically brought out by the Floud Commission Report (1938).

Inevitably, the strained relationship between the oppressive zamindar and the oppressed ryot took a communal overtone. The first serious attempt by the government to offer rights and safeguards to the ryots was criticized by the zamindars vociferously through their mouthpiece, the British Indian Association. Due to their educational backwardness and general attitude of withdrawal, the Muslims remained outside the four important movements that swept over Bengal in the nineteenth century—the renaissance, the religious reformation, the social reforms and the growth of political agitation. Whether it was the British Indian Association or the Indian Association founded to form the views of the educated middle classes, the Muslims did not figure prominently in these. Despite declaring the promotion of friendly feelings between Hindus and Muslims ‘as one of the objects of this association and including a Muslim aristocrat, Mir Mohammed Ali, as a committee member, the Indian Association remained predominantly a Hindu association. The Bengal Muslim middle class was still in a slumber. Consequently, for a period, the community became apathetic and indifferent, and did not exert itself towards any kind of social or political activity, lest it should arouse the suspicion of the rulers. The Muslims were at this time in the deepest depths of degradation and decay’.⁸

A small undercurrent of Muslim awakening was however developing outside the mainstream of the nineteenth century’s dominantly Hindu Bengal Renaissance. The person who really pioneered a concerted organizational effort to intellectually uplift the Muslim community in Bengal was Nawab Abdul Latif (1828–93). He passionately felt that the withdrawal syndrome was doing great damage to the community. Originally from Faridpur, but settled in Calcutta, Abdul Latif founded the Muhammadan Literary Society (1863) in Calcutta in which he gathered all the upper-and middle-class Muslims of that metropolis. The society

propagated that British rule was too powerful to be resisted and too useful to be ignored. He realized the great value that Western education and loyalty to the government offered to his community. His role in Bengal was similar to that of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in north India. The society met once a month for many years at Abdul Latif's house and freely discussed various questions of the day. It also held annual conferences where leading scholars, both European and Indian, were invited to present on various scientific themes and experiments. The purpose of these gatherings was twofold: to create an opportunity for friendly social gathering for all classes of Muslims. At times the viceroy, the lieutenant governor of Bengal, the judges of the high court and the elite of Calcutta society, European and Indian, attended the programmes. Exhibitions of oriental artefacts would sometimes be held. The lieutenant governor was the society's patron from 1870 till 1895. The society was overtly loyal to the British government and took special care to promptly remove any trace of sedition anywhere. It was because of this that it never went anywhere near the Indian Association. But towards the close of the century, it inevitably started expressing views on important political issues of the day. Thus it petitioned the Secretary of State, strongly supporting the Indian Councils Bill, but opposing the principle of election which, in its opinion, would harm the interests of the backward Muslim community.

Nawab Abdul Latif also helped in the founding of the Presidency College, the reorganization of the Hooghly College and his own alma mater, the Calcutta Madrasa. In fact, he continued his educational activities till his death in 1893 after which the society gradually petered out. Unlike the Muhammadan Literary Society, the next Muslim body that came up—the National Mohammedan Association founded in 1878 under the leadership of Syed Amir Ali—had some distinct political orientation. It declared that 'there was need for a bona fide political body among the Mohammedans, to represent faithfully and honestly to government, from a loyal but independent standpoint, the legitimate wants and requirements of the Mussalman community'. To Amir Ali, therefore, goes the credit for initiating Muslim Bengal into some sort of rudimentary politics, although

he remained loyal to British rule all along. His association also had the support of the Hindu elite. Amir Ali acknowledged the great assistance he received from influential Hindus.⁹ One of the honorary vice-presidents of the association was Raja Indra Chandra Singh of Paikpara. There were six Hindus among the honorary members including Surendranath Banerjee, Kristo Das Pal and Maharajah Jatindra Mohan Tagore, and there were twenty-nine Hindus among the subscribing members. Two even served on the committee of management. Unfortunately, this healthy trend was not followed by other Muslim associations in Bengal, thereby preventing the possibility of Hindu–Muslim unity on a common social and political platform. The organizers of the association felt that ‘the welfare of the Mohammedans is intimately connected with the well-being of the other races of India’. The association directed its attention to social liberation and educational activities of the Muslims. It achieved a crowning success when its memorandum on education of 6 February 1882 submitted to Ripon provided the basis for Lord Dufferin’s famous resolution of 15 July 1885 on Muslim education and Muslim employment in public services. In 1883 in the Bengal Council, Mohammad Yusuf had demanded reservation of seats for Muslims. But Amir Ali’s association gradually phased out when he was appointed a judge of the Calcutta High Court in 1890 and withdrew from public activities.

Several other organizations were formed, like the Muhammadan Reform Association (1896), generally devoted to the education of Muslims. With the founding of the Indian National Congress on 28 December 1885 it was evident that the Hindu upper and middle classes were willing to plunge into direct political action. For a few like Amir Ali, unless the political activities of the Muslims ‘ran on parallel with that of their Hindu compatriots these were certain to be submerged in the rising tide of the new nationalism’. It became clear that few Muslims in Bengal were willing to give up their loyalism and come out in support of the Congress. Most of them had become more attuned to Syed Ahmed’s line of total support to British authorities and even followed Syed Ahmed’s Patriotic Association (1885) formed to oppose the Congress. Unlike Amir Ali and Delawar Hussain

Ahmed, Nawab Abdul Latif upheld the outmoded madrasa system of education and opposed its replacement by a general English-oriented system of education. Thus two parallel systems of education, one general and the other madrasa, were perpetuated in Bengal. This fomented religious exclusiveness and communal and separatist feelings among the Muslims and an anti-Muslim bias among the Hindus, which ultimately led to the partition of India in 1947.¹⁰

On behalf of the Muhammadan Literary Society, Abdul Latif regretted their inability to accept the invitation of the Congress to join the Congress session in Calcutta in 1886 ‘as they do not anticipate any benefit to be derived from the deliberations of the Congress’. The National Mohammedan Association also sent a similar reply of regret. Some Muslims like Abdul Hamid Khan Yusufzai, editor of the Bengali paper *Ahmadi*, criticized this attitude. Thus there was a clear divergence of opinion among Hindus and Muslims in Bengal on joining the Congress. ‘The Muslims were conscious of the fact that the Hindus were far more advanced than themselves in every sphere of life. Hence it will be unwise for them to join hands with the Hindus in political affairs.’ The number of Muslim delegates from Bengal who attended the Congress sessions as against the total number of delegates from Bengal¹¹ convincingly illustrates that only a few Muslims from Bengal patronized the Congress. Even those who attended did so more in their individual capacity than as representatives of the Bengalee Muslim community according to the admission of even Abdul Kasim of Burdwan who attended nearly all the Congress sessions from 1896 onwards.

One important reason why the sincere feelings of some progressive Hindu and Muslim individuals in facilitating the creation of a common nationalism were frustrated was the close identification of the activities of extremist Congress groups with Hindu motifs, Hindu deities and Hindu rituals. This started with the Hindu mela—which could have been named Banga mela or Bangla mela—and went on to Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s starting the Ganapati festival and Shivaji festival, both of which had some

repercussions in Bengal. There was a general move to organize them on Hindu lines. The target was no doubt British rule, but inevitably there was an unintended anti-Muslim fallout. Their appeals to the past could only mean the Hindu past. Patriotic writers invariably glorified not merely ancient Indian culture but its predominantly Hindu lore. They also began to dwell upon the struggles of the Rajputs, the Marathas and the Sikhs as instances of early urges for freedom. As it happened, all these people had had as their adversaries the Muslim rulers, and the Hindu trend in the national sentiment was therefore intensified without very happy consequences.¹² The report of the Sedition Committee (1918) commented that the religious practices of the Ganapati festival were similar to those of Muharram. Whether in promoting the Shivaji festival, which revived bitter memories of Shivaji's fighting with the Mughals and other Muslim powers, Tilak deliberately wanted to hurt the Muslims is doubtful, but clearly these had the unintended effect of driving the two communities apart. Muslim sentiment was hurt by Tilak justifying Shivaji's killing of Afzal Khan, and his strong support to the movement against cow slaughter. When no less a patriotic leader than Bipin Chandra Pal could announce that 'in honouring Shivaji we were honouring the Hindu ideal', Bengalee Muslim sentiment found it difficult to treat this as a common platform. They felt impelled to go along with leaders like Nawab Salimullah and think that their path was different from that of the Hindus and they must strive for separate safeguards for their community.

Thus a great divide had already been created when the partition of Bengal, Curzon's sinister move to curb the influence of the anti-British Hindu elite, took place on 16 October 1905. No doubt the anti-partition agitation was the first of the great people's movement against colonial rule. But, paradoxically, except a handful like Barrister Abdulla Rasul or Liaquat Hussain, the majority of the Muslims in East Bengal supported partition and viewed the great anti-partition agitation as an attempt to deny them an opportunity to have a Muslim-majority province and as an all-out effort by the Hindus to continue their dominance, an aspect which has been ignored by Indian nationalist historians. In 1904 Curzon had toured East Bengal and

appealed to Muslim separatism. In retrospect, the anti-partition agitation, the swadeshi movement and even the overtly Hindu armed revolutionary movement aggravated the ill feelings between the two communities and accentuated the great divide. It made the Bengalee Muslims line up with the Muslims of upper India and the Aligarh movement, something they had not done till then. The anti-partition agitators and the armed revolutionaries (labelled 'terrorists' by the British) were by and large Hindu bhadraloks, who at times took an anti-Muslim stance. Bengalee Muslims wanted to include a demand for continuance of the partition in the Aga Khan deputation demands. Nawab Salimullah and Nawab Ali Choudhury threatened that in case this was not agreed to Bengal would not cooperate with the deputation.¹³

This illustrates that a subtle difference between the Bengalee Muslims and the upper India Muslim leadership had appeared. The latter wanted to avoid taking sides on a controversial issue like the Bengal partition while for the Muslim leadership of East Bengal the continuance of the partition was necessary for the protection of the interests of the Muslims. Eventually, the Aga Khan deputation to Lord Minto at Simla on 10 October 1906 comprising nobles, ministers of state, great landlords, lawyers and merchants¹⁴ only raised demands for separate electorate and weighted representation for Muslims in all elected bodies and did not raise the issue of partition of Bengal at all. This somewhat peeved the East Bengal Muslims. These deputationists were primarily championing the cause of the Muslim landed aristocracy and Muslim soldiers in the army. Bengalee Muslims were insignificant both as zamindars and as army recruits and could thus be ignored. The Aga Khan deputation to Minto pleading for separate electorate and larger representation in the services had included only five members from Bengal and one each from East Bengal and Assam, all of them aristocrats.

Leaders like Nawab Salimullah now turned to other political experiments. He successfully converted the AIMEC convened at Dhaka in December 1906 into a political conference out of which was born the All-

India Muslim League. He had issued invitations to all members to continue sitting after the educational conference was formally over and circulated the outlines of a 'Plan for a Muhammadan Confederacy' and requested them to consider it.

In canvassing support for a Muslim political federal body Salimullah sought the support of a young advocate of Calcutta High Court, A.K. Fazlul Huq, whose potential the nawab discovered. This was the first advent of a great leader who was to be called 'Sher-e Bengal' in later years and who was destined for four decades to play a major role in Bengal politics, and thereafter in the politics of Pakistan. On 31 December Nawab Salimullah moved a resolution for establishing a Muslim political association, the All-India Muslim League. The resolution adopted at this meeting announced the following objects:

- (i) To promote among Musalmans of India feelings of loyalty to the British Government and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intentions of the Government with regard to any of its measures.
- (ii) To protect the political rights and interests of Musalmans of India and respectfully to present their needs and aspirations to the government.
- (iii) To prevent the rise among Musalmans of India of any feeling of hostility towards other communities without prejudice to the objects of the League.

The League's headquarters were shifted to Lucknow in 1910. 'Thus what was born in the soil of East Bengal came to be nurtured in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh under the Urdu group. But it had little influence till the 1940s in Bengal which resented its closeness to zamindars and aristocrats.'¹⁵

While a generally non-communal Amir Ali undertook the task of providing leadership to the London branch of the Muslim League from 1908 onwards, the Muslim leaders in the Congress tried their best to thwart this growth of separatism in Muslim politics. They met in Calcutta after the Congress session held there in 1906 and formed a political association, named the Indian Musalman Association to counteract the League's separatism.

For Salimullah and his followers the annulment of the partition in 1911 was a great blow. In disgust, Salimullah even persuaded Fazlul Huq who

had joined government service as deputy magistrate to resign and join politics. Fazlul Huq, like so many others, joined both the Congress and the League and in fact at one time became general secretary of the Congress. In April 1914 in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Huq expressed his bitterness over the annulment of the partition, and warned that for the Muslims this may be a parting of ways. But he was soon to outgrow this phase and turn more radical. With the death of Nawab Salimullah, who had almost retired from politics after the annulment, in January 1916, the age of 'courtier, upper-class Muslim politicians was over. The new, more modern type of Muslim politician, anti-British and pro-Muslim but not necessarily anti-Hindu, was typified in Fazlul Huq. They never had much fondness for the politics of the Aligarh School',¹⁶ which comprised the nobles, the landed aristocracy and the titled gentlemen.

First Partition of Bengal

The first partition of Bengal in 1905 transformed the petition-and-prayer strategy of the Indian National Congress, till then a microscopic elite, to a mass national movement. It came at a time when public opinion in Bengal was gradually turning against the Congress. As noted by Aurobindo Ghosh in an article in the *Induprakash* of Bombay:

The ideal and objectives of the Congress are founded on ideas that are wrong, the programme of work it has been following is mistaken, and the conduct and action of the Congress leaders lack sincerity, freshness and devotion thus rendering them unfit for leadership. The Congress which has no contact with the masses and represents only a small section of the people cannot claim to be a national organisation.

Slowly but surely there were signs of people seeking alternatives to Congress politics. Some groups emphasized promotion of indigenously produced goods, like the opening of Lakshmi Bhandar by Sarla Devi (of Tagore family) in 1903. Others stressed nationalism-oriented education, like the Dawn Society (1902) of Satish Mukherjee, Visva-Bharati by Rabindranath Tagore (1901), Jogesh Chandra Ghosh's Society for Scholarship (1904) to send Bengali boys abroad for industrial training. All these became important strands of the mass upheaval that followed the 1905 partition. Interestingly, it is now established that the origin of the well-known Anusilan Samiti (1902) predates the partition. Among its active members were Aurobindo Ghosh, Barin Ghosh, P. Mitra, Jatin Banerjee and Abinas Bhattacharya. These members published the journal *Jugantar* which became the mouthpiece of the samiti. There was a clear undercurrent of Hindu religious revivalism in these activities inspired by the teachings of Vivekananda and active association of Sister Nivedita and Aurobindo.

From the time of his arrival in India, Curzon tried a host of modernizing reforms like the Calcutta University Act and the Calcutta Corporation Act, both attacked as anti-democratic measures. His Archaeological Monuments Preservation Act was a great achievement for which he deserves posterity's eternal gratitude. He also toyed with the idea of reconstituting the unwieldy province of Bengal Presidency which at that time comprised an area of 189,000 square miles with a population of 7,85,00,000 and a revenue base of over eleven crore rupees. Even after the constitution of Assam along with the Bengali-speaking districts of Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara as a chief commissioner's province in 1874, Bengal was considered too unwieldy to be governed effectively. Curzon came out soon with a proposal for constituting two provinces: one comprising West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (to be called Bengal) and the other comprising East Bengal, north Bengal and Assam (to be called East Bengal and Assam), both under lieutenant governors. The ostensible pretext was administrative convenience. But the real reason—and Curzon made no secret of it—was to split up the educated and nationalistic Bengalee Hindus and to reduce them to a minority in both the provinces. This would also hurt the national movement irreparably and would also alienate from the national movement the Muslim majority in East Bengal and Assam who would welcome the opportunity to have a Muslim majority province. In the new province there would be twelve million Hindus and eighteen million Muslims while in the province of Bengal the seventeen million Bengali-speaking people would be outnumbered by thirty-seven million people speaking Hindi or Oriya. Curzon wrote to Brodrick, the Secretary of State for India, that he would dig the grave of the Indian National Congress before laying down the office.

Curzon himself visited Dhaka before the partition to canvass support for the proposal. But the proposed partition met with stiff opposition from both the English and the Bengali press and from the general public. Public protest meetings were held all over. A meeting of about 300 representatives from different parts of Bengal under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Cotton, retired chief commissioner of Assam, held on 11 January 1905 opposed partition as proposed and pleaded for eliciting public opinion. But in spite

of all this, the Government of India, after obtaining the British government's approval, announced the partition on 7 July 1905 from Simla. This was opposed tooth and nail by educated Bengal under the leadership of Surendranath Banerjee, nicknamed 'surrender-not' by the Calcutta Britishers. He pledged to 'unsettle' what Curzon had announced as 'a settled fact'. The imperious Governor General's true motive was clear from the following statement in his letter to Brodrick, dated 17 January 1904: 'The Bengalees consider themselves a separate nation and indulge in dreams of driving away the British, and putting a Bengalee Babu in the Government House as Governor General. The partition of Bengal would undermine their sense of superiority and destroy their dreams and that is why they are agitating against it.'¹

Between 7 July and 16 October 1905 when the partition took effect, the whole of Bengal was angry and protesting. Mammoth protest meetings were held all over, for instance the one at Bagerhat (Khulna) on 16 July 1905 which, for the first time, urged the boycott of all British and foreign goods, the one at the Town Hall in Calcutta on 7 August 1905 presided over by Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi of Cossimbazar which called for continued protest and boycott of foreign goods and the one at Barisal B.M. College compound addressed by Ashwini Kumar Datta. One should note that it was during these months that concepts such as swadeshi or boycott of foreign goods, and en masse resignation from government offices and municipalities, and non-cooperation with colonial rule evolved. These were to sustain the agitation from 1905 onwards and to be eventually adopted by M.K. Gandhi (later to be known as the 'Mahatma'). Even many Muslims led by leaders like Maulvi Liaquat Gaznavi, Muhammad Ismail Chowdhury and Yusuf Khan Bahadur initially joined the anti-partition chorus until many of them, especially those who were based in East Bengal, were won over by the government's inducements and sops.

On the day the partition took effect, i.e., 16 October 1905 (30 Aswin 1312 BS)² there was fasting and hartal all over Bengal. Kitchens were closed and carriages were off the road. Rabindranath, who for once

participated in active politics, wrote: 'Bengal is going to be severed by law on 30 Aswin, but God has not separated them. Remembering this and for claiming this we shall observe the day as a day of unity for all Bengalees, and as a token of that, shall tie Rakhis on the wrists of one another, saying brothers shall not separate.' The direct association of Tagore with the anti-partition and swadeshi movements raised its stature. Rabindranath himself led a procession to the Ganga and initiated a mass ceremony for tying of coloured threads (rakhis) on each other's wrists. He composed his famous song *Banglar mati, Banglar jal, Banglar bayu, Banglar phal* especially for this occasion. It was on this day that the sky was rent with the mass shouting of *Bande Mataram* (I worship my motherland)—a poem taken from Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath* that served both as a nationalist song and a slogan for freedom. At a mammoth public meeting at Parsibagan in Calcutta that afternoon the foundation stone was laid for a proposed Federation Hall or Milan Mandir as a symbol of the unity of the two Bengals. It was presided over by Anandamohan Bose and attended by Surendranath, Asutosh Chowdhury and Rabindranath, among others. The following declaration was adopted amidst the chanting of the slogan 'Bande Mataram': 'Ignoring the unanimous opposition of the Bengalees, the British Parliament has severed Bengal into two. As a protest against this action we take the oath and resolve that we shall take all possible steps to neutralize the evil effects of the partition and to preserve the unity of the Bengalees. May God be our guide.'

Paradoxically, while Calcutta was fasting and mourning the partition with a hartal, many Muslims in Dhaka were celebrating the partition with prayers of thanksgiving, although there was a tinge of sadness at the separation from Calcutta. After all, Dhaka was once again the capital of the province. Also, it was a Muslim-majority province, and the 'East Bengal' Muslim would be free from the political and economic domination of the Calcutta-based Hindu zamindars, lawyers and businessmen.

In many respects the first partition of Bengal and its fallout in the form of both a non-violent mass movement and a parallel, armed-revolutionary, anti-British movement was a watershed in both Bengal's and the subcontinent's history. Educated Bengal rose up with all its might under the leadership of Surendranath and several others determined to undo this diabolical move to politically separate the Bengalee nation, and compelled the mighty British Empire to submit to the demand after six years of hard struggle. In that process the whole subcontinent was galvanized into active movement, both non-violent and violent, for freedom from colonial rule. Many techniques of protest first launched during the anti-partition agitation became useful tools in the hands of the nationalist leaders in subsequent movements.

As the student community became the vanguard of the anti-partition movement, the government took various repressive measures aimed at scaring the students away from the agitation. Inevitably, this had the opposite effect. Even before the actual partition, the notorious Carlyle Circular (10 October 1904) issued to the district magistrate by the chief secretary laid down the strategy as follows: 'If any student in your district is found taking part in picketing or participating in the Swadeshi movement in any other manner, you should inform the heads of the institutions, if they are in receipt of Government aid, that unless they are able to restrain their students the financial help to their institutions would be stopped. Students of these institutions will be denied scholarships in future and those of them who are getting scholarships will have the same stopped. The University would be requested to deny permission to students of these institutions to sit for University examinations.'

This secret circular was leaked out and led to loud protests all over Bengal. About the same time, a year later, Pedlar, the director of public instruction, Bengal, wrote to the principals of some colleges on 21 October 1905 asking the principals to show cause why the students who had participated in the picketing on Harrison Road, which led to the disturbance of public peace, should not be expelled.

The attitude of the government disclosed by the Carlyle Circular and the letter of Pedlar angered the educated public and also sparked off rebellious tendencies. In a meeting held on 24 October with Abdul Rasul as president, Bipin Chandra Pal, who was fast emerging as a front-ranking leader, proposed the establishment of national educational institutions free of government control and parallel to the government's education system. This was the precursor of the National Council of Education. Another meeting was held the same day in College Square where about 2,000 Muslims were initiated into the nationalist movement. Another meeting, three days later, presided over by Rabindranath Tagore and attended by many luminaries like Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, Bipin Pal and Bhupendra Nath Basu, took a decision to oppose the Carlyle Circular by whatever means. A similar circular was promulgated by P.C. Lyon, chief secretary of the new province of East Bengal and Assam. This circular was addressed on 8 November 1905 to the divisional commissioner of Dhaka and was aimed at the suppression of the students and teachers of East Bengal. It gave several directions aimed at keeping the students away from the swadeshi movement and related in detail the preventive steps that would be taken against students, teachers and schools concerned, for disobedience of the same. The steps were the following:

- (i) 'Bande Mataram' was not to be shouted on the streets or in public places.
- (ii) No meeting was to be held in a public place for discussion of politics or allied matters.
- (iii) Students must not crowd on streets for singing nationalist songs or for shouting slogans.
- (iv) No discourteous gestures must be made to English ladies passing by in carriages and nothing must be done to cause them annoyance. It was further directed that the police would be entitled to inquire of the particulars of anybody guilty of discourteous conduct to an Englishman or a Muslim on the streets, and refusal to give particulars would justify the culprit being taken to the police station.

In protest, at Rangpur the students of the Zilla School and the Technical School defied the ban on the slogan 'Bande Mataram' and joined the newly set-up National School, the first of many such national schools set up by the anti-partition agitation. An Anti-Circular Society was also set up at Rangpur. Similar protest demonstrations took place all over the new provinces at places as far apart as Midnapore, Asansol, Raniganj, Hooghly,

Burdwan, Dhaka, Banaripara, Sirajganj and Jalpaiguri. As repression got intensified, reinforced by two other circulars of Lyon and the direct interest that Lt Governor Bamfylde Fuller of East Bengal and Assam took in banning the slogan 'Bande Mataram' and all national songs at public places, the students became more and more rebellious, turning to those who preached violence for freeing the country from foreign colonial rule.

The anti-partition agitation in Bengal inexorably led to the swadeshi movement, the boycott of imported foreign goods, encouragement of the use of products of nascent indigenous industry, non-cooperation with government authorities and passive resistance to the repression let loose by the authorities (given a concrete shape only by Gandhi) and eventually the rise of active anti-British national feeling all over the subcontinent. In a way Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was anticipating Gandhi when he wrote in his daily *Sandhya* on 21 November 1906:

If all government employees, chowkidars, constables, Munsifs and Deputy Magistrates (it would be better if the native sepoy joined in) resign in a body, the English rule can be brought to an end without firing a single shot.

Bipin Chandra Pal wrote on 18 September 1906 in an article in the journal *Bande Mataram*:

No one outside a lunatic asylum will ever think of any violent or unlawful methods in India in her present helplessness of her civic freedom. We may yet make the administration in India absolutely impossible any day. Our ideal is freedom which means absence of all foreign control. Our method is passive resistance which means an organized determination to refuse to render any voluntary and honorary service to the government.

He conveyed this message by addressing meetings all over Bengal. Both swadeshi and boycott met with wide acceptance outside Bengal and leaders beyond the borders of Bengal vied with one another in accepting these two techniques as also Bengal's demand for the undoing of the partition as their own national platform. Gandhi wrote in 1908 from South Africa noting that politics was passing from the age of petitions and prayers on to a new phase of confrontation. To quote Sir Valentine Chirol: 'The topic of partition of Bengal has now become secondary. The principal question now being openly discussed is not whether Bengal will constitute one or two provinces

under the British but whether Bengal, and for that matter India, will at all stay under British rule.’³

There are examples in history of boycott as a means of improving indigenous industry. It was now revived and used extensively to promote and protect Indian industry and to force the hands of the British into revoking the partition by hurting British interests. As usual, students took the leading role in boycott of British goods. Sometimes they would seize stocks of foreign goods and make a bonfire of them. At times the police would intervene and there would be clashes. Sometimes forcible attempts to obstruct Muslim-owned shops selling British goods would provoke communal clashes, an ominous portent whose significance was to loom larger and larger in subsequent years. How deep Bengalee feeling had gone was illustrated by examples such as the cobblers of Mymensingh deciding not to repair British-made shoes, or the cooks and domestic servants of Barisal deciding not to serve in a family that used foreign goods, or students refusing to write examination papers because those were imported papers, or Brahman pundits refusing to use imported sugar and salt in performing pujas.

Contemporary journals and other records provide ample evidence that between 1905 and 1910–11 British textiles and other industries suffered perceptible loss of business in India. On 1 September 1905, the Marwari Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta, sent a telegram to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce saying that unless the partition was revoked within a few days there would be no sale of their cloths during the Durgapuja season and requesting the latter to put pressure on the Secretary of State for India for annulment of the partition.

Jogendra Chandra Ghosh of Calcutta arranged to send a large number of young men to England to learn the technology of manufacture; more than four hundred young men went to England to get technical knowledge and many of them on return started small industries. At least twenty new factories sprang up as a result of their efforts.⁴ Thus anti-partition and swadeshi movements, with their emphasis on boycott of British goods and

the use of indigenous products, transcended narrow economic considerations and gradually widened into a mighty political movement for freedom. Will Durant, the noted historian, has correctly observed that the origin of the freedom struggle in India should be traced to 1905.

ENCOURAGEMENT OF INDIGENOUS INDUSTRY

The boycott of British goods was the most important plank of the movement against the partition of Bengal. To fill the vacuum created by the boycott, swadeshi industry was encouraged. Thus, unrefined rock salt was substituted for imported salt and molasses was substituted for sugar. But cotton textile posed an insurmountable problem. Indigenous cloths were supplied by the handlooms and the Bombay and Ahmedabad mills. As these were not able to meet the demand, the mill-owners increased the prices of their cloths. Unfair competition with the Manchester Mills had earlier forced most of the weavers out of their trade. Boycott of foreign textiles thus posed a very serious problem. To meet the situation, educated young men in the villages often used to walk 8–10 miles to distant villages where handwoven cloths might be available from local weavers.

Young men opened shops at various places and sold indigenous products as cheap as possible. There was massive propaganda urging boycott of British goods and social ostracism for use of such goods. These led to clashes between the government and the public. Police oppression mounted and many young men suffered imprisonment and caning. But, inevitably, as the intensity of repression increased, some young men came to feel that the answer to violence was violence and that violent methods were called for to stifle the repressive measures. This attitude was the genesis of the so-called terrorist movement.

DISCOURAGEMENT OF IMPORTED GOODS

According to the *Statesman* and *Friend of India* a businessman complained that in the previous year, during the Durgapuja, he had sold cloths worth a

lakh and a half rupees, but in the current year, he would be happy if he could sell half as much.⁵

The following chart published by the *Statesman* showed the comparative sales of foreign textiles in 1904 and 1905 respectively at different places:⁶

Place	Textiles sold in September 1904 Worth Rs	Textiles sold in September 1905 Worth Rs
Jessore	30,000	2,000
Bagra	1,700	200
Dhaka	5,000	2,000
Nadia	15,000	2,500
Malda	8,000	1,300
Burdwan	6,000	1,000
Arrah	1,500	200
Hazaribagh	10,000	500

In September 1906 the collector of customs at Calcutta sent a ‘confidential report’⁷ on the previous year stating that:

- (i) The import of salt from England had gone down by 140,000 maunds and that of Aden salt had increased from 48,000 maunds during the year to 77,000 maunds.
- (ii) Import of cotton textiles had decreased by 30,000,000 yards and cotton yarn worth less than a crore of rupees had been imported.
- (iii) The import of shoes was less by 75 per cent during the year.
- (iv) Import of cigarettes had fallen by 50 per cent.

Official records and the correspondence of British traders unmistakably show that the import of foreign goods went down considerably for three or four years. British textiles suffered considerable loss of business in India till 1908–09. A recovery was registered from 1910 when the boycott movement lost its intensity. But it left its imprint on the state of business in India. Even ordinary people became conscious of the fact that import of foreign goods was one of the factors that were principally responsible for the economic distress of the country.

In a way the stream of national education had started even before 1905, with the foundation of the Dawn Society in 1902 by Satish Chandra Mukherjee with the express idea of promoting ethical, moral and political principles. A second object was to impart technical training and promote the use of products of indigenous industry. The students of the society's school started a Swadeshi Bhandar as early as in 1903. Thus it seems clear that some of the planks in the swadeshi platform were making their appearance even before the swadeshi movement started in earnest in 1905. The swadeshi movement turned the small stream into a mighty river. The society's journal *Dawn* made revival of indigenous industry a special concern in its issues. The Dawn Society became an important centre of activity in the swadeshi movement.⁸

The Dawn Society organized on 5 November 1905 a historic meeting which created the **National Council of Education (NCE)**. The meeting was addressed, among others, by Rabindranath and Satish Chandra. Satish Chandra appealed to the students of Calcutta University to come out of the 'institute of slavery' and boycott its examinations. Four days later, in another meeting Subodh Chandra Mullick donated one lakh rupees for national education and Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury, zamindar of Gauripore, promised a donation of rupees five lakh. On 16 November 1905 the NCE was formalized. Among those who attended it were Gurudas Banerji, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Hirendranath Datta, Asutosh Chowdhury, Rashbehari Ghose, Rabindranath Tagore, Taraknath Palit, Byomkesh Chakravarty, Chittaranjan [C.R.] Das, Abdul Rasul, Nilratan Sarkar, Brijendranath Sil, Lalmohan Ghosh, Surendranath Banerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, Motilal Ghose and Subodh Chandra Mullick.

Satish Chandra Mukherjee was entrusted with organizing the NCE. The new system of education to be introduced was to have the following characteristics:

- (i) Education in all branches of the arts, sciences and technical subjects was to be imparted in Bengali, but English was to be included among the compulsory subjects for study. Necessary textbooks were to be written in Bengali by competent scholars.

- (ii) Along with the imparting of physical and moral education, students were to be taught the views of all religious sects. Instillation of patriotism and devotion to the service of the country in the minds of the students would be a particular aim of education; rituals were to form no part of religious education.
- (iii) Stress would be laid on the teaching of history, literature and philosophy of the land and on harmonizing Eastern and Western ideals.
- (iv) Arrangements for scientific, technical and industrial education would have to be made, keeping in view the economic needs of the country. The treasure of scientific knowledge that remains untapped in the fund of wisdom of the East, particularly in the Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicine, was to be unearthed and studied.

The NCE and the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education (SPTE) came to be registered on the same day (1 June 1906). The former established the Bengal National College and School on 14 August 1906 and the latter established the Bengal Technical Institute on 25 July 1906. After Independence both of them were included in Jadavpur University.

Aurobindo Ghosh, a professor of the Baroda College, with a salary of Rs 750 a month joined the National College as principal on a salary of Rs 75 a month. This was a great sacrifice. The college lost its popularity after 1910. When the swadeshi movement turned into the freedom movement there was a sea change in the scenario. Then again, for middle-class Bengalees, securing jobs was the ultimate goal of higher education and education in the National College was a handicap. Not only the National College, but the national schools, too, which had been established all over the country gradually closed down. But the Bengal Technical Institute progressed as the education and training offered there afforded ample scope for an independent earning in trade even if employment was not available.

GOVERNMENT REPRESSION

The government soon realized that it had erred in underestimating the impact of partition and that the anti-government movement was turning into a political revolution in the country. Fuller, lieutenant governor of the newly constituted province of East Bengal and Assam, followed a diabolical policy of divide and rule, harassing the Hindus and showing undue favour to the Muslims. He created misunderstandings between the two communities in Bengal by pampering one and persecuting the other. He

betrayed his attitude through an irresponsible declaration drawing on folk tales that he had two queens, the Muslims and the Hindus, and the former was his favourite while the latter was out of favour with him. In contrast, the lieutenant governor of the other province, Fraser, was more conciliatory. Fuller's administration in East Bengal and Assam came to be viewed as synonymous with autocracy. The chain of events that took place in the town of Barisal in East Bengal provides an illustration.

Fuller was aghast by the frequent calls for strikes. When five of the prominent citizens of Barisal went to explain the object and spirit of the appeal for a strike to him, he demanded that it should be withdrawn. They came away and wrote a letter saying, 'As the Lieutenant Governor thinks that portions of the appeal are provocative and may lead to breach of peace, we withdraw the said portions.' Immediately on its receipt the district magistrate Jack issued a statement saying that 'Ashwini Kumar Datta and his colleagues have withdrawn the appeal realizing that the same is seditious and may lead to disorder'. Ashwini Kumar immediately wrote back saying that only a few words were omitted from the appeal out of respect for the lieutenant governor, but the appeal itself was never withdrawn and he requested the district magistrate to correct his statement to put the record straight. When no reply on this was received, Ashwini Kumar filed a defamation suit against Jack, who lost the case and had to pay Rs 120 as damages. It may be mentioned that even the *Statesman* of Calcutta blamed Jack for having issued a statement that was not true.

Meanwhile, the situation in Barisal gradually worsened. The police reported that the Hindus were using force to prevent the Muslims from purchasing foreign goods and misbehaving with the Europeans. When the district magistrate went to Banaripara village, there was a scuffle and as a result three students and one teacher were arrested. A number of students met the district magistrate for reconsideration of the prohibitory order, but he would not listen to them. Some bricks were thrown at the magistrate. A telegram was sent to Fuller who rushed to Banaripara with Gurkha forces (25 November 1905). At the same time punitive police contingents were dispatched to various places. Day after day the vernacular press published

harrowing accounts of the oppressions perpetuated by the Gurkhas and the police at Barisal.

A house was demolished because the words 'Bande Mataram' were written on its wall outside. In another case a boy of eleven or twelve was dragged out of a house, taken to the court where he was tied to a triangular frame and caned for having shouted 'Bande Mataram'. The police were also reported to have been looting from the shops anything they liked without paying for the same.

Nevinson, special representative of the *Daily News* of London, toured various parts of Bengal and sent reports that were published as a book. After describing Fuller's behaviour towards Ashwini Datta and some other leaders he stated:

But Barisal's misfortune did not end with it. A large number of respectable people have been ordered to leave Barisal town within 15 days for having participated in a movement against the partition. Gurkha soldiers have been posted at various parts of the town and they are indiscriminately entering into houses and perpetrating acts of oppression which would have caused rioting if committed elsewhere in India.⁹

While oppression in Barisal was reaching a climax, the other districts also had their fair share of suffering. Magistrates openly announced that unless sale of indigenous goods was stopped and that of foreign goods resumed, they too would bring in Gurkha soldiers and post them in their areas. One district magistrate was so irritated by shouts of 'Bande Mataram' that he appointed a number of old, respectable people of his district as special constables only to humiliate them in public. A large number of people were prosecuted for propagating the boycott of British goods and many government employees were dismissed on the charge of joining the swadeshi movement. Sixty clerks in the offices in Barisal were dismissed on the above grounds. Lathi charge on unarmed civilians was a daily occurrence. Fuller's administration came to be regarded as similar to the barbarity of the middle ages.¹⁰ The *Manchester Guardian* of England commented, 'It is doubtful if such pettifogging tyranny exists even in Russia.'

Fuller's tyranny reached its height at the time of the annual session of the Provincial Conference held in Barisal in 1906. Delegates to the conference learnt on arrival at Barisal that the shouting of 'Bande Mataram' on the streets had been prohibited at Barisal as in the other towns of East Bengal. They decided to violate the prohibitory order. Next day at noon they started in a procession for the venue of the conference. The president of the conference, Abdul Rasul and his English wife were in a carriage followed by Surendranath Banerjee, Motilal Ghose, Bhupendranath Bose and many other prominent men. As soon as a band of young men wearing badges with the words 'Bande Mataram' appeared on the street after them, policemen started beating them up with lathis and snatching away the badges. Chittaranjan, son of Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, was pushed into a tank after assault, but still continued shouting 'Bande Mataram'. He was rescued from the tank in a seriously injured condition by others. On hearing of this incident Surendranath and some other leaders came back and asked the police superintendent, Kempt, the reason for the outrage. Surendranath accepted full responsibility for what the boys had done and offered himself for arrest. He was arrested at once. Surendranath asked Bhupendranath Bose and others who were there to go and attend the conference and to start its proceedings.

The police took Surendranath to the house of the district magistrate, Emerson. After a summary trial Surendranath was fined Rs 200 for having taken out a procession without a licence and for having violated the ban on shouting 'Bande Mataram'. The fine was immediately paid by Dinabandhu Sen, a prominent member of the Barisal Bar. Surendranath now went to the conference venue and the audience gave him a standing ovation. When the shouting stopped, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta got on the dais with his son who had been badly beaten up by the police.

As the conference began the next morning, the police superintendent came there and wanted an undertaking from the president that the end of the day's session would not be followed by shouts of 'Bande Mataram' by the delegates as they left. In the absence of such an undertaking, he threatened to close the conference. The president declined to give the undertaking. A

magisterial order under Section 144 CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure) prohibiting the holding of the conference was now promulgated. A wave of resentment passed over the delegates, many of whom expressed themselves in favour of a violation of the order. The leaders, however, managed to dissuade them from such a course of action and the delegates left the conference shouting 'Bande Mataram' as a mark of protest against the action of the government.

'Surendranath's unprecedented popularity was an indirect result of the excesses of Fuller. In fact the high pedestal that he came to occupy in the estimation of the people after the punishment awarded to him in Barisal was unequalled by any leader before him and it was the position, prestige and popularity gained by him that ultimately forced the British Government to annul the partition of Bengal.'

¹¹

Fuller was angry at the sustained campaign against his atrocities published in the daily newspapers and in meetings. Aurobindo Ghosh, as editor of the *Bande Mataram*, a radical nationalist journal, was prosecuted for sedition for the scathing articles he wrote in the paper (August 1907). The government cited Bipin Chandra Pal as a witness to prove that Aurobindo was the editor of the paper but Pal refused to depose in the case and was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for that refusal. Aurobindo was acquitted.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, editor of the paper *Sandhya* was also prosecuted for sedition for the articles written by him in his paper. He declined to defend himself saying that he would not be answerable to the enemies of the country for whatever he might have done in his country's interest and further that the arms of the British government were not long enough to reach him. He kept up his pride till the last and died before the trial concluded.

Government oppression could not suppress the swadeshi movement. The first anniversary of the partition was observed through meetings held with great enthusiasm at many places (16 October 1906). Six processions were taken out in Dhaka and shops of both Hindus and Muslims were closed. A public meeting there was presided over by a member of the nawab family.

Similar functions were held in Noakhali, Barisal, Chittagong, Pabna, Faridpur and other places. Hindus and Muslims both took part in them. The anniversary was observed everywhere through processions, kirtans, tying of yellow threads on each other's hands, display of fireworks, singing of *Bande Mataram* and taking the oath to use only indigenous goods.

MUSLIM ALOOFNESS AND OPPOSITION

At the beginning, many of the Muslims stood by the Hindus in the anti-partition movement and the attempts of the government to wean them away and to induce them to support partition did not succeed, though a large group had been siding with the government as well. However, Muslim support for the movement gradually declined. Curzon brought around Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka to his side by giving him a cheap loan of fourteen lakh rupees at a very low interest and, under his leadership, the number of Muslims supporting the partition grew.

This hostile attitude towards the anti-partition movement served the interests of the administration and led to communal disturbances in several towns, like Jamalpore, Dhaka and Comilla with indirect and sometimes direct support of the government. In 1907 Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka went to Comilla and for four days thereafter some Muslims indulged in looting Hindu shops, burning down the houses of the Hindus, indiscriminately beating up Hindu men and women and perpetrating other atrocities on them, with the police silently looking on. Similar atrocities were committed in Jamalpore and in nearby villages. Hindu young men also came forward with arms to protect their community. Printed leaflets were distributed, inciting the Muslims against the Hindus, assuring the former that the government would not take any action against them for their acts of oppression and that the nawab of Dhaka wanted them to move against the latter.

The administration took no steps to suppress the riots and in fact collaborated with the rioters in those events. This is amply proved by confidential police reports and the testimony of witnesses in court. The following observations of Nevinson are relevant:

My personal experience is that wherever the Hindus clashed with the Muslims, government officials invariably sided with the latter. In view of their policy of securing the help of the Muslims in the anti-partition movement, government officials are only too eager to humiliate the Hindus by prosecuting them on petty charges. Hindus are denied government employment and schools of the Hindus have been denied government aid. When Muslims beat up Hindus the punitive police raid the houses of the latter and destroy their property, and Gurkha soldiers are stationed in Hindu localities. Hindus are not permitted to sit on the riverbanks.

Muslim mullahs roamed about proclaiming that the Government is at the back of their community, that the courts have been closed for three months and nobody would be punished for assassinating the Hindus or for looting their shops or for carrying away Hindu women.¹²

Leaflets were circulated with government patronage in several places of East Bengal inciting the Muslims against the Hindus. The most notorious was the 'Red Leaflet' or 'Lal Ishtihar' whose authorship was attributed to one Ibrahim Khan of Mymensingh. The following abstract from this pamphlet addressed to the Muslims was an open incitement to violence:

Oh Muslims! Awake, collect funds and establish national schools and shun studying with the Hindus as far as practical and start national business and do not make purchases from the shops of Hindus. Start your own industry and do not touch goods produced by the Hindus. Give no employment to Hindus and do not serve the Hindus even in the meanest jobs. Do not give up the professions of your community (such as milkman etc.) under the influence of Hindu superstition. You are foolish; if you can acquire intelligence the Hindus can be sent to hell in a day. You are in a majority in Bengal; you are cultivators and agriculture produces wealth. Where did the Hindus get their wealth? They have no wealth of their own; they have become rich by cleverly wresting wealth from you. If you can learn that trick and gain sufficient intelligence, you can starve the Hindus to death or get them converted to Islam.

Muslims should never join the misguided Swadeshi movement of the Hindus who are cordially inviting the former to join them and oppressing them if they refuse to do so. Participation in the movement will not benefit the Muslims in any way. The principal object of the Hindus is to dominate over the Muslims for all times to come. Hindu selfishness and Muslim ignorance are at the root of all evil—these are two enemies of the Muslims which have kept them suppressed.¹³

This red leaflet was distributed among the Muslims at the beginning of 1907. But the government took no action in the matter for six months against Ibrahim Khan. When the English daily *Bengalee* drew the attention of the government to the leaflet, the district magistrate of Mymensingh issued a notice to Ibrahim Khan asking him to show cause why proceedings

under Section 108 of the CrPC should not be initiated against him. On Ibrahim Khan's undertaking that the distribution of the leaflets would be stopped, the matter was dropped. The arrogance and partisan attitude of Fuller, the lieutenant governor of East Bengal, was to a large extent responsible for the serious public disturbances in East Bengal. Eventually, his arrogance led to his own exit from the province. Angry with the agitational conduct of two students, Fuller asked the Calcutta University to disaffiliate them. Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, the vice chancellor, persuaded the then chancellor, Lord Minto, that it would be highly improper to accede to this request. Minto, convinced by the weightage of the vice chancellor's views, requested Fuller to withdraw his direction to the university. Fuller arrogantly replied that he would rather resign than withdraw his direction. Minto, who was obviously not happy with him, immediately said that he would accept his resignation. In this he was supported by the Secretary of State for India. On 3 August 1906 Fuller sent in his resignation and thus ended the reign of terror that he had unleashed in East Bengal. Things did improve thereafter.

Unfortunately, the open identification of the motherland by the swadeshi movement with the Goddess Durga (as in the song *Bande Mataram*) and encouragement in Bengal of the Shivaji festival started by Tilak in Maharashtra in 1902 served to drive away large sections of Muslims from the anti-partition agitation. Although the organizers of the Shivaji festival in Calcutta and towns like Barisal tried to emphasize on second thoughts that Shivaji did not fight Islam, but only oppression and was himself secular, serious damage had already been done to Hindu–Muslim relations. Muslim masses easily fell prey to the vicious propaganda that the movement's overglorification of Shivaji against Emperor Aurangzeb was essentially anti-Muslim in character and should be opposed by all Muslims, all the more so because the agitation was directed against the creation of a Muslim-majority province. Thus the first great national movement, from the beginning, became suspect in the eyes of the majority of Bengalee Muslims.

Meanwhile, the feud between the moderates and the extremists in the Congress went from bad to worse. At the Surat session of the Congress

(1907) they clashed headlong. The extremists held a separate session and stayed away from the official Congress for nine long years only to return to it at the Lucknow session in 1916.

Armed Revolutionary Movement or Agni Yug

First Phase

An inevitable offshoot of the swadeshi movement was the rise of armed revolutionary groups which sought to fight British rule with violent methods and primarily targeted white officials and other government personnel who were anti-swadeshi or repressive. This movement spread to some other parts of India and remained as a parallel freedom movement side by side with the Indian National Congress's official non-violent movement. It started in Bengal when the disillusioned youth, after the Congress's Surat split, turned to the cult of the bomb and continued till the Chittagong outburst of 1930–34. In a way Subhas Bose's Azad Hind Fauj or Indian National Army (INA) during the Second World War was a continuance of the same trend. To that extent, the armed movement continued till the end of the Raj.

While the main credit for achieving the freedom of the subcontinent is conventionally given to Gandhi and the non-violent agitation led by him, an objective student of history should give equal credit to this armed revolutionary movement that ran parallel for the achievement of independence. Some of the nationalists were inspired by armed revolutionaries in other parts of the world, notably Ireland and Russia, and came to the conclusion that armed struggle was a must for throwing out the foreign rulers. Leaders like C.R. Das and Subhas Bose while remaining in the Congress movement kept close links with the underground revolutionary terrorists. 'Agni Yug', or Age of Fire, is the common name in Bengal given to this phase of the national movement. Some of the revolutionaries were no doubt misguided idealists. Their efforts were more often than not uncoordinated and sporadic, not strong enough to take on the

might of the British Empire. But they were great visionaries and their patriotism and spirit of sacrifice were widely acknowledged and cast a profound influence on at least two generations in Bengal.

The Anusilan Samiti and the Jugantar Party were the two main organizations which served as the focal centres of revolutionary terrorism. The former operated from 49 Cornwallis Street in Calcutta (earlier from Sukea Street). The main components of its programme were physical exercise, educational and cultural activities aimed at character building, understanding the revolutionary movements in Europe and America, and eventually practising the use of guns and bombs. Pramatha Mitra was the president and Aurobindo Ghosh and Chittaranjan Das, the two vice-presidents. Others associated were Bipin Pal and a Maharashtrian, Sakham Ganesh Deuskar, whose well-known book *Desher Katha* portrayed the economic exploitation of the country by the foreign rulers. Sister Nivedita also came sometimes to take classes. In 1905 a branch was set up in Dhaka and soon branches were established in many towns of both East and West Bengal.

The Anusilan Samiti also had an underground cell. Membership was through formal initiation with religious overtones, and the members had to pass from an outer circle of membership to an inner circle on proving their dedication, skill and trustworthiness. At each stage, members had to take a different formal vow (*Adya*, or the first, and *Antya*, or the final; *Pratham Bisesh*, or the first special; *Dwitiya Bisesh*, or the second special).¹ Like every other organization, the Anusilan Samiti also developed internal squabbling, with Jatindranath Banerji falling out with P. Mitra, and later on with Barin Ghosh. One fundamental difference arose on the issue of organizing swadeshi dacoities to collect funds for the manufacture of bombs and arms. While P. Mitra preferred a constructive programme, others like Barin Ghosh (Aurobindo's brother), Trailokyanath Chakravorty and Bhupendranath Datta stood for the cult of the bomb. The mouthpiece of this group was the journal *Jugantar*, which came out on 18 March 1906, and soon a group came to be formed around it. Barin became the main leader of the Jugantar Party which gave greater importance to assassination and

dacoity. It had Aurobindo's tacit support. Jugantar Party was broadly based in West Bengal while Anusilan Samiti had its area of operation mostly in East Bengal. Jugantar Party for a while acquired a somewhat greater charisma on account of Khudiram Bose, Prafulla Chaki, Satyen Bose and Kanai Datta being its members, and also its association with the Alipore Bomb Case. Bhupendranath Datta, brother of Swami Vivekananda, became editor of the *Jugantar*. But it needs to be highlighted that although Anusilan Samiti and Jugantar Party gradually became separate bodies, they operated with a lot of coordination and at times helped each other against the police. The differences between them have often been exaggerated. Those differences were more personal than ideological—both aimed at driving out the foreign rulers by violent methods on the lines of the Irish and Russian revolutionaries. But the Jugantar members were more radical than the Anusilan Samiti members in their methods. Even at that time, some people questioned how freedom could be achieved by killing some British men with bombs and guns. Barin Ghosh's reply to that was: 'No, we do not expect that; what we wanted was to rouse the country from the torpor it was in with the sound of the bombs. We were preparing ourselves for the armed revolution that was inevitable.'

The violent phase in Bengal's history started with a series of so-called swadeshi dacoities and assassinations of notoriously anti-swadeshi government officials. Both have been subjects of controversy ever since. Dacoity carried moral stigma, but was justified by the revolutionaries on the grounds that their activities needed funds, and that the victims were selected from among collaborators with the government and the dishonest rich who were to be seen as enemies of the nation. Often, government funds were targeted for seizure. Sometimes, after a dacoity, a written note was left that the funds had been borrowed for the country's freedom struggle and would be repaid when freedom came, but the fact remains that these dacoities did not exactly make the terrorists popular with a section of the people.

The first recorded attempt on the life of an official was at Goalando on 23 December 1906, when Allen, the district magistrate of Dhaka, was seriously injured. Such attacks on individuals received a spurt after the success of

Ullaskar Datta and Hemchandra Das in manufacturing bombs in 1907. The bomb was first tested at a hillock near Deoghar railway station sometime in 1907. Barin Ghosh, Ullaskar Datta, Nalini Gupta, Prafulla Chaki and Bibhuti Sarkar were involved in the test. The explosion killed one of them and seriously injured Ullaskar. Almost immediately followed the attempt on Lieutenant Governor Andrew Fraser's train at Narayangarh in Midnapore district on 5 December 1907. The next important event was the Muzaffarpur murder on 30 August 1908 where the target was Kingsford, the district judge, who as the chief Presidency magistrate of Calcutta had become notorious for harsh sentences on political offenders and had been transferred to far-off Muzaffarpur, away from the terrorists who had sworn revenge on him. Khudiram Bose of Midnapore and Prafulla Chaki of Rangpur were waiting to kill him with bombs on that fateful evening as he was to return in a horse carriage from the club. Kingsford delayed his return, and the wife and daughter of Kennedy, a lawyer, returning from the club around the same time and in a similar carriage, were killed outside the gate of Kingsford's house. Both Khudiram and Prafulla managed to flee. Prafulla could reach Mokamaghat railway station where the police sub-inspector, Nandalal Banerji, tried to arrest him in a train compartment on suspicion. But he shot himself dead. Nandalal got a big reward from the government, but was killed at Serpentine Lane, Calcutta, by the terrorists within six months. Khudiram trekked 24 miles along the railroad in the opposite direction, and was arrested on suspicion by the police in a shop at Waini railway station after an unsuccessful attempt to shoot himself. He was tried on the charge of murder, but faced it stoically expressing remorse at the killing of two innocent women, but remaining unperturbed and fearless till the end, quoting from the Gita and stepping on to the scaffold at the age of eighteen. He along with Prafulla Chaki are traditionally held as the first martyrs in the history of Bengal's freedom movement. Their martyrdom formed the theme of innumerable songs and poems which survive even today. The bombs that were thrown by them at Muzaffarpur reverberated throughout Bengal and indeed the whole subcontinent.

Within two days of the Muzaffarpur incident (on 1 and 2 May) the police surrounded and raided a garden in Muraripukur Road, Calcutta, believed to be the headquarters of the revolutionaries. They arrested Aurobindo. Simultaneous raids were also conducted at several places leading to the arrest of all the other leaders. This was the end of the first round of the revolutionaries–police interaction. Then the famous Alipore Bomb Case took place in which thirty-six revolutionaries, including Aurobindo, were tried by the sessions court. The judge, Beachcroft, acquitted Aurobindo and sixteen others, sentenced Ullaskar and Barin to death, ten to transportation for life, and four others to various rigorous prison terms. On appeal, the Calcutta High Court commuted the death sentences to transportation for life and also reduced the term of other sentences. Barin Ghosh made a confessional statement leaving out Aurobindo, but giving details of the Jugantar Party's programme. It has remained controversial ever since. Many revolutionaries including Aurobindo were critical of the statement. Others defended it as being actuated by the best of motives of sacrificing himself for the party by taking full responsibility, so that others may be spared.

Barin mentioned in his confession the name of Naren Goswami as a member of his party and Naren was arrested. Naren had backed out of an order to proceed to Muzaffarpur along with Khudiram and Prafulla and was also suspected to be the person who had informed the police of the goings-on at the Muraripukur garden. While in the Alipore jail, Naren made a detailed statement indicating, among other things, Aurobindo's active role in the affairs of the revolutionary group. The prosecution now withdrew its case against him, and he was removed to the European ward. The revolutionaries decided to kill him before he could be called to the witness box to give evidence against Aurobindo. Satyen Bose and Kanai Datta were assigned the task. Both of them got themselves admitted to the hospital on pretext of illness and established contact with Naren pretending they were repentant and wanted to make confessions. On the morning of 31 August 1908, as Naren had come to meet Satyen in the hospital, he was shot dead by Satyen and Kanai who surrendered to the police and were hanged after trial on 10 and 24 November respectively. This was one of the most daring

episodes in the history of the Agni Yug. How Satyen and Kanai could manage to get two revolvers and smuggle them inside the Alipore Central Jail has remained a mystery.

Aurobindo's defending counsel was Chittaranjan Das. He started by stating on his client's behalf: 'The charge against me is that I have proclaimed the idea of freedom in the country and I admit this charge.' He ended his argument by appealing in an emotion-choked voice: 'I appeal to you, therefore, that a man like this stands not only before the bar of this court, but stands before the bar of the High Court of History ... Long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil and this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon by us as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India but across distant seas and lands.'²

In delivering his address, Chittaranjan's eyes moistened in emotion and the entire court listened to him spellbound, in pin-drop silence.

It was when he was in solitary confinement in the Alipore jail that Aurobindo's mind turned to spirituality and he took a different turn. In his famous speech in Uttarpara he stated that while in confinement, the voice of God indicated to him a new path. He followed that path and spent the rest of his life at Pondicherry in spiritual quest. There is a sharp contrast between his long ascetic life of a saint in the Pondicherry ashram, when he provided spiritual guidance to thousands, and his early life as the unquestioned leader of a revolutionary organization who believed in the cult of the gun and guided the activities of his revolutionary comrades. Both phases were equally genuine as Aurobindo later admitted.

After his release, he was still involved in political work for a while. He participated in the Provincial Conference at Barisal in 1909. Surendranath requested him to join the Congress. But Aurobindo expressed his unwillingness until the extremists were accommodated in the Congress. That was the end of the matter. Aurobindo still edited two journals, *Dharma* (in Bengali) and *Karmayogi* (in English). But shortly thereafter he, reportedly under Sister Nivedita's advice to escape from the police sleuths,

left for the French town of Chandernagore and from there went to Pondicherry where he settled down to a life of spiritualism in which he scaled new heights and was to be acknowledged as a leading spiritualist the world over. In any case, his involvement with politics, although short-lived, was an important episode in Bengal's freedom movement.

Meanwhile, the government stepped up its policy of repression and promulgated the Explosive Substances Act, 1908, under which possession of bombs or bomb-making materials and collecting materials for manufacture of bombs were made serious offences. This was supplemented by a new press law which authorized a magistrate to stop any newspaper and confiscate a press if it was publishing anything inciting murder or violence. This law was used to stop *Bande Mataram* (English), *Sandhya* and *Jugantar* (both in Bengali). The Indian Penal Code was amended in December 1908 providing for draconian punishment for sedition including trial without jury by special tribunals and arbitrary power to ban any society and take possession of its land premises. On 14 December 1908, the following revolutionary leaders were arrested under the Bengal Regulation of 1818 and kept in different jails outside Bengal, including some in Burma, without any trial for fourteen months: Ashwini Kumar Datta, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, Krishna Kumar Mitra, Subodh Chandra Mullick, Sachindraprasad Basu, Pulinbehari Das, Bhupesh Chandra Nag, Prof. Satish Chandra Chatterjee and Shyamsundar Chakravarty.

How the severe laws were used would be evident from the fact that during the ten years from 1909 to 1919, 300 newspapers and 350 presses were punished, 130 newspapers were closed down and 500 printed books confiscated. Among the newspapers closed were the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Basumti*. But the press continued to play an active role in spreading revolutionary fervour in Bengal and elsewhere. The role of three of the newspapers must be highlighted in this context: the daily *Sandhya*, edited by the maverick Brahmabandhab Upadhyay who was prosecuted several times and died in the hospital without having to go to the British prison as he had vowed he would never do; the *Jugantar*, edited by Bhupendranath Datta which had a short but defiant career till it was closed in July 1910;

and the English daily *Bande Mataram*, started by Bipin Pal and edited by Aurobindo Ghosh, which for several years preached the message of defiance of the British Raj. The song *Bande Mataram* became for Bengal revolutionaries what *La Marseillaise* became for the French Revolution. Also, 'Bande Mataram' became the battle cry for the revolutionaries. A new revolutionary literature grew in Bengal during those days which inspired many freedom fighters in the succeeding decades. A significant role in building up sentiments was played by the writings of Vivekananda who never directly preached anything anti-British, but emphasized the importance of fearless mind and body that should free itself from all shackles—a message that had unmistakable significance for the revolutionaries.

The armed revolutionary movement from the Muzzaffarpur killings (1909) till the Chittagong Armoury Raid (1930) took the following forms:

1. Making of bombs and collection of firearms;
2. Murder of government officials, both white and anti-swadeshi Bengalees, police informers and collaborators;
3. Looting of government treasuries and armouries;
4. Swadeshi dacoity on rich people for collecting funds;
5. Contact with Germans during the war years for supply of arms;
6. Circulation of revolutionary literature among people at large;
7. Attempts to recruit army personnel for the projected anti-government movement.

Of these, the swadeshi and political dacoities all along remained a controversial issue with strong opinions of the people, both in favour of and against it. While we need not narrate the individual events, some of them did stir the country due to the daredevil nature of the revolutionaries and their courage and heroism. Contemporary evidence also points to the care with which the targeted people were selected, how the funds seized were used and accounts maintained, and the honour of women protected during dacoities. But there were some revolutionaries who had conscientiously objected to this method both because it could antagonize wide sections of people and because it carried the potential to degenerate into plain antisocial activities masquerading as swadeshi action. Revolvers and guns

were procured either by theft and snatching or purchased from seamen and junior officers of foreign ships. In a sensational case of theft of pistols belonging to Roda Company in Calcutta seven carts full of pistols were to be taken to the warehouse on 26 August 1914, but the seventh cart was hijacked and the contents seized by the revolutionaries. Lastly, there is at least one recorded instance of attempt to motivate the members of the armed forces in the cult of revolution.

The Bengalees constituted a tiny percentage of the Indian armed forces. Hence this aspect of the revolutionary programme was on a low key in sharp contrast to the activities, to say, of the US-based Ghadar party in Punjab. Russian sources record³ that there was a ball in the house of the lieutenant governor on Christmas night in 1908. Among the guests were the Governor General, the commander-in-chief and other high officials. The 10th Jat Regiment was to do guard duty in the Lt governor's house. But one of the soldiers betrayed the conspiracy to the authorities. A Russian journal published a news item about the trial that followed, in the course of which the accused soldiers admitted that they had joined a secret society in Bengal whose object was the destruction of British sovereignty in India. Moreover, to try to infuse revolutionary spirit in their comrades, one of the accused was reported to have told the judge, 'Do you think that the number of rebellious sepoys is confined to twenty-five? There are many more involved in the matter.' The Jat soldiers found involved in the conspiracy were heavily punished.

There was a good deal of hesitation, argument and discussion among revolutionaries as to the propriety of dacoity as a form of the struggle for freedom. There were those whose conscientious objection to it led them away from the path of revolution. But gradually it came to be realized by all that money was needed to keep the revolutionary party active and dacoity was the only way in which money could be obtained. In a few instances, the owners of the houses raided were intimated in writing that the amount of money seized had been credited in the accounts as loan received from them and that the money would be paid back on attainment of independence. In spite of the best intentions at the time, such repayments were not possible

and were never made. In an effort to erase to some extent the moral guilt attached to dacoity, certain general rules were accepted. For example, no woman of the house raided should be touched and that only those who had amassed money dishonestly were to be victimized. Though the first rule was generally followed, the second cannot be said to have been strictly observed.

After a dacoity at Gopinath Roy Lane, Howrah (1910), the owner of the house received a long letter written in Bengali,⁴ with the words 'Bande Mataram' and the symbol of the Jugantar Party at the top along with the words 'Bengal Branch of Independent Calcutta, Kingdom and United India' with an address. The letter was to the following effect:

Six honorary employees of the Revenue Department of our Calcutta Office have borrowed from you Rs 9891/-one anna five pice for the purpose of fulfilling our noble object and deposited the same with us. The money has been credited in our books as loan taken from you with interest @ 5 per cent per annum. If by the grace of God our object is achieved, the money with interest will be repaid to you. Under our previous directions the ornaments pledged by you with our debtors were not touched. We have since discovered a locket and an amulet with the cash taken from you and we understand from our informer that these are also pledged ornaments and it has been decided in a meeting of our association held on 13th Asar that these should be returned to you within a fortnight. If you oppose us in any way or go to the police, none of your family will be left alive to enjoy your vast wealth.

One in your position must appreciate that without sacrifice it is not possible to deliver our country from the clutches of the British. If people like you would give us regular donations, commission of dacoities would become unnecessary.

In Japan, the rich have unstintingly spent money for advancing the strength and prosperity of their country. We pray to God that you and the likes of you also follow the example and help us in our noble mission.

Sd/J. Balwant
Secretary
Department of Finance
Bengal Branch of Independent Calcutta
Kingdom of United India
14th Asar 1323 BS

There are other instances where similar letters were issued.

The first phase of the Agni Yug was over with the un-partitioning of Bengal until it gathered momentum again during the First World War. Its salient features, as summed up by Gopal Halder were, first, the

revolutionaries did not belong to a single unified party, but were divided into a number of secret groups. Secondly, they did not subscribe to any common ideology, but shared the same nationalist aspiration for freedom and a faith in armed revolution. Third, the common features of their activities were secret societies, indoctrination of their members, physical and moral training, collection of firearms, collection of funds by dacoities and assassination of enemies and traitors. Fourth, by no means were all who belonged to these secret societies reconciled to such activities (see Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay's *Biplabi Jibaner Smriti*). Many of them accepted these as temporary and unwelcome devices in the preparation for guerrilla campaigns, defection of the Indian armed forces and eventually for armed insurrection on a national scale. Fifth, as opportunities presented themselves in the national and international fields the revolutionary terrorists tried to take advantage of them and varied their methods and techniques in accordance with the requirements of the situation. Lastly, most of the leaders of these groups like Sri Aurobindo himself, had an exaggerated notion about the role of the middle-class intelligentsia in the national democratic revolution.⁵ The entire movement was therefore confined to the Bengalee bhadralok class. For such a movement to be successful in its objects, it needed a wider mass base. Such a base had existed in Bengal as illustrated by the Indigo Revolt of 1859–62 and the numerous peasant agitations such as the one at Pabna in 1873. But the bhadralok revolutionaries, many of them products of the zamindari system, could not establish adequate linkages with the aspirations of the lower classes and therefore failed to turn the movement into a mass uprising that could truly shake the foundations of the British rule. But by their fiery patriotism, bravery and sacrifice, they did shake up the Raj and caused enough anxiety for it. Also, they convincingly repudiated a general impression of Bengalees being soft and gentle, and created a situation where the presence of any Bengalee stranger could cause a stir among white officialdom, the police and the intelligent people all over the subcontinent from the Khyber Pass to Chittagong.⁶ In fact, one of the considerations

which weighed with the colonial government to shift the capital from Calcutta to Delhi, was the general sense of insecurity the top white officialdom felt in Calcutta.

MORLEY–MINTO REFORMS (1909)

One of the direct outcomes of the swadeshi movement was the Morley–Minto Reforms of 1909 which was a significant step forward in the direction of diluting official control over the Indian Council. Earlier, the Indian Council Acts of 1861 and 1892 had introduced the paraphernalia of a legislative council which was, however, a powerless official-controlled body. The first act, shortly after the mutiny, had provided for a legislative council where the viceroy's five executive councillors sat with six to twelve nominees, British and Indian, at least half of whom were supposed to not be officials. It was a purely consultative body with no legislative powers or control over the executive. The 1892 act had extended the number of those who were not officials, provided for some indirect election for some of them and given some limited lawmaking power to the council.

The swadeshi movement brought about a sea change. Soon after the anti-partition agitation was launched, Curzon resigned in the wake of his dispute with Kitchener, the commander-in-chief. A Liberal Party government came to power in Britain in which John Morley became the Secretary of State for India. Curzon's successor was Lord Minto, more flexible and not tied to Curzon's legacy. He, along with Morley, had already broken new ground by getting S.P. Sinha (later Lord Sinha) appointed the first Indian member of the viceroy's Executive Council (as law member). Now the Morley–Minto duo announced the following reforms:

1. The membership of the Imperial Legislative Council was increased from twenty-five to sixty (thirty-six officials, including five nominated officials, and twenty-four elected members). The eight members of the viceroy's Executive Council were ex-officio members. Thus a majority of officials was inbuilt. Also, the principle of separate electorate for Muslims was accepted. This was to prove a time bomb.
2. Important changes were effected in the constitution of the Provincial Councils. Under the Act of 1892, there were only eight members in the legislative council for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and they represented the municipalities, district boards, zamindaris, the university and the Chamber of Commerce. The Indian Councils Act of 1892 brought about certain

changes affecting the administration of Bengal, the most important of which were as below.

The Provincial Legislative Council was to consist of fifty-one members of whom twenty-six were to be elected and twenty-five were to be nominated. Of the nominated members twenty were to be government officials. Of the elected members, specified seats were allotted to the representatives of Muslims, zamindars, the university, the Chamber of Commerce and other important associations, while the rest of the seats were open to the general public. All British subjects in India of the age of twenty-five years and above were qualified for exercising their franchise, but the following persons were disqualified:

- (a) Dismissed government servants,
- (b) Persons convicted of offences carrying a penalty of imprisonment for more than six months,
- (c) Persons bound down to be of good behaviour,
- (d) Lawyers whose licences have been cancelled, and
- (e) Persons notified by government as unfit for election in public interest in view of their past activities.

The Governor General in Council was, however, authorized to condone these disqualifications.

3. The newly constituted legislative council was given more powers than was enjoyed by the old council. It was given the power to discuss and amend the government proposals in the annual budget though the government was not bound to accept the amendments. In other matters, the members could propose any measure in general public interest and the council could vote on it but even if the same was passed by majority, it was open to the government to accept or reject it. Such proposals thus were in the nature of suggestions and were not binding on the government.

The moderates demanded self-government such as that enjoyed by the Dominions. But the new reform did not concede this. The representatives of the people got the right to discuss matters and to question the administration for eliciting information but the administration remained fully in the hands of the executive government.

4. Two Indians—K.G. Gupta, ICS, and S. Bilgrami—were appointed in the fourteen-member advisory committee in London to advise the Secretary of State for India. But they were both loyalists and could not in any case influence the advice of the twelve other members.

The reforms aimed at keeping the staunch nationalists away from the administration. The government, if it so desired, could notify the leaders of any party as unfit for election in public interest. No terrorist or extremist had a chance of being a member of the council in view of the disqualification attached to persons convicted for six months or more.

The Morley–Minto Reforms satisfied the moderates, but not the extremists who felt that no real power had been transferred to Indians. One aspect of the reforms, viz., separate representation of Muslims in the legislative councils was not liked by either the moderates or the extremists. This virtually accepted Syed Ahmed's theory that Muslims and Hindus

were like two separate nations, and Muslims could never expect equal treatment from the Hindu majority. Also, this was in response to a delegation of Muslims led by Aga Khan which had called on Governor General Minto at Simla on 1 October 1906, pleading for separate electorate for Muslims, since within a common electorate Muslims could not expect to be elected. Lord Minto straightaway conceded this request. There is enough documentary evidence, the foremost being Lady Minto's diary and the testimony of Beck, principal of the Aligarh College, that the Aga Khan deputation was a 'command' performance engineered by the British rulers to sow seeds of discord between the Hindus and the Muslims. Both the deputationists and the Governor General were play-acting, and the outcome was known to them beforehand. Three months later, on 31 December 1906, the Muslim League was formed in Dhaka as a rival to the Congress. From the very beginning, the Muslim League leaders pressed for separate electorates at central, provincial, district board and municipality levels. To quote one of the leaders, Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, 'We cannot wield powerful pens like the Hindus, but our arms are powerful enough to wield the sword.'

The imposition of the principle of separate electorates like the imposition of the first partition of Bengal must be reviewed in historical perspective as parts of the colonialists' grand design of *divide et impera*, aimed at keeping the Muslims apart, thus facilitating the continuance of foreign rule.

Unfortunately, the majority of the two communities fell a victim to this grand design. It was during these years that the ugly phenomenon of communal riots, unknown in pre-British days, first made its appearance. The first such rioting occurred at Mymensingh and Comilla. This was to become a recurrent feature till the subcontinent's independence and even afterwards.

ANNULMENT OF PARTITION

Meanwhile, tired of continuing terrorist violence and the economic impact of the boycott movement, the British authorities began a serious examination of the merits and demerits of the partition. Both the new

Governor General, Lord Hardinge, and the new Secretary of State, Lord Crew, came to the conclusion that nothing short of reuniting the two parts of Bengal with Calcutta as the capital would satisfy the Bengalees and that otherwise conditions would further deteriorate. But as a quid pro quo Calcutta could no longer continue as the capital of British India, and Delhi, the old Mughal capital, should be restored as the capital of the Indian empire. What also weighed with the authorities, apart from the fact that Calcutta had become unsafe for British officialdom, was that Calcutta was at a corner in the British Indian empire and by moving to Delhi the Central government would not only move to the traditional imperial capital, but also to a more central location.

The following decisions, till then kept a closely guarded secret, were announced by King-Emperor George V at the **Durbar held in Delhi on 12 December 1911:**

1. The whole of Bengal be reconstituted as a separate province called a Presidency under a governor in council.
2. The capital of India be transferred from Calcutta to Delhi.
3. Bihar and Orissa be constituted as a separate province under a lieutenant governor.
4. Assam be brought back as a province under a chief commissioner.

As the whole reshuffling process was done with the division as the basis, many **Bengali-speaking districts like Sylhet and Cachar in Assam, and Manbhum and Singhbhum in Bihar were left outside Bengal. Hindus in general were ecstatic. For them the reunification of Bengal was of utmost consequence. Muslim opinion was divided. Those in East Bengal were somewhat upset, although many of them welcomed the return of Calcutta as the provincial capital. A Government of India Act, 1912, passed by the British parliament on 25 January 1912, gave legal effect to the proposed changes. Lord Carmichael was appointed governor of the reunited Bengal Presidency.**

SHIFTING OF THE CAPITAL TO DELHI

However, the annulment of the partition did not mean the end of terrorism as the British rulers had expected. The revolutionaries were no longer viewing uniting Bengal as their sole objective. They revealed their intentions as early as on 23 December 1912 by throwing bombs on the Governor General's procession when he was ceremoniously entering Delhi in a procession to symbolize the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. There were fifty elephants in the procession and numerous people—both men and women—who lined the streets and watched from balconies and housetops. The Governor General with his wife was seated on a spacious howda placed on a richly caparisoned elephant of enormous size. When the procession came near the clock tower in Chandni Chowk, there was a bomb explosion. Both the Governor General himself and his wife were seriously injured and the attendant died.

The conspiracy was believed to have been masterminded by Rashbehari Bose, the leader of Bengal terrorists. It was also rumoured that the bomb was thrown by Basanta Kumar Biswas, who was dressed as a woman and stood among a crowd of women assembled on the veranda of the second storey of the Punjab National Bank building and threw the bomb from there. Basanta Kumar, Abodhbehari, Amirchand and Balmukund were convicted in the Delhi Conspiracy Case in 1914 and were executed on 1 March 1915. Rashbehari Bose was also an accused in the case, but he had absconded and escaped punishment by fleeing to East Asia.

Neither Lord Hardinge nor many others at the time realized that though the former was the immediate target of the bomb, the bombing was not the act of a few miscreants. It was the beginning of a new armed nationalist movement with a wider objective of independence for the entire country. The First World War was to provide them with an opportunity.

Over a Decade of Hindu–Muslim Camaraderie

With the onset of the First World War (1914–18) a new phase began in politics when the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League and, for that matter, the Hindus and the Muslims came on a common platform. By the time the war ended, the general pro-government attitude among the Muslims was replaced by a hostile attitude on account of the Khilafat (caliphate) question. Many of the Muslims in India were agitated over the British attack on Ottoman Turkey and Turkey's defeat. As the head of Ottoman Turkey had adopted the title of the Caliph of Islam, his defeat, the separation of the Arab territories like Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, etc., from the Ottoman Empire, the treatment meted out to him by the victorious allies and the eventual abolition of the Khilafat by the Turkish nationals, who were led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, made a section of the Muslims in India sullen. All these developments were viewed as anti-Islamic by them. This was to find expression in the Khilafat agitation from 1919 onwards. Interestingly, the Bengalee Muslims did not have such a strong and passionate feeling about the Khilafat issue, although they mildly sympathized with their co-religionists in north India.

The colonial Government of India, along with Britain, declared war against Germany and its allies, and Indian soldiers in large numbers took part in the fight against Turkey in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Palestine, and thus participated in the process of the liberation of the Arab countries from the Ottoman imperial yoke. One of the Indian soldiers was Kazi Nazrul Islam who was to shine as a leading poet of Bengal. The Khilafat issue was riding high and, to the extent that Mohammad Ali [M.A.] Jinnah was anti-Khilafat, he was discarded by the Muslim community in general. He opposed both Gandhi's non-cooperation movement and the Khilafat

agitation even at the risk of going against the mullahs and maulvis, and had to leave India and Indian politics by 1930.

During the war years the Congress, controlled by the moderates, and the Muslim League came very close to each other in 1915 and 1916. Their annual sessions were held at Bombay and Lucknow respectively and during the same week, in order to enable common members like Fazlul Huq and Jinnah to attend both. Fazlul Huq presided over a Muslim League session at a time when he was a general secretary of the Congress. The resolutions passed by both bodies were also nearly identical. The 1915 Bombay session of the Congress was presided over by Lord S.P. Sinha, a Bengalee barrister, who, like Jinnah and Tilak, now favoured a joint platform to achieve self-government. The story goes that both Huq and Sinha travelled to Bombay by the same train and discussed their respective speeches and compared notes during the journey. Moreover, both the Muslim League and the moderate Congress leaders also made a show of their loyalty to Britain in fighting the war. The Bengalee president of the 1914 session declared without any ambiguity, 'The only thought of the people of all the provinces and of all communities in India at this moment of peril of the British Empire is to fight the aggressors and to save our empire.' This reflected general moderate opinion. Gandhi, just back from South Africa, but not yet an established leader, toured widely to help in the recruitment drive for the army. But many Indians, including some Congress leaders, wanted to take advantage of Britain's discomfiture to wrest constitutional concessions from it.

At the League's session in Bombay (1915), following the Congress session, despite some pandemonium caused by orthodox mullahs, the official delegates unanimously adopted Jinnah's motion for forming a committee 'in consultation with other political organizations, to formulate a scheme of reforms in the name of United India'. A joint committee of seventy-one members was thus formed with Motilal Nehru—a well-known lawyer of Allahabad—leading the Congress members, and M.A. Jinnah on behalf of the League. The result was the Congress–League Scheme jointly crafted by Motilal Nehru and Jinnah. The Lucknow session of the Congress

(1916) adopted the Congress–League Scheme and took the unusual step of conceding the principle of separate electorates for Muslims and also fixed the number of Muslim members in the Central as well as provincial assemblies, in fact conceding them a slightly higher percentage of seats than their actual number in those provinces where they were in minority. In Bengal, following the same principle, the Muslims forming 52.6 per cent of the population had 40 per cent of the seats. This was opposed by a section of Bengal Muslims led by Abdullah al-Mamun Suhrawardy who even repudiated the Lucknow Pact and left the Muslim League, reviving the Central National Mohammedan Association. Fazlul Huq, a supporter of the Lucknow Pact, had to compromise. Both the Congress and the League demanded self-rule. In a way this was the high noon of accord in the Hindu–Muslim relationship. Some historians have criticized the come-down by the Congress leadership as having directly paved the way for the two-nation theory and the partition of the subcontinent. But in historical perspective, this must be viewed as a right decision by the Congress. If the lofty aims behind the scheme were not achieved, that was on account of subsequent developments. Another great significance of the Lucknow Congress (1916) was the return of the so-called extremists to the Congress after nearly a decade of schisms from the time of the session at Surat (1907). But within two years it was to be the turn of the moderates to leave the Congress. This followed the Montagu–Chelmsford Report on the future constitutional set-up and the controversy it generated among political leaders and parties. On 20 August 1917, Edwin Samuel Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, declared in the British parliament that the aim of the British government was to establish responsible government in India and that necessary changes would soon be made for the Indians to prepare themselves for it by the gradual association with different branches of administration.

Montagu and Governor General Chelmsford brought out the Montagu–Chelmsford Report on 8 July 1918. As expected, the extremists rejected the report while moderates welcomed it. Moderate leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Ambika Charan Majumdar and Bhupendranath Bose decided to

stay away from the Bombay session of the Congress (1918), which was to specifically consider the Montagu–Chelmsford Report. They felt the majority opinion was no longer with them, and they wanted to make the proposed reforms a success. Despite Tilak's special efforts to incorporate the moderate viewpoint, and the Bombay Congress's eventual resolution welcoming the Montagu–Chelmsford Report as a progressive report which needed some improvements, the moderates stayed away. In moving the main resolution Tilak stated that in this resolution he had harmonized the respective points of view of the moderates, the extremists as well as the centrists. This session was attended by 3,845 delegates. Two months after the session, the moderates, who had already formed a new party named the National Liberal Federation, met in a conference in Bombay (1 November 1918) and endorsed the report wholesale, thus repudiating the official Congress position. The split could not be avoided. In any case, the moderates, by leaving the Congress, also removed themselves from the centre stage of history, playing hardly any role thereafter.

The Congress–League Scheme (1916) drafted by a joint committee of seventy-one Congressmen and League leaders was a great landmark. It marked the zenith of Hindu–Muslim cooperation for achieving self-rule. At the Muslim League session Jinnah as president easily got it approved. In the Congress session presided over by Ambika Charan Majumdar, the support of Tilak, who had returned to the Congress after nine years, ensured its easy passage. There were 433 Muslim delegates at the Congress session, a record number, led by Jinnah, who lent their wholehearted support to the scheme. In Bengal and Punjab, which were Muslim-majority provinces, they would have no separate electorates and fewer reserved seats than their proportion in the population, as it was felt that they did not need special consideration in these two provinces. A salutary provision for all minorities was that if in any council three-fourths of the representatives of a minority community were opposed to any bill or resolution concerning that community, it was to be dropped. But in the euphoria that was generated, it was overlooked that by negotiating with the Muslim League, the Congress had recognized it as

the representative of Muslims in India and thus unwittingly planted a time bomb with destructive potential for the years ahead.

The euphoria of Hindu–Muslim camaraderie caused by the Lucknow Pact continued even in the attitude to the Rowlatt Act and the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms on to the high noon of communal amity under C.R. Das’s charismatic leadership. When as a result of the resentment over Rowlatt Act and over the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms, a strong current of disappointment arose, its leadership was taken over by M.K. Gandhi. Jinnah, however, with his strong preference for constitutional methods rather than agitational politics, was getting disenchanted. Also, to the extent that he was anti-Khilafat, he was sidelined by Muslims. For the time being he virtually retired from active politics.

From 1921 onwards the whole of India was overwhelmed by the non-cooperation movement under the leadership of Gandhi. To this was added the Khilafat agitation which affected large sections of Muslims aggrieved by Ottoman Turkey’s defeat, disintegration and discomfiture at the hands of the victorious allies. The non-cooperation movement arose out of a set of three circumstances: first, the dissatisfaction of Indians with the notorious Rowlatt Act passed by the British authorities to curb the revolutionary movement; second, the deep resentment caused by the very limited nature of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms of 1919; and third, the bitterness felt by large sections Muslims over the harsh treatment of the Turkish Sultanate. The agitation against Rowlatt Act was spread over the whole of India. But its biggest impact was in Punjab where the then governor, Sir Michael O’Dwyer, installed troops in the streets of Lahore, Amritsar, Kasur and Gujranwala, where martial law was proclaimed on Sunday, 13 April 1919. Jallianwala Bagh, a walled garden at Amritsar virtually became a killing field when an unarmed crowd that had gathered there to protest against the Rowlatt Act was ruthlessly machine-gunned under the orders of General R.E.H. Dyer, the commander of the military forces, resulting in a kind of genocide. The whole country protested against it, climaxed by poet Rabindranath Tagore formally relinquishing the knighthood conferred on him by the British Crown.

The Congress then endorsed the agitation call given by the Central Khilafat Committee and gave the call for a nationwide hartal. Many Congress leaders had thought that this was a good opportunity to bring the general body of the Muslims in India into the national movement. The Congress session held in December 1919 at Nagpur endorsed Gandhi's call for non-cooperation with the British. Dissenters like Annie Besant, Bipin Pal and Jinnah were simply voted down. The non-cooperation movement continued until 1924 when a violent incident took place resulting in burning of a number of policemen at a police station called Chauri Chaura in United Provinces. Gandhi felt that the movement was breaking away from non-violence and turning to violence. He withdrew the movement, thereby causing a lot of dismay among the nationalists, including even leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and C.R. Das. Many of those who had gone full steam into the agitation felt let down.

Slowly, Chittaranjan Das had assumed overall leadership of both the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal. He now started the Swarajya Party within the Congress to contest the elections held under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms only to prove how hollow the reforms were and how far they were from the people's expectations. The Muslims in Bengal, disappointed with Gandhi, responded in large numbers to C.R. Das's (popularly called Deshbandhu) call. Among his lieutenants were H.S. Suhrawardy and Tamijuddin Khan. Meanwhile, elections had been held in 1920 under the 1919 act. No Congress candidate contested in response to the party's boycott call. The Liberals (formerly moderates in the Congress) had a free run. In a house of 140, in which officials and nominated members numbered 26, there were 57 elected Hindu and 39 elected Muslim members. The governor, Lord Ronaldshay, appointed Surendranath Banerjee, Prabhas Chandra Mitra and Nawab Ali Chowdhury of Mymensingh as ministers to deal with the transferred subjects. They served from January 1921 for the full term in the council till the end of 1923. The Muslim minister, Nawab Ali Chowdhury, who was elected president of the Central National Mohammedan Association after Salimullah's death, was a zamindar without any formal education and was chosen in preference to the

highly educated Abdullah Suhrawardy because he was from East Bengal. Otherwise, all the three would have represented West Bengal.

Ironically, the very first major task of Surendranath, as minister in charge of local self-government and health, was to undo Lord Curzon's anti-democratic Calcutta Corporation Act of 1899 which he had so vehemently opposed twenty-four years ago and to introduce a bill in 1921, restoring self-government in the corporation. Taxpayers were to elect 80 per cent of the municipal commissioners, who would elect the mayor and the chief executive officer. But discussion in the council showed deep divisions among legislators. The majority of the Muslim members, led by Syed Nasim Ali of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, demanded separate electorate for the Muslim seats and an increase in the number of reserved seats for Muslims from the twelve the bill had provided. Separate electorate was accepted despite opposition from Abdullah Suhrawardy and some other Muslim councillors. A. Suhrawardy challenged Nasim Ali to contest any number of candidates from the Khilafat Party in any ward in Calcutta to prove his claim that the Bengal Provincial Muslim League was not the true representative body of the Muslims in Bengal. Eventually, the principle of separate electorate was accepted, reflecting the majority Muslim view.

The growing communal propensity was also illustrated by the unnecessary controversy over government grant to the newly established Dhaka University promised by the government as a sop to Bengal Muslims, some of whom felt aggrieved by the annulment of the partition and the resultant loss of Dhaka's importance. From having been a provincial capital, Dhaka had become only a district town with the divisional commissioner's headquarters. An unfortunate agitation against the grant started under Asutosh Mukherjee, the great educationist and judge who felt that this would hurt Calcutta University. Lord Hardinge announced as a compromise that the new university would cover only Dhaka city and a radius of ten miles, and would essentially be residential. While this compromise satisfied West Bengal Hindu opinion, some of them still successfully deprived Dhaka University of the annual contribution of rupees five lakh from the Government of India and, in that process, created

animosity between Muslims and Hindus and between East Bengal and West Bengal. The educated Hindu opinion simply failed to gauge the East Bengal Muslims' hurt feelings and to appreciate how much this new university could do in eradicating ignorance and spreading the light of education in backward East Bengal. We cannot do better than recall the appeal made by the respected leader Fazlul Huq in the course of his intervention in the debate in the council on this issue:

To my mind the Dhaka University became an eye-sore to the men at the helm of the Calcutta University ever since Lord Hardinge proclaimed its establishment, though this proclamation was merely the fulfilment of a long-promised and long-desired decision of the government which had so long been kept in cold storage. I do not want to say much but I would caution my friends of West Bengal who put up objections whenever any money is proposed to be spent for Dhaka ... Beware, if you persist in this attitude, it will only create differences between the two communities which will cause serious harm to the administration. I appeal to my friends on behalf not only of the Muslims but of the people of East Bengal in general not to object to the allotment of the fund proposed for the Dhaka University.¹

Khwaja Muhammad Azam of the Dhaka nawab family observed:

The major part of the total income of the Bengal government is collected from East Bengal but is spent for West Bengal; we do not object to it. What I do not understand, however, is the attitude of the people of West Bengal in objecting to the Dhaka University a few lakh rupees which was intended to be spent for that university but could not be spent for so long. Nor do I understand why the Calcutta University should be so envious of the Dhaka University.²

A detailed examination of the controversy over the Dhaka University discloses that the seeds of communal division of Bengal were slowly being planted in the country. But in some respects the difference was not communal, and there were some silver linings. For example, many conservative Hindus supported the scheme for Dhaka University and at the same time voted with the Muslims against the proposal to give women the right to vote.

The legislative council (1921–23) also passed a number of other laws, like suppressing goondaism, regulating land rent and tenancy rights. There was no clear-cut political division among the members. By and large, the official members, the Europeans, the Anglo-Indians, the Hindu aristocrats

and the loyalist Muslim members supported the ministers while the [common] Hindu members in general opposed them. Even when the ministers were outvoted, the governor, in exercise of his special powers, could veto any resolution passed by the council. Thus it was established that the ministers need not have the confidence of the council. By 1923, with the Swarajya Party getting a majority in the elections to the Calcutta Corporation, the spotlight shifted there. C.R. Das became mayor, H.S. Suhrawardy the deputy mayor and Subhas Chandra Bose the chief executive officer. Five aldermen were also elected by Swarajya Party members, including luminaries like Rabindranath and J.C. Bose.

CHITTARANJAN'S BENGAL PACT 1923

Now C.R. Das, in a bold bid to forge unity among the Muslims and the Hindus, drafted the historic Bengal Pact of 1923, a shining example of an imaginative instrument that could bring the Muslims and Hindus of Bengal together. The following were the main terms:

1. The number of members of the two communities will be decided by their respective strength in Bengal's population, and the two communities will vote separately to elect their members.
2. The Muslims will have 60 per cent and the Hindus 40 per cent of the seats in local self-government institutions.
3. Fifty-five per cent of the government appointees will be Muslims, but 80 per cent of the vacancies will be filled up by them until the overall percentage of 55 was reached.
4. Music before mosques, usually a standard excuse for Hindu-Muslim riots, was to be banned.
5. Killing of cows for religious purposes on the Bakr-Id day, a standard pretext for starting communal violence, was to be permitted and nobody will be allowed to object to it.
6. A committee with equal members of Muslims and Hindus will be appointed in every subdivision to supervise the implementation of the above terms.

The Bengal Pact, Chittaranjan's masterstroke, did win for him the support of the Bengal Muslims, but cost him substantial Hindu support. It was rejected by the Congress session at Kakinada (1923) presided over by Mohammed Ali, but was endorsed by the Bengal Provincial Conference of 1924. Thus the majority of the Hindu Congressmen defied their own central leadership and preferred to go along with Chittaranjan in what they

perceived to be in Bengal's larger and long-term interest. But the Bengal Pact, in some respects the high watermark of Chittaranjan's political career, remained a subject of heated debate. Chittaranjan was so agitated when the Kakinada Congress refused to endorse the Bengal Pact that he said he would wash his hands off all-India politics, and confine his activities to Bengal.³

The elections to the second legislative council (1924–26) was the next landmark. The Swarajya Party, a group within the Congress itching to take part in the elections under C.R. Das's charismatic leadership, and fortified by Congress's approval to join the elections, stormed the bastion of the Liberal Federation. Surendranath himself lost to a young unknown doctor, Bidhan Chandra Roy, who fought as an independent candidate with Swarajya support. C.R. Das became leader of the fifty-four-member Swarajya group in the council. The Nationalist Party, led by Byomkesh Chakravarty, had nineteen members and usually voted with the Swarajyists. The Muslim members usually sided with the government. Lord Lytton, the governor, invited Chittaranjan, the leader of the largest party, although not commanding absolute majority, to form the government. This move met with strong opposition from the British community and its mouthpiece, the *Statesman*. But Chittaranjan declined. After all, the Swarajya Party's avowed object was not to form any government but to oppose the government at every step and to create a deadlock and show the hollowness of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms. Lytton now appointed A.K. Fazlul Huq, one-time Salimullah protégé but then a Congress leader, S.K. Guznavi and Surendranath Mullick as ministers, signalling the shift of political gravity in Bengal for the first time towards Muslims. As Surendranath Mullick's election was set aside by the court, Huq and Guznavi stayed as the only two ministers and they carried on with the support of the officials, the Europeans and old Liberals and some friends. Thus it was the 1924 council elections which, for the first time, put Muslims in the dominant position in the politics of Bengal. It took quite some time for this truth to dawn on the Hindu bhadralok psyche.

At the very first meeting of the second legislative council, a resolution moved by J.M. Sengupta and eloquently supported by C.R. Das for release of all prisoners detained under Bengal Regulation Act of 1818 without trial was passed by 76 to 45 votes. This put the government in a predicament. 'Law and order' was the governor's 'retained' subject. Sir Abdur Rahim, member of the governor's Executive Council, had a dig at the Swarajists wondering how those who wanted to do away with these laws would not take the responsibility for the administration. Das's retort was: 'I can assure Sir Abdur Rahim that we should take over the responsibility for the administration the moment the entire responsibility therefor devolves on the people.'

The council passed two more resolutions—one urging the release of all persons convicted of political offences and the other calling for the repeal of all those laws under which persons had been convicted. Emboldened by such success the Swarajyists moved a no-confidence motion against the ministers, but this was defeated by one vote. Unfortunately, this incident acquired a communal overtone with agitated Muslim demonstrators rushing into the council chamber (Town Hall), urging members not to 'join the conspiracy for removal of Muslim ministers'. The Swarajya strategy of voting against the budget proposals with the help of others in the Opposition further heightened tensions. The governor himself held a secret conference with some members to garner support for the budget. Das with his followers left the chamber in protest. Thereafter the budget proposals were passed. But the Opposition took a stand on the salary of the ministers, and despite the governor's best efforts, repeatedly disallowed the salaries. The motion was moved by Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy who had already made his mark as a legislator. The ministers had to resign and the governor himself took over the administration of the transferred subjects. Thus the Swarajyists had succeeded in their main objective of bringing the diarchy of the 1919 Act to a close temporarily, although in that process, they had to pay a heavy price by kindling the communal flame.

Another effort was made by the governor to make the system work when he appointed Raja Manmathanath of Santosh and Nawab Ali Chowdhury as

ministers, but the Swarajya Party moved a cut motion reducing their salary and got it passed with the support of Fazlul Huq. The government then decided not to appoint ministers any more, but to suspend diarchy till the end of the second council term (January 1927). In the meantime, the council also turned down a proposal to extend the life of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill (1925) and of the Suppression of Terrorism Act. These could become laws only by the exercise of the governor's special powers.

At the all-India level the uneasy relations between Gandhi and the Swarajya Party continued. In the Congress session at Ahmedabad on 27 June 1924, Gandhi moved a resolution to the effect that those who favoured council entry were against non-cooperation and as such they would not be eligible for membership in any of the executive bodies of the Congress. Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru opposed this. In fact, Motilal Nehru moved a counter-resolution for rejection of Gandhi's resolution, but it was rejected by 82 to 68 votes. Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das, along with their followers, walked out of the conference. Gandhi tried for a compromise and met Motilal and Chittaranjan in Calcutta. They argued that all members of the Congress would engage themselves in spinning and weaving and in working for removal of untouchability and achieving Hindu-Muslim unity, but the Swarajya Party in the Congress could enter into the Central and provincial councils and frame separate rules and collect separate funds for this purpose.

The basic disagreement between Gandhi and Chittaranjan Das on the issue of the attitude to terrorists continued. It came to surface in 1924 when a young terrorist, Gopinath Saha, in trying to assassinate Sir Charles Tegart, the notoriously anti-terrorist commissioner of police of Calcutta, by mistake shot dead another Englishman, Day, an officer of Kilburn & Co (11 January 1924). Gopinath expressed his regret for killing an innocent man, but showed great courage when he was being hanged, declaring: 'Every drop of my blood will sow the seeds of freedom in the homes of Bengal.' Sympathy and emotion surged all over Bengal. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee at its annual conference held at Sirajganj on 1 June 1924 passed a resolution acknowledging the supreme sacrifice of Gopinath Saha. It

stated that 'this conference, while denouncing and dissociating itself from violence and adhering to the principle of non-violence, appreciates Gopinath Saha's idea of self-sacrifice, misguided though it is, in respect of the country's best interest and expresses respect for such self-sacrifice'. This was opposed by Gandhi. He moved a resolution at the Ahmedabad session of the All India Congress Committee condemning the killing of Day by Gopinath Saha. Chittaranjan moved a counter-resolution reproducing the text of the Sirajganj resolution. The AICC rejected Chittaranjan's motion and approved Gandhi's motion by a very narrow majority of seventy-eight to seventy. This reflected the strength of both sides as also the fact that Gandhi's support base in the Congress was only a shade larger than that of Chittaranjan Das.

CHITTARANJAN-BRITISH CONVERGENCE

But the disagreement between Gandhi and C.R. Das was visibly growing. The government took advantage of this situation by hitting the extremists hard. Subhas Bose, chief executive officer, Calcutta Corporation, and Das's main lieutenant, was arrested on a charge of encouraging terrorism. Even Gandhi saw through this game and hurried to Calcutta for a conciliatory dialogue with Das which resulted in an agreement between the two.⁴

In immense tension and in the midst of hard work, Chittaranjan's life was slowly nearing its end. Even with the short span of life remaining he followed a mixed policy of confrontation and conciliation with the British Raj. He vehemently opposed a draconian ordinance issued on 5 October 1924 for suppressing terrorists and the arrest of Subhas Bose and several others under the ordinance. He left Simla where he was convalescing and rushed to Calcutta on 27 October to lead the protest demonstration. He had to be carried to the council chamber on a stretcher accompanied by Dr B.C. Roy and others. The bill was defeated. From the mayor's chair Chittaranjan announced: 'Mr Subhas Chandra Bose is no more a revolutionary than I am.' But his conciliatory tone was also evident both from a published pamphlet (29 March 1925) in which he condemned violence and from a

presidential address at the Faridpur session of Bengal Provincial Congress (2 May 1925) where he offered a compromise to the British Raj on certain terms. These terms were:

First, government should relinquish for good the repressive powers assumed by them and, in proof of their bona fides, should release all political prisoners.

Secondly, they should make a firm commitment of complete Swaraj for India within the British Empire and this commitment should be unalterable.

Thirdly, pending grant of independence, the administrative machinery should be moulded in such a way as to serve as the foundation for the complete independence to come.

The nature and manner of moulding of administrative machinery to suit complete independence should be determined by mutual discussion.

We, on our part, shall undertake not to encourage any seditious movement by word, deed or conduct—of course this is not done now—and we shall try in all possible ways to [remove] such suicidal movements from the land.

The strength and energy that are now being misdirected against the government would meet their fulfilment in full utilization for the real good of the country.

If government would not heed our proposals for a compromise, we would generate among the masses in the whole country a general atmosphere of disobedience of the government. Vanquished in our struggle of disobedience of the government, this is the ultimate weapon in our hand—a weapon sure and unfailing.

There was a significant change in British attitude. The British authorities realized that Gandhi having withdrawn from active politics for a while, Chittaranjan's leadership of the Congress offered the best prospects for a settlement. There began what an observer has called a long-range flirtation between Birkenhead, the new Secretary of State for India, and C.R. Das.⁵ Lord Birkenhead entered into negotiations with Chittaranjan Das through the governor, Lord Lytton, and an intermediary.⁶ In a speech in the House of Lords, Birkenhead appealed to all Indians to move forward on the lines of Chittaranjan's appeal and cooperate with the government. On his part, he expressed his willingness to lay aside all suspicions. Das had also, in his memorable speech at Faridpur on 1 May 1925, declared that he was prepared to negotiate if the government divested itself of all discretionary powers and announced an amnesty for all political prisoners.

Chittaranjan's Death

But within weeks of the Faridpur conference, Chittaranjan, while convalescing in Darjeeling, breathed his last on 16 June 1925, when Birkenhead's promised statement on India was still to come. Needless to say, his untimely death put an end to a strong possibility of a Congress–British political settlement. It plunged Calcutta and the entire country into unparalleled grief. To quote from his daughter Aparna Devi's biography of Das: 'If the country had advanced along the path indicated by my father at Faridpur with the leaders forsaking the illusion of leadership and their vanity, we would have obtained complete independence long ago and would not have to partition the country for gaining independence.'⁷ Gandhi, who was at Khulna when Chittaranjan died, rushed to Calcutta and endeared himself to Bengalees by joining the funeral procession and making a number of grief-stricken statements.

Before his death Deshbandhu had gifted his house to the nation 'in order to divest himself of the last vestige of wealth that he possessed in the world'. To use Mahatma Gandhi's own words: 'The deteriorating communal situation over matters in the Calcutta Corporation occupied a lot of attention in the last few days. The burial of a Muslim *pir* inside the Municipal Market had created much controversy.' Chittaranjan had told Mahatma Gandhi, who'd spent five days with him at Darjeeling, 'Neither Suhrawardy nor Subhas Bose had any authority to allow the *pir* to be buried in the Hogg Market. A wrong had been committed but we cannot wound the feelings of the Musalmans—it will be a greater wrong to exhume the body.' He asked an associate 'to see Sarat and ask him to speak to Suhrawardy so that everything may be smoothly done. If other communities raise the proposal for exhuming the body, and the Muslim members then resign, I shall also resign with them. But if any sect among the Muslims claims the body and has it removed for burial at some other place then troubles will be over'.⁸ That was the practical solution suggested by Das to what had become an emotive communal issue.

The unexpected and untimely passing away of C.R. Das, a giant among men, created a vacuum both in all-India and in Bengal politics. It not only

stopped a possible political settlement with the British government, but also prevented the emergence of a joint Hindu–Muslim front in Bengal. He was the only national leader whom both the Hindus and the Muslims trusted. Not only was his death mourned by stalwarts like Gandhi and Rabindranath and by political leaders like Motilal Nehru, M.A. Jinnah, Maulana Azad and Mohammed Ali, but also by common people everywhere, Hindus and Muslims alike. One has only to go through the highly emotional comments of the Muslim newspapers and periodicals of Bengal to understand the depth of sentiment. A typical comment was that of *Muhamadi* (Bengali) which described Chittaranjan's death 'as God's extreme punishment to our countrymen'.⁹

Also, it was Das who first perceived the need for the Congress to go beyond city politics and reach out to the outlying masses. In doing so, he not only made a very special effort to attract the Muslims but also co-opted into the provincial Congress hierarchy district Hindu leaders like J.M. Sengupta, a barrister from Chittagong, who had successfully led labour agitations around 1917. B.N. Sasmal, a Mahishya caste leader of Contai, Midnapore, who had led an effective non-cooperation movement in Midnapore, and Anil Roy who had led a successful movement against Union Board in Bankura in 1921. Das made a special effort to bring the armed revolutionaries within the fold of the Congress and thus enlist their patriotic fervour and organizational skill for the nationalist cause. There were two main groups—Anusilan Samiti, based mainly in the East Bengal, and the Jugantar Party, based in West Bengal. Both these organizations accepted Das's leadership under an informal agreement, though not officially. But this carried an inherent danger of driving the Muslims away on account of these organizations' excessive dependence on Hindu religious myths, ideals and motifs. Das was eminently successful by 1921 in roping in newly emerging Muslim leadership and building up a joint Hindu–Muslim anti-British political front. Some of the Muslim leaders who came under his banner were Abdullah Barqui of Dinajpur, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi of Chittagong, Akram Khan of 24 Parganas, Shamsuddin Ahmad of Kushtia, Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chaudhury of Tippera, Tamijuddin

Khan of Jessore and, above all, H.S. Suhrawardy of Midnapore. Tamijuddin Khan, a former Congressman and subsequently a front-rank KPP (Krishak Praja Party) and Muslim League leader, has in his memoirs paid a tribute to Das's heroic effort to build a composite patriotic movement. 'The crowning achievement was the Bengal Pact of 1923 under which the Muslims in Bengal were to be given 55 per cent of the government jobs and 60 per cent membership in local bodies in Muslim-majority districts.' This was a unique effort at co-opting the educated Muslims within the *bhadralok*. It was opposed by some Hindu Congressmen and some Muslims. Abdullah Suhrawardy accused Das of playing into the hands of religious zealots and told him: 'You have given so many concessions to the Muslims that tomorrow they will say that all Muslims must grow beards. I refuse to grow a beard.' Tamijuddin Khan himself bemoaned that 'Hindu-Muslim differences were of such a radical character that the influence of one single man, however strong, could only provide a temporary diversion of the natural [sic] course of history, but it could hardly lead to different destiny unless some social upheaval uprooting the causes that divided the two people intervened'.¹⁰

CAMARADERIE TURNS TO CONFLICT

No such social upheaval occurred. On the other hand the Hindu-Muslim camaraderie of over a decade gave way to conflicts. After Das's death, the Krishnanagar session of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (1926), under sustained pressure from a majority spearheaded by the terrorist-dominated Karmi Parishad, rejected the Bengal Pact. There was no generosity, the one quality that was sorely needed, on the part of the Hindu *bhadralok* towards the downtrodden Muslims. Das had steamrolled the Hindu terrorists and Muslim leaders into joining the Congress, but failed to integrate them into it. Inevitably, once his dominant leadership was no more, they parted company. After the abrogation of the Bengal Pact, by the Kakinada session of the Congress as well, the Muslims in large numbers felt betrayed and deserted by the Congress. Among them was H.S.

Suhrawardy. The first sign of the estrangement was that the Muslims fought the Calcutta Corporation election in 1927 separately, thereby signalling the return of separatism and the end of the nascent Bengalee nationalism.

From 3 to 5 April in 1926 and again from 11 to 25 July, Calcutta for the first time exploded into communal violence on a scale unknown earlier, starting with the standard issue of Arya Samaj processionists playing music before mosques. This accentuated the process of communal polarization. It was during these riots that poet Nazrul Islam wrote the inspiring song 'Kandari Hushiar' asking Hindus and Muslims to unite. This was sung as the opening song of the provincial political conference at Dhaka (1928) as also in the annual conference of the Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samaj. But, by and large, his message was unheeded. The much-talked-of composite culture of Bengal gave way to the political stance of 'Islam in danger' accepted by large sections of Bengal Muslims. There was repercussion of Calcutta riots at Patuakhali, Barisal and elsewhere. According to official reports, between 1922 and 1927 there were 112 communal riots involving 450 deaths and injuries to 5,000. There were two standard points. For the immersion of Durga idols on the occasion of Durgapuja, Hindu processions would insist on playing music near mosques where the Muslims would object to being disturbed while praying. Or during Bakr-Id, Muslims would make it a point to kill cows in the open, thereby hurting religious sentiments of orthodox Hindus. Incidents such as these, aided by agents provocateurs, would lead to ugly communal disturbances negating the efforts of so many right-thinking people among both the communities who would have liked to see them living as friends. As always happens, antisocial elements would invariably take advantage of the situation to engage in widespread looting and destruction of property. Why the Durjapuja processionists could not be advised to avoid routes where mosques stood, or at least agree to stop playing music while passing by mosques, and why the Muslims had to perform cow slaughter in the open, and not in secluded places, has never been understood. We can quote a wise observation from the *Oxford History of India* that remains valid even today. 'The incident deserves notice because it is a good illustration of the way in which the unexpected happens

in India, and the facility with which an ordinary complaint against the administration can be used to excite a fanatical outburst of religious enthusiasm.’¹¹ Dhaka city for years became prone to such recurring bouts of communal violence following a set pattern.

Thus the collapse of the Khilafat movement around 1924 was followed by disunity among Muslims, the consolidation of communalist forces to fill the vacuum, growing estrangement between Muslims and Hindus of Bengal in spite of the presence of so many right-thinking elements among them both and a new awareness among Bengalee Muslim leaders of their importance as a political force. The disappearance of Chittaranjan created a void in Bengal which could not be filled. The euphoria created by Das lasted for some time. But Hindu–Muslim differences surfaced soon thereafter. Some of the Muslims found new pastures in the Muslim League, till then viewed by them as a party of the propertied classes and, therefore, with marginal influence. Unfortunately, the one politician who could have kept some of the Hindus and Muslims together, Subhas Bose, was kept out of the scene during long periods of detention at home or at Mandalay or in exile in Europe.

Agni Yug, Second Phase

While the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League were vying with each other in showing loyalty to the British Raj during the war, the Bengal revolutionaries carried on relentless underground efforts to destabilize colonial rule. In spite of repression, en masse deportation of terrorists to Andaman, punitive tax on villages and executions, the revolutionary agitation continued in Bengal spurred by the fiery writings in *Sandhya*, *Jugantar* and *Bande Mataram*—the trio of newspapers that systematically preached the path of violence. They believed in taking advantage of the Empire's critical situation to achieve the Indian goal of self-rule. The Bengal revolutionaries, after achieving their original objective of undoing partition, had moved to a bigger objective of securing the country's freedom through armed action. With this end in view secret activities continued, culminating in the murder and shooting of British officials and Bengalee officers, who were notoriously repressive, police officers or police informers and renegades among the terrorists. The swadeshi dacoities also continued unabated. One of the most sensational cases of murder was that of Basanta Chatterjee, a dutiful and courageous officer of the Intelligence Branch of the police, on the third attempt on him on 19 July 1914 in broad daylight at Chowringhee–Sambhunath Pandit Street crossing. As the *Statesman* editorially commented the next day, 'This murder is the most audacious of the crimes committed by the anarchists in Bengal. For them it is a notable victory, but for the Government it is a matter of great humiliation.' An official report of the Sedition Committee commented that 'causing demoralization of the police force was among the primary and principal objects of the revolutionaries and from this incident it is clear that

they have almost succeeded in that. It also demonstrates that it is impossible to control the situation by the ordinary law and nobody can now deny the need for special laws’.

The outbreak of the First World War had created favourable conditions for the revolutionaries for waging an armed struggle with the help of arms obtained from the Germans. Their rationale was that Britain’s crisis should be exploited to secure independence and that the end justified the means. The Bengal revolutionaries, with the support of Indians who were resident in Germany, established contact with the German government and were assured of supply of both arms and funds. Indian revolutionaries in the USA also promised support. A German ship was to come to the Bay of Bengal and unload its cargo of arms at an undisclosed point in the Sundarbans or on the Orissa coast. The whole scheme of an armed uprising was finalized at a meeting of the revolutionaries at which Jatindranath Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin) presided. There were conflicting reports about the port from which the German ship would sail. Naren Bhattacharya went to Batavia (Djakarta) under an assumed name, C. Martin, to negotiate with the Germans and to receive arms. Bholanath Chatterjee went to Bangkok and Abani Mukherjee to Japan. Bagha Jatin, accompanied by several other revolutionaries, went incognito to Balasore where a business enterprise (Universal Emporium) had already been established by the revolutionaries as a cover. The German ship, *Maverick*, was expected to arrive at Balasore coast with its load of arms. Coinciding with this, the revolutionaries had planned to:

- (i) blow up a number of key railway bridges on the three railway routes branching out from Calcutta, thereby preventing military movement to Bengal from outside;
- (ii) organize a liberation army in East Bengal which would first free East Bengal and then move on to Calcutta; and
- (iii) occupy the armouries in and around Calcutta, and then occupy Fort William.

But the plan proved to be impractical, seriously flawed and foredoomed. The *Maverick* never arrived at the mouth of the Mahanadi. The plan was betrayed to the police. It raided Universal Emporium at Balasore, surprised the revolutionaries’ checkpoint at Kakipad—a jungle at the mouth of the Mahanadi where they were waiting for the ship—and put them to flight.

Jatindranath and four of his comrades went into the jungles near the Buribalam River, were mistaken for dacoits by the villagers and got involved in an encounter with them. On receiving the news, a police party from Calcutta, led by Tegart himself, which had specially gone there in search of the revolutionaries, reached the spot. Bagha Jatin and his comrades barricaded themselves behind an anthill which stood near Buribalam embankment. There was a fierce exchange of fire at the end of which Chittapriya Roychowdhury was dead and Bagha Jatin and Jyotish Pal were seriously injured. Bagha Jatin died in hospital. Naren Dasgupta and Manoranjan Sengupta were sentenced to death and Jyotish who had recovered was sentenced to transportation to Andaman for fourteen years. Thus ended one of the most heroic episodes in the history of the armed revolutionary movement in Bengal. Naren Bhattacharya went to the Soviet Union after the Soviet Revolution and, under a pseudonym, M.N. Roy became an associate of Lenin and a leader of international communism before the rise of Stalin.

But the government's repression also continued apace. The Defence of India Act providing for detention without trial, summary trial and special tribunals, without applying the safeguards of the Indian Evidence Act, and harsh punishments were applied at random against terrorists. The Bengal government took to the practice of detaining about 800 persons of known revolutionary antecedents in remote inaccessible villages far away from their homes where living conditions were unhealthy and medical help was practically non-existent. Many of these detainees were forced to make confessions under torture and hardship. But a large number of them retracted their confessions at the time of their trial and complained of forced confessions through torture. They therefore gave a lie to the statements of the successive governors of Bengal, Carmichael and Ronaldshay, that most of the internees had confessed. Police torture of freedom fighters was rightly compared by Bertrand Russel to the murder of Jews in the gas chambers of the Nazis.¹

But clearly the expectation of all those who had thought that the British, out of gratitude to Indian support in the war, would concede Home Rule or

Dominion status, remained unfulfilled. The British showed no inclination to grant Home Rule before the end of the war. The Home Rule agitation, led by Annie Besant from within the Congress, failed to make any significant mark in Bengal. The moderate–extremist reunion at the Lucknow Congress (1915), expecting favourable British response, came to naught. Montagu’s declaration on 20 August 1917 that the government policy was to establish responsible government in the country by gradual association of Indians with the administration as early as possible fell far short of the expectations. India was now getting ready for a new phase of agitation against the British Raj. A new leader of the Congress, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, was now entering the centre stage.

ADVENT OF GANDHI IN INDIAN POLITICS

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, born 2 October 1869 at Porbandar in Gujarat, was trained as a barrister in London and started his practice in South Africa. It was the naked oppression by the whites of the blacks and the Indians under the garb of ‘apartheid’ which drove him to political agitation on non-violent lines. Gradually, he tried to perfect the strategy of satyagraha, or passive resistance, which was to become an important means of non-violent struggle against the British in later years. In simple language, satyagraha means unarmed resistance to any form of injustice. It has a lofty moral standpoint involving truth and love and is aimed at arousing the conscience or ‘inner voice’ as Gandhi preferred to call it, in the tyrannical opponent. He set up a centre of his own—the Phoenix Farm near Durban—where Indian satyagrahis were trained to resist racial discrimination and oppression. During the First World War, Gandhi came to India and helped the British Raj recruit soldiers. After the war, on his return to India finally from South Africa, he experimented with satyagraha at Kheda in Gujarat (against the oppressive rents on land) and at Champaran in Bihar (against the oppression of the indigo planters). In between, he spent some time at Santiniketan on Rabindranath’s invitation. They struck an instant rapport, Gandhi calling Tagore ‘Gurudev’, and Tagore calling Gandhi ‘Mahatma’, adjectives that secured national recognition straightaway. Thereafter, he

plunged himself into the Congress movement in the wake of dissatisfaction over the Rowlatt Act and the disappointment over inadequate reforms, starting without any power base, but becoming within a year the undisputed leader of the Indian freedom movement.

ARMED REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT: LAST PHASE (1920–35)

After 1919, the revolutionary terrorists decided to operate under the broad umbrella of the Congress while keeping the underground cells active. This was partly in response to C.R. Das's appeal to them and partly it arose out of a growing conviction among the revolutionaries that 'a handful of determined terrorists could never win swaraj for India unless they had support of the masses of the populace'. Outwardly they were Congressmen, but in their heart of hearts they aspired to overthrow the British rule through armed movements. Their involvement with the non-cooperation movement convinced them as Gopal Haldar—a member of the Jugantar and subsequently a leading communist intellectual—notes that a movement involving the people could be a strong movement if it was properly organized. As the 1920s wore on they got in touch with revolutionaries of UP and Punjab. The result was the formation of the Revolutionary Republican Party, subsequently named the Hindustan Republican Association, under the leadership of Jogesh Chatterjee, originally from Anusilan Samiti of Bengal. They took part in the Kakori conspiracy. Jatindranath Das fasted for sixty-three days to death in Lahore Jail in 1929 and Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru went to the gallows in 1931. Chandrashekhar Azad was killed in fighting. By 1928, some of the Bengalee revolutionary leaders were released but, as in the past, they rallied round Subhas Bose as members of the Congress while secretly carrying on their revolutionary activities. The Anusilan and Jugantar groups had entered into an alliance while in jail. It ended in 1929 amidst a lot of mutual recrimination. It was also during the 1920s that a section of the revolutionaries, in quest of an appropriate ideology, was drawn to Moscow-based international communism.² Among the Moscow-returned communist

revolutionaries were M.N. Roy, the most famous of them, Nalini Gupta and Abani Mukherjee, who influenced people like Gopen Chakravorty and Jatin Mitra. The foundation of the Workers and Peasants Party (WPP) in 1926, attracting both Anusilan and Jugantar workers, was a landmark. The party proposed various demands for workers on the Western trade union model and led the jute workers' strike of 1928–29 under the banner of the Bengal Jute Workers Association. It also turned its attention to the demands of the peasantry, but appeared to be overshadowed not only by Fazlul Huq's Krishak Samiti, but also the communist affiliate, the Kishan Sabha, inaugurated at the Lucknow Congress of 1936. But the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha, despite its revolutionary slogan for complete freedom from exploitation and spreading its roots to a number of East Bengal districts like Mymensingh, Tippera and Pabna, could never be as strong as the WPP and was thus not a decisive political force in Bengal politics.

Thus the terrorists saw a sea change in Bengal politics with the emergence of new actors and groups, and the reorientation of existing actors and groups into communal politics. Slowly but surely, a communalization of attitudes among both Hindus and Muslims was under way. For the north and East Bengal Muslim peasantry, the Hindu zamindar was a bugbear, and the anti-zamindar attitude invariably expressed itself in anti-Hindu terms. For the Hindu professional classes and government employees the growing quota for Muslims in government jobs was perceived as a threat, and it invariably acquired an anti-Muslim overtone. On the other hand, in West Bengal, the imposition of new taxes through the newly established union boards and local boards made the peasants look upon the British administration as the villain. So the situation became far more complex. The Bengal Congress was as usual divided into a number of groups with different ideological commitments. The Muslims by forming a separate political organization simultaneously weakened the anti-British struggle and strengthened the separatist tendencies which were soon to be consolidated in the demand for a Muslim homeland.

We have said that a large number of armed revolutionaries gave up violence and joined the Congress movement around 1920. Some of them,

while in detention, came under the influence of the teachings of Marx and Lenin. But an undercurrent of terrorists remained throughout with links with some of their erstwhile comrades now turned politicians, and even with some Congress leaders. They went on collecting arms and bombs, hitting targets wherever available and waiting for an opportunity when it would be possible to launch an armed uprising in conjunction with the Congress-led freedom movement in the open. In 1925 the police raided one house at Dakshineswar and one at 4 Sovabazar Street and seized large quantity of bomb-making materials, guns, revolvers, cartridges and a lot of revolutionary literature. Another house was the temporary shelter of Surya Sen (Master-da) who was to attain fame in the Chittagong Armoury Raid. But he was alerted just before the raid and could give a slip to the police. In 1926 the police conducted similar raids at Salkia and Domjur in Howrah, Sukea Street in Calcutta and Deoghar in Bihar. The Bengal revolutionaries also got in touch with revolution-minded people in other provinces and gave them the know-how to make bombs and launch violent attacks on selected targets. In fact, Bengalees became a subject of keen interest for the police intelligence everywhere in the subcontinent. One of the most daredevil acts was the throwing of bombs by Batukeshwar Datta and Bhagat Singh inside the Central Legislative Assembly from the visitors' gallery on 2 April 1929 simply to proclaim that the people did not have faith in the puppet show that was going on in the name of a legislature. After a lapse of several years there were a number of dacoities between 1923 and 1930, some of them outside Bengal, the most sensational of these being the dacoity on a train at Kakori railway station near Lucknow. The Kakori Conspiracy Case involving a large number of Bengalees started in 1925 and dragged on for several years. Simultaneously, the terrorists systematically made attempts on the lives of officials who treated the terrorists in inhuman fashion, or on spies or informers.

Some of the more sensational murders were those of IB chief Lohman by Benoy Bose and two others at Dhaka (29 August 1930) and of Simpson, IG (Prisons) inside Writers' Building, Calcutta, by Benoy Bose, Badal Gupta and Dinesh Gupta (8 December 1930)—with Badal taking his life with

poison, Benoy being seriously injured in trying to shoot himself and dying in a few days, and Dinesh being sent to the gallows after recovery in July 1935. Then there were the murders of three successive British district magistrates in Midnapore—Peddy, while opening an exhibition at the Collegiate School (1931); Douglas, shot dead while presiding over a district board meeting (1932); and Burge, fatally shot while playing football (1933). Other murders were those of Garlich, sessions judge, at Alipore, who had sentenced Dinesh to death, by Kanailal Bhattacharya, a school student (1931); of Stevens, district magistrate of Comilla by two schoolgirls, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury (1931); the murder of Kamakshya Sen, a sub-deputy collector at Dhaka (1932); and that of Asanullah, deputy superintendent of police, Faridpur, who was responsible for repression and persecution of a large number of revolutionaries in the Chittagong Armoury Raid (1931). There were many abortive attempts as well. These included Gopimohan Saha killing one Ernest Day, mistaking him for the notorious Charles Tegart (1924); the attempt on A. Cassels, commissioner of Dhaka division at Tangail (1931); the attempt on Villiers, president of the Indian Tea Association by Bimal Dasgupta (1931); the attempt on Jackson, governor of Bengal, while speaking at Calcutta University's convocation as chancellor in the Senate Hall by Bina Das (1932); the attempt on Alfred Watson, the editor of the *Statesman* of Calcutta (1932); the attempt on the SP, Chittagong, at the European Club, Chittagong; and last but not the least, the sensational attempt on Sir John Anderson, governor of Bengal, at Lebong race course at Darjeeling by young Ujjala Majumdar on 8 May 1934.³

These sporadic incidents did create a general feeling of admiration for the revolutionaries among common people, and consternation in white official circles. Nearly three-fourths of the long list of brave names written on the walls of the Cellular Jail in the Andamans are Bengalee names, and an official circular of those times is on display warning the jail staff not to allow prisoners to mix with any Bengalee. In his memoirs Sir Percival Griffiths, a distinguished ICS officer, records how on an early morning when he was on duty to witness the hanging of two young revolutionaries,

as the young men were being led to the gallows, one of them greeted him saying: 'Thank you Sir for giving me this opportunity to die for my country.' This was a perfect example of a certain Bengalee–British love–hate relationship that was present all along. Percival writes that he was totally shattered.⁴

This is an appropriate occasion to refer to the killings in the notorious Hijli Camp. A number of suspected revolutionaries were kept confined in this camp in the district of Midnapore. There were occasional quarrels between them and their guards. There was such an incident on 16 September 1931. At about nine that night a party of policemen, guards and warders numbering at least fifty, attacked the prisoners with lathis, guns and bayonets and assaulted them and fired at least a hundred rounds on them. Two of the prisoners were killed and at least twenty were injured. The Hijli jail murders attracted general condemnation in the country and were remembered for many years.

CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID

The last recorded direct encounter between the British Raj and the Bengal terrorists and one of the greatest events of terrorist violence was the sensational Chittagong Armoury Raid (1930–34). In a way, it was a kind of quixotic attempt by a group of firebrand armed terrorists to give a big jolt to the British Raj by capturing the government armoury at Chittagong and all other key government installations, free those areas from British rule and keep them free for some time, thereby sending a message to the other parts of the British Empire. The story goes back to the 1928 session of the Congress in Calcutta where a large volunteer corps gathered under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. Many of them were revolutionaries who had been released from detention recently. About 2,500 young men joined the corps and received a rudimentary military training. The members of this corps styled themselves as Bengal Volunteers. After the Congress session they dispersed all over Bengal. Some of them like Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Lokenath Bal went to Chittagong and came under the

leadership of Surya Sen, a teacher popularly called Master-da, a firebrand revolutionary who believed in wrecking the foundation of the British Raj through armed revolution. Soon, under his leadership, a group was formed which called itself the Indian Republican Army (1930). They gathered bombs, arms and ammunition and also a fund of half-lakh rupees. This group decided on a daredevil attack on the British rulers that would include the following steps:

1. The government armoury at Chittagong would be attacked at 10 p.m. on 18 April, Good Friday. This day was chosen because it commemorated the bloody Easter Revolution of the Irish Republican Army several years ago.
2. Surya Sen was to be the supreme commander of the fighting group.
3. There was to be a War Council consisting of Nirmal Sen, Lokenath Bal, Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Ambika Chakraborty and Upen Bhattacharya.
4. There would be several groups charged with separate tasks. The group that would attack the police armoury would be led by Ananta Singh and Ganesh Ghosh. At the same time, another group consisting of Nirmal Sen and Lokenath Bal would attack the railway armoury. A third group led by Ambika Chakraborty would attack the telephone and telegraph exchange. The fourth group under the leadership of Naresh Roy and Triguna Sen would attack the European Club and kill the Europeans there to avenge the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
5. There would be a reserve group of thirty who would wait near the police armoury and would come to the support of the other groups, if needed.
6. All the groups would meet Master-da after accomplishing their tasks and decide on the further course of action.

There is no doubt that the immediate objectives of the revolutionaries, as outlined above, were on the whole secured with comparative ease. The first group occupied the police armoury situated on a hillock after shooting the sentries dead. The other policemen ran away, whereupon the leader of the group, Surya Sen, ordered the Union Jack to be burnt and hoisted the Congress tricolour. Immediately thereafter, they were met by the group which had destroyed the telephone exchange. Similarly, the group led by Nirmal Sen and Lokenath Bal could also capture the railway armoury after shooting down the British sergeant who was on guard. This group also appeared before Surya Sen and reported success in its mission, but the group that had gone to attack the European Club and to kill the Britishers could not accomplish its mission. Apparently, when they went to the club

and entered into the hall, the hall was found empty, as all the members had left before 9 p.m. Surya Sen replied, 'Don't bother, Chittagong town is in our control, we shall be avenged.' Surya Sen, as the leader, then issued the following proclamation in the name of 'Revolutionary Republican Government'.

Dear Revolutionary Soldiers! The heavy responsibility of the Indian revolution now rests on the revolutionary army. Inspired by patriotism we have earned the glory of completing in Chittagong the revolutionary mission of fulfilling the ambition and heart-felt longing of our countrymen.

It is a matter of great pride for us that our army has occupied the centres of British power in Chittagong. The enemy's armouries are in our hands. The telephone exchange is destroyed, telegraphic contact with outside has been snapped and railway lines have been uprooted. The enemy forces have been defeated, the oppressive foreign government has been wiped out of existence. The national flag is flying about and it is our duty to keep it flying at the cost of our life and blood.

I, Surya Sen, president of the Chittagong Sector of the Indian Republican Army, do hereby declare that the present Council of the Republican Army of Chittagong converts itself into a Provisional Revolutionary Government and issues the following directives:

1. Resistance will have to be built up to ensure the victory that has been won today.
2. The armed struggle for India's freedom will have to be strengthened and extended.
3. The internal enemies will have to be suppressed.
4. The antisocial elements and looters will have to be kept in check.
5. All directions of the Provisional Revolutionary Government will have to be obeyed.

This government expects and claims active cooperation and total obedience from every true young man and woman of Chittagong.

But very soon the government forces regrouped, brought machine guns and opened fire on the offices under the revolutionaries' control. It was here that the revolutionaries were found without any well-conceived strategy. Realizing that the enemy attack from all round would begin, the revolutionaries withdrew to several hillocks in the vicinity of the town and sought to defend themselves there. One such outpost was on the Jalalabad Hill. It was here that, on the fourth day after the uprising (22 April 1930), the most important battle of the entire series was fought. The government troops surrounded Jalalabad Hill from all sides and opened merciless machine-gun fire on the revolutionaries, many of whom fell dead one after another. Eventually, after nightfall, under the leadership of Surya Sen and

Lokenath Bal, the members dispersed in the darkness of the night in two batches led by Nirmal Sen and Lokenath Bal. After being separated for some time they got together in a village called Noapara. Meanwhile, the government forces reoccupied Chittagong town and the surrounding areas. Around 15,000 Gurkha soldiers from the army were deployed in this area.

The revolutionaries went into hiding in separate groups, some of them even taking refuge in a hideout of the Jugantar organization in Chandernagore. Surya Sen was hiding along with Pritilata Waddedar and several other revolutionaries in a house owned by one Savitri Devi. On 13 June 1932 this house was suddenly surrounded by policemen led by Captain Cameron. Cameron was killed while trying to storm the revolutionaries. The police brought a canon that blasted the house in the morning. When the police went inside they found the dead body of Nirmal Sen, but Master-da along with Pritilata Waddedar gave them a slip and escaped. They went to another village named Katani. On 11 September 1932 a band of revolutionaries led by Pritilata Waddedar staged a second daring attack on the European Club at 10 p.m. There was fierce exchange of fire in which some lives were lost on both sides. An armoured military vehicle rushed in. Pritilata was injured and, unable to run away with her compatriots, she took her own life by swallowing potassium cyanide. The name of this woman revolutionary martyr is given an honoured place in the roll of honours of Bengal's revolutionaries against colonial rule. Other women rebels who are remembered are Kalpana Datta and Manikuntala Sen. Surya Sen was arrested from a house in a village called Gajrala on 2 February 1933. He was tried and sent to the gallows on 13 January 1934. Isolated incidents continued to occur at a number of places as and when other revolutionaries tried to stage an incident or when the police surprised some of them in their hideouts and attempted to capture them. The last such incident occurred on 7 January 1934 when, in protest against the death sentence on Surya Sen, four revolutionaries opened fire on a group of Englishmen playing cricket in the Nizam Paltan field. Two of them were killed and the other two, after their capture, were sentenced to death. Many of the revolutionaries, after

their capture, were sent to the Andaman Island prison to serve long prison terms.

The revolt of Chittagong in 1930 somehow or other captured the imagination of a whole generation of Bengalees. On an impartial assessment, the entire incident must be viewed as foolhardy. It was too much for the revolutionaries to expect that the British Empire would be toppled only by their capturing some landmarks in Chittagong town. There is no evidence of planning for a sustained struggle after the first three to four days, or of the Chittagong rebels establishing links with freedom fighters elsewhere.

Ganesh Ghosh, one of the revolutionaries who lived for a long time and became a Communist Party member of the Indian parliament, justified the exercise in the following observation:

The situation in India at the end of the third decade of this century was disturbing to a degree; the masses were gradually getting more and more restless and agitated. The general demand was for an open conflict with imperialism without delay. It is in the background of this assessment of the Indian situation that the revolutionaries of Chittagong had started the armed revolution on 18 April [1930]. The principal object of this mission was to immobilize the administration by a sudden unexpected attack, to grab political power even though for a short time, to proclaim the constitution of an independent military government and to fight to the last for upholding it and ultimately to sacrifice their lives in the endeavour. The revolutionaries knew and realized perfectly well that it would not be possible to keep the provisional government functioning and they also knew that an armed conflict aiming at maintaining that government could only end in annihilation but still they prepared themselves to that end. Death was the sure goal and the programme that the revolutionaries of Chittagong chalked out for attainment of freedom through an armed revolution was referred to by them as 'the programme of death'.

The Chittagong revolutionaries took to armed revolution and 'the programme of death' in the then prevailing circumstances with the sole object of setting up before their countrymen a possible and attainable ideal. Temporary emancipation of a particular area from the clutches of imperialism could surely not mean freedom for the country. But the not meanmean freedom for the country. But the revolutionaries hoped that one heroic incident at one place would inspire the youth of the country or a

sizeable section of it to emulate the action and lead them to the path of revolution.

The Chittagong revolutionaries were certainly successful in their limited objective of stirring the imagination of a generation of people of India with their courage, daredevilry and sacrifice. But how far they succeeded in making a perceptible dent in the structure of the British Empire remains a question mark. After the Chittagong Armoury Raid many of the revolutionaries were once again imprisoned or sent to Port Blair from where they were released only around 1937–38. By 1938 Jugantar was formally dissolved and its workers joined the Congress under the leadership of Surendra Mohan Ghosh. The Anusilan cadres by and large constituted themselves into the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Many of them, while in Andaman, felt attracted to Marxism and joined the nascent Communist Party generally operating as a part of the Congress Socialist Party under the umbrella of the Congress.

In summing up one cannot do better than quoting the following assessment of Gopal Halder:

Looking back one must admit that revolutionary terrorism as a source of action full of daring and danger was no casual phenomenon nor futile attempt [due] to blind hatred. The best elements of the country subscribed to this course for thirty long years. It was not, as was held by some officials, due to ‘unemployment’ of the educated *bhadraloks*, nor, as was pointed out by more subtle researchers, due to some psychological maladjustment of the youthful individuals that would yield psycho-analytic therapy. In fact, like the Indian struggle for freedom of which it was a part and parcel, revolutionary terrorism was an expression of the national situation and also of its unresolved social and religious contradictions. No doubt during the thirty years of its life (1903–34), it failed at every phase to attain its end. But so failed the Indian nationalist movement itself during all the years—in 1905, in 1921–22, in 1930–33, and in 1942. Repression had won outwardly every time; but terrorism also emerged out of every such period of repression a stronger force with a bigger moral and popular appeal—until it found that the real objects of the revolutionary movement had been gained one after another, for example, acceptance of complete independence as the goal of the Indian nation in 1930, creation of the condition for a revolutionary movement in 1935, and finally, defection of the Indian forces in 1945–46 that had been visualized in 1914.

It must be said that revolutionary terrorism had failed in only one vital matter. It could not enlist active Muslim support. It failed to resolve the religio-social conflicts of the Indian life and the Bengali life as a part of it, and to evoke courage, patriotism and dynamism of our Muslim countrymen in the cause of freedom. That of course is the

failure it shared with Indian nationalism as a whole; and it is a failure, the roots of which lay deep in our past. Apart from this, revolutionary terrorism succeeded in what it intended to do—evoking the maximum sacrifice of a chosen few [due to] the ‘spirit of minimum sacrifice on the part of the many’. And the heritage it has left is in the main rich and noble. It is the call for living a dedicated life—self-sacrifice for national freedom, spirit of service for the needy and the poor, and regard for certain fundamental moral values—courage and discipline and devotion to duty, a seriousness in outlook, and a healthy scorn for publicity and political exhibitionism.⁵

ALL-INDIA POLITICS AND SIMON COMMISSION

Meanwhile, the appointment in 1927 of the all-white Simon Commission, without a single Indian member, to recommend changes in the 1919 constitution, was opposed by Bengal along with the rest of India. Black-flag protest processions were taken out all over Bengal. The firebrand poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam, led the procession at Comilla. A second landmark of this period was the Nehru Report (1928) prepared by a committee headed by Motilal Nehru, including Jinnah as a member. It demanded immediate transfer of power to Indians. This report was opposed by both the Muslim Congress leaders like Maulana Mohammad Ali and certain Hindu leaders. Jinnah failed in his effort to strike a balance. This led to his final parting of ways with the Congress. There was growing divergence of opinion between the Congress old guard led by Gandhi and the younger elements led by Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru who pressed for nothing short of complete independence. At the Calcutta Congress (1928) Gandhi moved a compromise resolution, giving an ultimatum to the British authority to grant Dominion status by 31 December 1930, failing which the Congress would resort to non-violent non-cooperation movement. The followers of Subhas felt it far too moderate. Gandhi threatened to leave the Congress if the party did not endorse his views. The resolution was passed by a majority of 1,350 to 973, although many called Gandhi’s action an emotional blackmail. The narrow majority indicated that the Subhas group had substantially increased their strength. At this Calcutta session Subhas Bose also created history by appearing in military uniform as the General Officer Commanding of the Congress Volunteer Force—a foretaste of the Azad Hind Fauj to be formed fifteen years later.

Political extremism kept surging up from 1929, spurred by the death of Jatin Das, a leading revolutionary, in Lahore jail on 16 September 1929 after fasting for sixty-three days. The Congress's Lahore Resolution for full independence (1929) was a landmark. Despite the persistence of strong differences between Gandhi-led moderates and Subhas-led extremists, the Congress adopted a resolution for civil disobedience in 1930 and for resignation from state councils. Gandhi himself launched the civil disobedience movement by marching with some followers to Dandi on Gujarat coast and defying the Salt Law by making salt from seawater. This electrified the whole of British India. In line with the rest of the country, Bengal also formally joined the civil disobedience movement although factional fights kept the Bengal Congress hopelessly divided. A no-tax-payment campaign was undertaken in Midnapore district. In Contai town, twenty-five persons received injuries when the police fired. At a village, Pichabani, near Contai, the police opened fire on a crowd of women satyagrahis breaking the law. There was police firing at Tamluk, Barisal and many other places. Colleges became special targets of police action. Bengal accounted for the largest number of freedom fighters sent to jail. Even inside the jails, satyagrahis (including a person of Subhas's stature) were subjected to cruelty.

Between 1929 and 1932 the British government held three Round Table Conferences in London in order to break the impasse but there was no solution. Governor General Irwin's direct negotiations with Gandhi led to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (4 March 1931) under which the Congress was to withdraw the civil disobedience movement in return for responsible self-government to be granted to the Indians, except for defence, external affairs, finance and the interest of the minorities. Gandhians in the Congress claimed the pact as his victory, but his opponents called it a sellout. The Calcutta Congress (1931) approved it, although Subhas Bose and his followers bitterly opposed it. Meanwhile, apart from the communal issue, the issue of justice to the Depressed Classes among the Hindus, led by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, was also becoming a major issue. British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald gave an Award (17 August 1932) in favour of separate

electorate for the untouchables. This was opposed by the Congress. Once again, the Congress returned to civil disobedience and the government to repression. On 20 September 1932, Gandhi in imprisonment undertook a fast unto death. Saving Gandhi's life became the main concern and all other concerns receded to the background. Dr B.R. Ambedkar seized this opportunity to extract his terms. The result was the Poona Pact between Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar (25 September 1932). Gandhi broke his fast on 26 September 1932 although it became clear that he had yielded much more ground in the Poona Pact than what he had done in the MacDonald Award. The caste Hindus had to swallow a bitter pill, atoning for the sins of their forefathers. The civil disobedience movement, still running on paper, had already become a big joke. Also, there was a strong realization among many Congressmen that the policy of boycotting legislative councils was proving counterproductive. A conference of leaders like Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, Dr Ansari and Bhulabhai Desai met in Delhi from 30 March to 2 April 1934 and decided to revive the Swarajya Party, and to contest the forthcoming general elections as Congressmen. This received Gandhi's somewhat reluctant consent at another conclave at Ranchi. As a reciprocal gesture, the government removed the ban on the Congress and the Congress announced withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement on 20 May 1934. Gandhi announced his retirement from the Congress. The left wing led by Subhas Bose was clearly on the upswing.

Unmaking of a Nation

The promise for united action against foreign rule, seen during the period from 1914 to 1925, was belied during the decade from 1926 to 1935 and thereafter. After C.R. Das there was none who could retain the general loyalty of both the communities. Muslim separatism now started asserting itself and staking its claim to political power. Both Fazlul Huq's KPP and the Muslim League, already conscious of the demographic preponderance of the Muslims over Hindus, started systematically to stake claims to all institutions of patronage, power and influence, hitherto the preserve of Hindus. They adopted policies and programmes to counteract Hindu bhadralok control of these institutions and in other walks of life.

This process of communal polarization was facilitated by the opposition of the Hindu members, including the Swarajyists, to the passing of the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill in 1928 in the Bengal Legislative Council, thereby showing their support for the interest of the zamindars rather than the interest of the prajas. This was also the time of the emergence of the powerful praja movement among the Bengalee Muslims, disillusioned with both the non-Bengalee Muslims and with the Bengalee bhadralok Hindus. On 1 July 1929, Bengal Muslim Council Association was formed with all the Muslim members of the legislative council, with the option of the members to join or stay in other organizations. While some leaders like H.S. Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin favoured a purely Muslim organization, Fazlul Huq, Tamijuddin Khan and some others favoured a non-communal organization. On a motion of Huq, the supporters of a non-communal organization now formed the Council Praja Party (later Bengal Praja Party) to work, among other things, for 'safeguarding the interests of tenants and labouring classes of the province'. Huq was elected leader of

the Council Praja Party. Soon the Council Praja Party broadened into the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti (late 1929), and the latter turned into the Krishak Praja Party in 1936. Incidentally, the praja movement, from its beginning, included representatives from both East Bengal and West Bengal. Also, it operated on non-communal lines and basically against economic oppression.

It is noteworthy that parallel to the praja movement, there was all along another movement among Muslims in Bengal, primarily of non-Bengalee Muslims, who were harping on the slogan of 'Islam in danger' and who aimed at consolidating only the Muslims. Although it had some Bengalee elements in it, it was primarily non-Bengalee and also allied itself to Muslim organizations outside Bengal. The focus of non-praja Muslims in Bengal was the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) not affiliated to the All-India Muslim League (AIML). The issue of direct conflict between the BPML and AIML was whether representation of the Bengalee Muslims in the provincial legislature should be on the basis of the Lucknow Pact, or on the basis of joint electorate with reservation of seats fixed in proportion to the population in the Muslim-majority provinces, or on the basis of separate electorates altogether. While the BPML, following the League leaders and keeping in mind the interest of Muslims in the Muslim-minority provinces, favoured conditional acceptance of joint electorate without reservation of seats, Fazlul Huq and many others felt that this would not serve the interest of the backward Muslim community. The differences between the League and the BPML became wider and wider from 1929 onwards. No delegate was present from Bengal at the Allahabad session of the League held in December 1930. The BPML continued to disown AIML, and even offered support to the Krishak Praja Party in the 1937 Assembly elections until a new provincial branch of AIML was established in 1937.

As the decade of the 1930s wore on, separatist politics became increasingly confrontationist. The politically dominant Hindus had ridden roughshod over the genuine Muslim attempt at an acceptable communal adjustment in the 1920s. It was now the turn of the Muslims to do the same unto the Hindus. The Muslims were now fully conscious of their newly

acquired political power as a result of a series of constitutional changes. The growing confrontation brought, in the 1940s, a great communal divide from which there was no turning back. The communal riots in Calcutta in 1926, on a scale unknown in the past, gave the first signal that all was not well in the delicate communal relations in Bengal. There were repercussions at Barisal and a few other places. Politics tended to be dominated increasingly by communal issues. It was in 1927 that the British rulers, for the first time, gave official recognition to the dominance of Muslims in Bengal and the corresponding end of the bhadralok dominance. Legislative politics, till then the preserve of the Hindu bhadralok, slowly but surely passed under Muslim dominance. There were now five distinct groups: a Muslim upper-class group, of which Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy were the two main leaders; the Muslim peasantry and professional classes of which Fazlul Huq was the undisputed leader; the Congress-centred Hindu bhadralok, dominated by the so-called 'big five' of Bengal Congress politics (Sarat Bose, Bidhan Roy, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Tulsi Goswami and Nirmal Chandra Chunder); a powerful and vocal non-Congress Hindu zamindari class; and, last, the Scheduled Castes led by Jogendra Nath Mandal. These five broad groups were to attempt different permutations and combinations in legislative politics for the two decades before 1947, more often than not under the manipulative role of British officialdom. The third legislative council (1927–30) started with Sir Abdur Rahim being appointed chief minister on condition that he would select a Hindu member. As he was unable to do so and thus resigned, the governor appointed Byomkesh Chakravarty and A.H. Guznavi. But they lost the confidence vote and resigned. In October 1927 Nawab Mosharraf Hossain and Prabhas Chandra Mitra were appointed. Some time later, the Raja of Nasirpur replaced Prabhas Chandra Mitra who had become a member of the governor's Executive Council.

TRANSFER OF POLITICAL POWER TO MUSLIMS

In a way, the formal Hindu domination of the politics of Bengal ended around 1927. Since then, each successive ministry was headed by a Muslim

politician who received the combined support of the elected Muslim MLAs, the Scheduled Castes Federation MLAs, the European MLAs and the nominated official members. Thanks to the Congress policy of systematically sending Congressmen into the legislature only for the purpose of wrecking the diarchal constitution, Muslim leaders in Muslim-majority provinces received complete support from the government and developed a vested interest in separatism. This also paved the way towards Partition.¹ Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award of 1932, reducing the upper-caste Hindus to a minority position in the legislature, had also dealt a body blow to the power of the bhadralok. The Ramsay MacDonald Award had provided Bengal Muslims with 48.4 per cent seats in the Assembly as against their population of around 55 per cent. The Hindus were given 39.2 per cent of the seats while they constituted 43 per cent of the population. This was vigorously opposed by the Hindus of Bengal. The newly formed Hindu Mahasabha accused the Congress of betraying the interests of the Hindus.² Interestingly, some Muslim leaders like Akram Khan and the BPML also opposed it and moved a resolution in the Bengal Legislative Council that reservation of seats for the majority community in Bengal was a betrayal of their own interests. But the larger body of Muslims, including Fazlul Huq, welcomed it as a 'distinct advance'.

The composition of political parties in the third Legislative Assembly was confusing. Most of the Muslim Swarajyists led by H.S. Suhrawardy had parted company with their Hindu compatriots and demanded Muslim majority in the legislative council in proportion to their strength, and also separate electorate for them. The once-strong Khilafat group was slowly disappearing. The Muslim League was as yet inconsequential in Bengal. The most influential party among Muslims, especially East Bengal Muslims, was Fazlul Huq's KPP, nominally secular, but with strong Muslim orientation, dedicated to protecting farmers and ryots from exploitation and ameliorating their conditions.³

Meanwhile, to meet the challenge of the KPP, some of the Muslim leaders, notably Nawab Khwaja Habibullah, H.S. Suhrawardy and M.A.H.

Ispahani, founded, on 25 May 1936, the United Muslim Party (UMP). Fazlul Huq and his men described the UMP as a 'ministerial party, a zamindar party, formed to mislead the Bengal Muslim community'. Nazimuddin, representing the UMP, retorted that the Praja Party was not a purely Muslim organization. Meanwhile, the AIML, now led by Jinnah, made vigorous efforts to claim support of the Bengal Muslims by bypassing the BPML and inviting some leaders from Bengal directly, once again including non-Bengalee leaders like A.R. Siddiqui, M.A.H. Ispahani and K. Nooruddin. The UMP meanwhile decided to fight the elections on its own rather than on behalf of the AIML. Jinnah now came to Calcutta to discuss with KPP leaders and others further programme for coordination. At the discussion, the KPP demanded: (i) abolition of zamindari system with no compensation, (ii) the right to maintain KPP's separate identity, and (iii) that there will be no nomination from Jinnah. BPML was in full accord with the KPP. The UMP frontally opposed the abolition of zamindari system. No true agreement was possible and the attempted façade of unity collapsed. Fazlul Huq emphatically declared, 'From this day onwards begins a grim fight between zamindars and capitalists on the one side, and the poor people on the other.' He announced the formation of a twenty-five-member Election Board of the KPP, including representatives of the BPML.

In the 1937 elections to the Bengal Assembly there were four main parties, viz., the Bengal Provincial Congress, the KPP, the League Parliamentary Board and the Scheduled Castes Federation. While the KPP made a definite demand for abolition of the Permanent Settlement, neither the Congress nor the League Parliamentary Board made any such commitment. The KPP seemed to be a Muslim party on account of its membership and leadership, but was on paper a secular party. There were only four Hindus in the Election Board of twenty-five members. Fazlul Huq himself stated, 'It is true that, under the constitution, the Praja Party it is a non-communal organization, but for all practical purposes the Praja Party can no more be called a Hindu-Muslim party than the Congress be said to represent the Muslims. We have kept the door open for Hindus to come in, because the problems with which we deal are all of provincial concern

where united action by all sections seems to be essentially necessary. But as facts stand, the Hindus are practically non-existent in the Council of the Praja Party.' As the caste Hindus had a stake in the zamindari system, it is possible that they deliberately kept themselves away from the KPP. But surely there were plenty of Scheduled Castes whose interests differed substantially from those of the caste Hindus, but even they could not be enthused to join the KPP in large numbers. After the elections, the KPP claimed that two of the successful candidates in Scheduled Caste constituencies, viz., Birat Chandra Mandal and Upendra Nath Halder, although officially contesting as independents, were in fact sponsored by that party. The KPP had its strongholds mainly in some of the East Bengal districts, predominantly among the Muslim peasantry, and naturally did not want to undermine its dominant Muslim image by concentrating too much on Hindus, or even on Scheduled Castes. It was rumoured that the Congress backed the KPP against the League Parliamentary Board in many of the Muslim constituencies. The League Board in fact accused the KPP of receiving some funds from the Congress and the Hindus. But this could not have been very significant although it cannot be ruled out altogether. Referring to the epic election battle between Huq and Nazimuddin at Patuakhali and Huq's resounding victory over the zamindars of this area, Governor Anderson hinted that Huq had received substantial financial aid from the Congress. Huq denied that he had been helped by Hindus as such, but admitted that 'in some cases some of my Hindu friends have helped me; but with always entirely personal attachment to me'. Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy was known to have personally contributed to Huq's election funds.⁴

With the Bengal Congress weakened by the no-holds-barred rivalry between J.M. Sengupta and Subhas Bose, and with the Swarajyists boycotting the council from 1929, the Muslim ministers carried the show of managing the 'transferred' departments with the help of the official members, the Muslims and Scheduled Caste members in general, and some upper-class Hindu members including a few liberal Congressmen. The ministers did take some concrete legislative measures in the fields of education, local self-government and settlement of the debt burden of the

peasantry and safeguarding their rights. This third legislative council was indeed a turning point in the history of modern Bengal. It marked the transfer of effective political power in Bengal from upper-caste Hindus to Muslims, aided by Scheduled Castes and a small section of the Hindu aristocracy. Although the slogan for Pakistan and Jinnah's two-nation theory were still far off, there was a gradually emerging divide between Muslim politics and the politics of the Hindu bhadralok in Bengal. There was an inevitable hardening of attitudes on both sides. Nationalism in Bengal was relying more and more on developing a Hindu cultural identity in spite of its claims of being secular. In particular, the terrorist group was unabashedly Hindu. It did not take any steps to attract middle-class Muslims⁵ or even the Hindu lower castes. This Hindu divide was further strengthened by the Gandhi–Irwin Pact (1931) and the Poona Pact (1932) between Gandhi and Ambedkar, which made it clear that the Hindu bhadralok would no longer have the final say in the politics of undivided Bengal. Henceforth, a Muslim Bengalee, and a Muslim Bengalee alone, was likely to be the leader of the government under any constitutional pattern. With Subhas Bose's continued detention and externment abroad, factionalism reared its ugly head in the Congress once again. Some of its members, in protest against the steep reduction of the number of caste Hindu seats in the council, following Gandhi's controversial fast, formed a Bengal Nationalist Party, fought the Congress candidates in the elections to the Central legislative council in 1934 and even defeated them in a number of seats.

The growing Hindu–Muslim divide vitiated the proceedings in the Bengal legislature. On the one hand, there was increasing dominance of politics by Muslim politicians who had majority control in the Assembly by sheer electoral arithmetic. They could demand a larger and larger share of government jobs where Hindus had predominated so far, especially in the upper and middle echelons. This antagonized a section of the Hindus who resented losing their hold. There was also another economic basis. The Muslims were the dominant section among the peasantry and these leaders took it as their mission to improve the lot of the famished peasantry by

enacting new tenancy laws. Once again, this clashed with the economic interests of the Hindu zamindars and other landlords who dominated these sections. This provided a class basis to the Hindu–Muslim divide. All the Muslim politicians by and large followed this pattern whether they were Bengali-speaking leaders from East Bengal like Fazlul Huq, or whether they were Urdu-speaking leaders based in West Bengal, like Suhrawardy, or whether they were scions from old nawab families like Nazimuddin.⁶ Most of them had started in the Congress and drifted away from it after Chittaranjan's passing away. Interestingly, the Muslim League, despite originating in Dhaka, never had a base in East Bengal until the Second World War. Having for at least two decades been subjected to a system where the overwhelming number of new recruits in the executive services of the provincial government, like the Bengal Civil Service, were Muslims, and Hindu candidates, despite their educational superiority, were taken into subordinate services, educated Hindu opinion remained sullen and resentful. Instead of viewing it as an inevitable adjustment with the reality, some of them viewed it as an invidious discrimination. This attitude played no inconsiderable role in their unwillingness to stay with a Muslim majority in a united Bengal during the next decade and in their decision to opt for partition.

During the 1930s the KPP and the Muslim League represented two contrasting ideologies vying for Muslim Bengalee support. The KPP broadly represented tenant and peasant interests while the Muslim League represented the interests of the zamindars and the business communities. The first emphasized secular aspects like economic disparity and zamindari exploitation, while the second traced the root cause to the disadvantages suffered by the Muslims as a religious, underprivileged community, and emphasized that the only way the community could remove the state of deprivation was to act politically with a communal identity. There was a third weak stream consisting mostly of intellectually inclined middle-class Muslims, who believed in establishing a common identity with a common anti-imperialist stand. But this trend was progressively weakened as the decade of the 1930s wore on.

With deteriorating Hindu–Muslim relations, communal riots unknown in the pre-British days became a recurrent feature in some towns in Bengal and continued during the 1930s. It was during these riots that poet Nazrul Islam wrote his inspiring song *Durgamagiri kantara maru dustara parabara he*, asking Hindus and Muslims to unite. This was sung as the opening song at the Provincial Political Conference at Dhaka (1926) as also in the annual conference of the Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samaj. But, by and large, his message was unheeded. The much-talked-about composite culture of Bengal gave way to the political stance of ‘Islam in danger’ accepted by large sections of Bengalee Muslims. The city of Dhaka, for years, fell victim to this almost annual ritual of communal violence following a set pattern where the antisocials of both communities would temporarily take over, and the decent people on both sides would withdraw indoors for a few days. Officialdom stayed inactive, complicating matters.

The manipulation of religious symbols in these riots was a standard occurrence. There was growing distrust of the ‘other community’ which was seen as the enemy in a battle. The true meaning of slogans like *Alla-hu-Akbar* (God is Great) and *Bande Mataram* (Salute to the Motherland) were simply forgotten, making them communal war cries underpinning the mutual separation of the two communities. Day-to-day politics inside the Bengal Assembly and outside became recriminatory. The Muslims criticized the Hindus for utilizing their majority in the Calcutta Corporation to deny to Muslims elective offices like mayor, deputy mayor and alderman. The Muslims in Bengal formally stayed out of the civil disobedience movement. The Hindu bhadralok, already threatened with the loss of its power, further viewed with alarm the Muslim alliance with the *namasudras*, or lower-caste Hindu peasantry, but failed to do anything impressive to win back their support. The Hindu press was bitterly critical of Huq ministry’s agrarian reforms and, later, the efforts to take away secondary education from the control of the traditionally Hindu-controlled Calcutta University by forming a Board of Secondary Education.

Two relevant administrative reports of those times give interesting insights. The Bengal Administrative Report of 1929–30 remarked that

‘Muslims and Hindus tended to range themselves in opposite camps on any contentious question’ and illustrated this by giving the case of the Primary Education Bill, which was turned into a communal issue by the Hindu members in the council. The Dhaka Disturbance Inquiry Committee found political jealousy among the educated classes of the two communities since the inauguration of the ‘first reforms’ as the root cause of all troubles. Each distrusted the other. An interesting case in point was the somewhat irrational Muslim objection to the word *shri* (meaning prosperity) or the symbol of the lotus in the Calcutta University logo.

END OF THE BHADRALOK POLITICAL SUPREMACY

The Government of India Act of 1919 had introduced partial responsible government, enlarged the electorate, but kept 13 per cent of the council seats reserved for nominated officials. The 1935 act enfranchised only around 13.4 per cent of the adult population of Bengal over twenty years of age. Almost anyone paying any tax had the right to vote. Under diarchy, franchise qualifications (cess of one rupee or chowkidari tax of Rs 5 a year for rural areas, and Rs 1.5 a year for urban areas) were such that many Muslims were left without the right to vote. The 1935 act enfranchised about 12.6 per cent for the Assembly. This was just enough to cover the entire Muslim intelligentsia. This act also substantially reduced the property qualifications (six annas of chowkidari tax and eight annas for municipal tax or cess) and the educational qualifications to completion of upper primary course for men and basic literacy for women. This substantially increased Muslim voting power. This, coupled with the decimation of the Hindu bhadralok power after the MacDonald Award of 1932 and the Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar the same year—where Gandhi gave more concessions to the Scheduled Castes than even what the MacDonald Award had given—ensured Muslim domination of politics in Bengal with backing from the Scheduled Castes⁷ and the European members.

Another area of acrimony was control over secondary education by creating through legislation a Secondary Education Board. This was

directly resented by the Hindus. This became the subject matter of a running battle in the Bengal Assembly throughout the period from 1937 to 1946. Despite this, general Hindu–Muslim relations until 1944 were not marked by violence or confrontation except in isolated instances. Many individual Hindus including Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee served in ministries led by Huq and Nazimuddin. Even many Congress leaders were socially on good personal terms with the Muslim leaders. Subhas Bose had a substantial following among Muslims and several well-known Muslim lieutenants like Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chaudhury. Huq's KPP, despite being predominantly Muslim, was essentially a secular party. His personal closeness to the Hindu Mahasabha leader, Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, and the pro-Gandhi Congress leader, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, surpassed all barriers.

THE REFORMS OF 1935

The political deadlock created by the Ramsay MacDonald Award and the Poona Pact ended with the announcement of the Government of India Act, 1935. In many respects the 1935 reforms envisaged a constitutional scheme applicable to an independent country in a not-too-distant future. This act had a 'federal' component and a provincial component. The federal component with a federal government covering the provinces along with the princely states, the federal legislature, the viceroy's Executive Council and the Supreme Court, except the last two, was never implemented on account of the Congress party's strong resentment and the refusal of the majority of the princes to join the federal scheme. But the provincial autonomy that was envisaged was accepted by the Congress in spite of reservations on the veto power vested in the governor. Other parties also followed suit. All parties, therefore, agreed to take part in the elections to the provincial assemblies as also the proposed Central Assembly.

The Government of India Act of 1935, by giving the Muslims 119 seats and the caste Hindus only 50 (30 out of 80 in the Hindu constituency being reserved for Scheduled Castes under the Poona Pact), with 25 European members, once again underscored that Bengal politics would be dominated

in future by Muslims and that the caste Hindus would lose the privileged position they had enjoyed since the beginning of British rule. This was not acceptable to a section of the caste Hindus who refused to cooperate with the Muslim leaders. This further intensified the communal divide. The failure of the Congress leadership in Bengal to win the Scheduled Castes Federation's political support and the latter's steady support to the Muslim League must be considered as a crucial failure of Congress policy.

There can be no doubt that before the mid-1940s, Pakistan was never considered as a serious model by Bengal Muslims. The original Pakistan scheme conceived by Chaudhury Rehmat Ali, a student in Cambridge University in the early 1930s, and blessed by poet Sir Mohammed Iqbal, did not even include Bengal. It was a nebulous concept and was to comprise Punjab, Sind, Kashmir, Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and even Afghanistan. The original blueprint was not even clear about the future of the Hindus and the Sikhs in Punjab, who, taken together, were only a little less than the Muslims in number. Interestingly, the leadership for the Pakistan movement did not come from the mullahs and the orthodox, but from Western-educated, broadly secular-minded Muslim politicians like Jinnah, Liaquat Ali and H.S. Suhrawardy who saw in it an opportunity for controlling political power and economic resources for their community. Nor did the Muslim League gain much ground with the slogan before the early 1940s in those provinces where the Muslims were in the majority and already controlled political power. Rather, it gained unassailable positions in the provinces where the Muslims were in a minority and suffered from a fear of being swamped by the Hindu majority.

True that Fazlul Huq, under political pressure from all sides, joined the League and even moved the so-called Pakistan Resolution in Lahore in 1940, but he never believed in the Pakistan concept and all along stood for a non-communal regime where the rights of the Muslims would be amply safeguarded. In fact, Pakistan meant different things to different people. To the Muslim masses it provided an escape route from Hindu domination and the possibility of realizing a meaningful separate identity. To the Islamic orthodox groups like Khaksars, the concept of Pakistan was a

misapplication and misuse of Islamic principles. For Jinnah, who was a staunch nationalist till 1930 and adopted the Pakistan concept only in 1940, it was an instrument of political and economic power and religion had only a secondary role. For Kamruddin Ahmed, a Bengal Muslim League leader, it was essentially a movement of the Muslim middle class against the Hindu middle class.⁸

The fear of being swamped by the majority Hindu community fanned the flames of desire for Pakistan, especially in those provinces where Muslims were in a minority. Paradoxically, nearly all the provinces which were destined to form Pakistan in 1947, viz., Punjab, Sind and NWFP, were outside Muslim League's domination till as late as 1940. So was Bengal. Ispahani, an industrialist from Calcutta and Muslim League's main financier, noticed an 'almost fanatical determination amongst Muslims not to be dominated by Hindus any longer, for it was impossible to achieve economic emancipation at the hands of the Hindus'.⁹ The resignation of the Congress ministries in seven provinces in 1939 created a vacuum which was exploited by the Muslim League, particularly in provinces like Assam where, in place of a Congress ministry, the Muslim League was allowed to form a contrived coalition by Shadullah. Major political changes also occurred in Punjab, Sind and Bengal. The Unionists in Punjab, a non-communal party led by Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, and the KPP in Bengal under Huq's leadership, were 'coopted into the Muslim League'.¹⁰ This led to the League, confined till then only to the towns, reaching the rural masses. Both Huq and Sikandar Hyat Khan soon got disenchanted. Huq, who never believed in the two-nation theory, refused to resign from the National Defence Council as directed by Jinnah in 1940 and revolted against 'Jinnah's arbitrary use of power'. He even resigned from the Muslim League, protesting against the manner in which the interests of the Muslims in Bengal were being imperilled by Muslim leaders of provinces where the Muslims were in a minority. He also announced that the policy pursued by Muslim League was neither Islamic, nor patriotic and served neither the Muslims nor anybody else.

But Huq's joining the Muslim League in 1938 had given the party in Bengal a respectability it never had, and it rapidly grew in strength at the expense of both the Congress and the KPP. The mantle of 'Deshbandhu' (hitherto with C.R. Das) had passed on to Subhas Bose who was another leader in whom the Muslims had confidence. The fact that Bose had favoured the 1937 offer of Fazlul Huq for a Congress–KPP coalition and that he fought the Calcutta Corporation election under the banner of what was loosely called at that time the Bose–League Pact (1941) illustrate this. Another example was the united movement under Bose's leadership for the removal of the Holwell monument. Significantly, Muslim League leaders like Ispahani and A.R. Siddiqui were close friends of both Jinnah and Subhas Bose. After Subhas Bose's escape from Bengal, Muslims again felt somewhat leaderless. But it was clear that with the formation of the Indian National Army by Subhas Bose in South-east Asia and their invasion of the Indian soil in 1943 and by Subhas's regular radio broadcasts addressed to the Indian people, a great deal of enthusiasm was created even among the Muslims of Bengal, who would have perhaps welcomed Subhas to march into Delhi at the head of a triumphant INA. But after Subhas Bose's final disappearance in 1945 there was no turning back, and most of the Muslims irretrievably jumped into the bandwagon of M.A. Jinnah and the demand for Pakistan. Extremism gained ground on both sides and moderates were sidelined. All efforts at Hindu–Muslim collaboration such as the Huq–Shyama Prasad coalition (1941–43) failed partly on account of intrigues of British officials, and there was steady polarization on communal lines and a parting of ways.¹¹

CRYSTALLIZATION OF THE DISTINCT MUSLIM PSYCHE

By the 1920s there had been the clear emergence of a Muslim middle-class intelligentsia in Bengal, which staked its claim to both political power and job opportunities.¹² It was not a homogeneous group, linguistically, socially or economically. It attracted followers from both the aristocratic *ashraf* and the Muslim ryots and talukdars, although it was not coterminous

with either. Some of them were as critical of Islamic fundamentalism and the mullah activities as of domineering Hindu attitudes and actions. The Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti founded in 1911 by Muzaffar Ahmed among others was the earliest manifestation of this trend. It brought out the *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*. Other examples were *Saogat*, edited by Mohammad Nasiruddin, the monthly *Moslem Bharat*, edited by poet Mozammel Huq, and the evening daily *Nabayug*, of which A.K. Fazlul Huq was the proprietor and Muzaffar Ahmed and the poet Nazrul Islam the joint editors. The eternally rebellious poet Nazrul Islam was connected with nearly all these publications. By far his most famous poem 'Bidrohi' (The Rebel) came out in the Kartik 1328 BS edition of the *Moslem Bharat*. Nazrul maintained close contact with the freedom fighters and on 21 November 1921 led a procession at Comilla, protesting against Prince of Wales Edward's visit. He himself brought out the weekly *Dhumketu* in 1922, which was stridently anti-British. For a poem titled 'Anandamayee Agamane' (On the Arrival of the Blissful Mother) in the Puja edition of this weekly in 1922, he was charged with sedition, went underground, was arrested from Comilla and imprisoned in Hooghly Jail where he went on a hunger strike and was released on 15 December 1923. So great was his appeal that Rabindranath dedicated his play *Basanta* to him and Saratchandra Chatterjee wrote to him, greeting him as one of the greatest poets Bengal had produced. Nazrul Islam carried on his patriotic activities by editing the weekly *Langol* (Plough), the mouthpiece of the Shramik Praja Krishak Group (1925), the *Ganabani* (1933) and *Nabayug* (revived in 1940 with him as editor), and in courting detention a second time in 1930, from which he was released on 4 March after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

The Muslim Sahitya Samaj founded by some Dhaka teachers and intellectuals in January 1926 was also an illustration of this secular national trend. Its organ, *Sikha*, declared significantly: 'Where knowledge is confined and the intellect inactive, emancipation is impossible.' It also declared that it wanted 'a change of direction in the social and intellectual life of the Muslim society'. Some of the leaders of this group were Abdul Wadud, Qazi Mutahar Hussain, Abdul Qadir and Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Humayun Kabir, the intellectual-politician, and Sheikh Wajed Ali, the writer, also joined the group. One of its meetings in 1937 was presided over by Saratchandra Chatterjee, the famous novelist, showing its overall non-communal approach. Along with *Sikha*, another journal that provided sustenance to the newly rising Muslim middle class for years was the monthly *Saogat*. *Saogat* opposed the separate educational stream of madrasas and advocated a common educational stream for both communities ‘in order to establish amity in the body politic’. Abdul Hussain even went to the length of castigating Muslims for obstructing through their folly and wretchedness every good initiative of the progressive Hindus. Many of these intellectuals braved prosecution and social ostracism for their views. Some of them went so far as to form a ‘League against Mullahism’.

A number of other periodicals published from Calcutta and Dhaka such as *Naoroz* (June 1927), *Ganabani* (August 1926) and *Jyoti* (April 1930, editor Abdul Kadir) reflected this new liberal–humanist spirit among Bengalee Muslims, which, unfortunately, became a casualty amidst the rising crescendo of communal bitterness during the 1930s. The middle-class Muslim had placed high hopes on the Congress–League Scheme of 1916 and on Chittaranjan’s Bengal Pact and thereafter on the anti-communal patch-up efforts of Subhas Bose. Bose was a rare bhadralok politician in the post-Das period to earn praise from Muslims. In 1928, in the Bengal Legislative Council, Abdul Karim from Burdwan spoke of the earnest efforts that are being made ‘by my young friend Mr Subhas Chandra Bose, and others of his way of thinking to bring about a relation of amity and cordiality between the two communities’.¹³ Subhas’s continued detention and externment from Bengal frustrated all such efforts. After the death of C.R. Das and the Congress rejection of the Bengal Pact, the Bengalee Muslims were disenchanted with both the Congress and the League. The KPP emerged as the strongest champion of peasant and middle-class rights. Even the Swarajysts bitterly opposed KPP’s proposals during the discussion in the council on the 1928 Tenancy Act. In December 1925 a KPP-sponsored Tenancy Amendment Bill giving occupancy rights to the

ryots was opposed by Hindu interests even at its introduction. These were illustrations of a sharp divergence of class interests.

By the mid-1930s, the KPP and the Muslim League, representing conflicting ideologies, were both vying for Muslim support in Bengal. The first reflected peasant and tenant interests, the second zamindar and business interests. The salaried and professional classes were evenly divided. The Muslim League, essentially a party of the upper-class Muslims, had become virtually a defunct body after 1920, when it was overshadowed by the Khilafat group. It was literally put on the shelf on account of Jinnah's opposition to the Khilafat movement. It was revived in 1934 by Jinnah himself, who had been its staunch opponent earlier, and he took over its leadership under Liaquat Ali's persuasion. A Bengal branch was formed only in 1936 when Jinnah visited Bengal. Its main organizers were two Calcutta-based businessmen, M.A. Ispahani and A.R. Siddiqui. But such were the shifting sands of political loyalty in Bengal that both of them eventually became close allies of Subhas Bose. Soon the League attracted leaders like Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy, both seeking a platform.

The KPP originated from the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti (All Bengal Tenants' Conference) held at Mymensingh in 1934. It was not a Muslim party by definition, but one does not come across any caste Hindu name among its prominent members, although it had a large Scheduled Caste base. The leadership was exclusively Muslim, many of them high-class ashrafs, and the party was mainly concerned with improving the conditions of the Muslims and ensuring equal rights for them. The Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti, with Maulana Akram Khan as its secretary, came up in 1934 following the disappointment of many Muslims with the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1928. Soon there was a distinct cleavage along East Bengal–West Bengal lines. For electing a successor to Sir Abdur Rahim who resigned as president, the delegates from East Bengal supported Fazlul Huq in overwhelming numbers, while the majority of the delegates from West Bengal led by Maulana Akram Khan supported Khan Bahadur Abdul Momen. Another party, Jamait-i-Ulema-i-Hind, also had some peripheral influence. Paradoxically, it had elements who were also to oppose the

demand for Pakistan on the ground that creating a territorial sub-nation was un-Islamic. Its leadership was largely non-Bengalee.

It is difficult to accept Jatindranath De's contention that the KPP primarily reflected the interests of *jotedars* (landlords) and *sampanna prajas* (affluent farmers) and 'did not really launch a composite movement of the lower strata of Hindus and Muslims against exploitation of the zamindars'.¹⁴ His charge that the KPP served only Muslim interests is not supported by facts. There is an overwhelming evidence that it espoused the causes of ryots, both Muslim and Hindu. Also, it had a substantial Scheduled Caste base. It was thus an inter-community party. Fazlul Huq's election as the secretary of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti in 1935, the party renaming itself as the Krishak Praja Party and its open demand for the abolition of zamindari without compensation met with opposition from the landed upper-class Muslim leaders from Calcutta and the western districts, like Akram Khan, Abdur Rahim and H.S. Suhrawardy. They broke away in 1936 to form the United Muslim Party (UMP), which subsequently merged with the Muslim League. It criticized the KPP as not a purely Muslim organization and sought its identity only among Muslims in order to serve its own class interests.

As analysed by Tazeen Murshid, 'lack of consistency, or a certain ambivalence regarding their political destiny and ideological outlook characterised ... the majority of the intelligentsia in the pre-Partition period'.¹⁵ Leaders like Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Maulana Akram Khan were all, in varying degree, victims of this ambivalence. It also affected their attitudes towards British rule, the Congress and the Muslim League, on the concept of Pakistan and the idea of a united Bengal. Whether they came from the ashraf aristocracy, like Abdul Latif, Amir Ali, Salimullah, or Mir Musharraf Hussain, or rose to ashraf status from rural background like Munshi Meherullah and Danshil Ketabuddin, they were all reformers with deep concern for the education of their downtrodden community. They resented the Hindu bhadraloks' contempt for the Muslims, their refusal to accept some of the typical

vocabulary commonly used by Muslims (e.g. *pani* for water) as part of the Bengali language and the refusal of at least some of the Hindu Bengalees to give them the status of *bhadralok* or even that of Bengalee.¹⁶ In a way this attitude was refuted with vengeance in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's emphatic assertion two decades later that East Bengalees were the true Bengalees and their country the true Bangladesh. Rabindranath Tagore could pinpoint the emerging separate psyche of Muslim Bengal. In his *Ghare Baire (Home and the World)* he expressed his empathy with the Muslim cloth-seller who was bewildered and angry to see his shop full of foreign-marked cloth burnt by the *swadeshi* babus, thus creating a communal divide. The following comments also hold great relevance:

It is difficult to wish away a real separateness that exists between Hindus and Muslims. If we ignore this separateness in the interest of short-term gains that in turn also will not respond to our needs. Whenever we have appealed to the Muslim we have looked on him as a mere helper in getting a job done and not as one we look upon as our own. We have not treated him as a true companion, but only as an accessory. Where there is an incongruity between the two they will stay together only so long as it is necessary for them to do so in the interest of overcoming a common external danger. The moment that necessity is over they would start fooling each other in the distribution of the spoils. It is on account of this mistrust that the Muslim has not responded to our call. It is not unreasonable of him to feel that if he can prosper through his separatism that is his obvious choice. The feeling of separateness between Hindus and Muslims was not so intense a little while ago. We had united together so well that the separateness was not visible. But a time came when the Hindu started taking pride only in his being Hindu. If the Muslim had acknowledged the glory of the Hindu and removed himself to the background, the Hindu would no doubt have felt pampered. But the Muslim now raised his Islam precisely on the same token by which the Hindu's Hinduism had become aggressive. He now wanted to be the winner through his Islam form, not by uniting with the Hindus.¹⁷

In her excellent research work Tazeen Murshid¹⁸ traces the evolution of Abul Mansur Ahmad during those years from a nationalist and Congressite position to a communalist position in the 1940s through a transitory KPP phase. Initially, Mansur Ahmad was not at all anti-Hindu and strongly advocated Hindu-Muslim unity on Chittaranjan's lines. Gradually, he became a Muslim communalist in the sense of being exclusively concerned with protecting Muslim interests. In 1944 he joined the Muslim League as

he was said to be upset with aggressive Hindu communalism, even refusing to accept the separate characteristics of Bengalee Muslims. Driven to a point of extreme communalism he would not acknowledge Rabindranath, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Bankim Chandra as a part of East Bengal culture, as they neither used East Bengali language, nor depicted East Bengal Muslim life. Even when he participated in the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti, he strove to perceive it in a communalist role unlike many of the other members of the samiti. But after Pakistan came into being, bereft of the overwhelming Hindu threat, he became less of an exclusive communalist. He even supported the language movement in East Pakistan for recognition of Bengali as the country's official language. Abul Mansur Ahmad, in many respects, epitomized the career of many average members of the Bengalee Muslim intelligentsia who, during the late 1930s and early 1940s, changed over from nationalist positions to separatist positions on the basis of religion.

The MacDonald Award (1932) and the Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar ensured that in future Muslims, with the help of the Scheduled Castes, would dominate Bengal's legislative politics and bhadralok Hindus will recede to a secondary position. The newly acquired political strength further accentuated the aggressive Muslim psyche, which tended to browbeat the Hindus much in the same way as the Hindus had done in the yesteryears. The key point of the conflict was the determination of the Hindu bhadralok classes to cling to the social and economic privileges they had enjoyed for one-and-a-half centuries and the equally vocal aspiration of the emerging Muslim middle classes for a share in the privileges denied to them so long. This point was forcefully brought out by a non-politician scientist, Acharya P.C. Roy, while addressing a meeting of Muslim young men at Karachi on 26 October 1932.

Hindu-Muslim differences were differences only among intellectuals for loaves and fishes of office. It was a lie to say that Islam was spread by sword. Hindus should have been annihilated if this doctrine was true. The real reason for the spread of Islam was democracy and brotherhood, and landslides in Hinduism were due to untouchability and the caste system. For centuries Bengal was ruled by Muslims, and yet ninety-nine per cent of zamindars were Hindus.¹⁹

Gradually the Muslims in Bengal came to be broadly divided into three strands—conservatives, moderates and radicals. Nazimuddin and Tamijuddin Khan represented the first; Nausher Ali, Humayun Kabir and, to an extent, Huq and Suhrawardy, despite strong differences between the two, represented the second; and Muzaffar Ahmed and Kazi Nazrul Islam represented the third. Muzaffar Ahmad, a secular progressive nationalist leader, represented a very striking case of one who took a leading role in Congress politics, did his best in association with Nazrul Islam to project an intellectual approach in the politics of Muslim Bengal and eventually turned to communism. Born in a bilingual family in Chittagong and having learnt both Bengali and Urdu, he was attracted to the revolutionary movement, but found it difficult to identify himself with the revolutionaries' identification of the motherland with Goddess Durga, and turned to literary pursuits. In 1920 he decided to opt for politics. Deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the atheism in Marxism, he gradually turned to communism, and became one of the founders of the Communist Party operating as a part of the Congress. As a Congressman he took a leading part in Bengal Congress affairs while also working as a communist underground worker. But he, like so many others, was politically ineffective in influencing the general population of Bengal Muslims who turned to the Muslim League. Muzaffar Ahmad stayed on in India, as did several others like Kazi Abdul Wadood, to become a leading figure of the Communist Party of India, and after 1964 the Communist Party of India (Marxist), while maintaining a close linkage with the communists in East Bengal. But in the 1930s and 1940s he was ahead of his time as far as Muslim Bengal was concerned.

In Nazrul Islam, the secular and nationalist Bengalee tradition reached its zenith. The feeling was eloquently expressed by Subhas Bose as chief guest in a reception given to Nazrul at Albert Hall, Calcutta, on 15 December 1929 on behalf of the 'Bengalee nation' (its chairman was Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy and the organizers were Mohammed Nasiruddin Abul Kalam, Shamsuddin, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Habibullah Bashar).

The rebel poet Nazrul through his poems has revived mass awakening and patriotism and indeed brought about the magic of revolution in the life of the nation. The influence of his writings on the people is uncommon. Even an unmusical person like me felt like singing his patriotic songs inside the prison. We shall sing Nazrul's battle songs when we go to battles. We shall also sing his songs when we go to the prison. I have had the good fortune to listen to patriotic songs in various provincial languages. But I do not recall listening to such a stirring song as *Durgam Giri*. The dream of Nazrul is not just his own dream, it is the dream of the entire Bengalee nation.²⁰

Unfortunately, there were not many takers in Bengal of this dream as the 1930s and the 1940s progressed, and more and more Bengalees surrendered themselves to the galloping cavalcade of separatist and communalist forces. Also, their leaders, Muslims and Hindus, subordinated Bengal's true interests to the dictates from leaders in northern and western India. The pathetic fact remains that the Bengal Muslim Society in the late 1930s and 1940s was not yet ready for rebels like Nazrul Islam and Muzaffar Ahmad, or even gentle scholarly Humayun Kabir or the poet Sufia Kamal who were inspired by the best secular humanist traditions of Bengal and upheld the religion of man above all communal considerations. Their psyche opted for communalist and separatist politics at that point of time. It was only after the creation of two Bengals in 1947 that their Bengalee psyche could get the upper hand with its inevitable political fallout after a quarter of a century. But in the turbulent 1940s, their mind was dead set on separation and breaking away from Hindu-dominated India.

Parting of Ways

The Government of India Act of 1935, which was brought into effect in 1937, was a very important landmark in the evolution of the Hindu–Muslim relationship. The federal component of the act was not acceptable to either the Congress or the princes, but the Congress accepted the provincial part of the act and provincial elections were announced. Diarchy, which had prevailed in the provinces since 1919, came to an end. For the first time the common masses cast their votes in general elections to elect legislators, who would form responsible government in the provinces. The political history of Bengal during the eventful years from 1937 to 1946 can be divided into:

- (a) Fazlul Huq’s KPP–Muslim League coalition (1937–41);
- (b) the Shyama Prasad–Huq coalition (1941–43);
- (c) the Muslim League coalition government led by Khwaja Nazimuddin (1943–45); and
- (d) governor’s rule under Section 93 (1945–46).

It was during these years that the uneasy coexistence between the bhadraloks and the Muslims in a political system that had marked Bengal for about ten years gave way, leading to the parting of ways. Fazlul Huq, H.S. Suhrawardy and Khwaja Nazimuddin were the three dominant Muslim leaders who played decisive roles in the last phase of undivided Bengal. Eventually, they all surrendered their initiatives to leaders from northern and western India. Of them, Huq had brought about a new style of mass-based politics into the picture, not depending on official patronage as Nazimuddin did, but derived his power from demonstrated contribution to the well-being of the masses. His slogan of *dal-bhaat* (rice and lentil—a staple) for the people in the 1937 Assembly elections and his concern for the farmers and the prajas endeared him to the Muslim peasantry of East

Bengal, whose language he spoke. Yet his career was marked by many turns and twists, many ups and downs. Joining politics as a lieutenant of Nawab Salimullah, he supported the first partition of Bengal but thereafter gravitated to the Congress. In 1916 he supported the Lucknow Pact and stood for Hindu–Muslim unity. In 1918 he had the unique distinction of being both general secretary of the Congress and president of the League. In particular, he opposed Gandhi’s call to the students to leave schools and colleges. In 1920 he opposed Muslim participation in Gandhi’s civil disobedience movement as this, in his opinion, would hurt the interests of the Muslims. The repudiation by the Congress of C.R. Das’s Bengal Pact in 1926 and its unwillingness to take a pro-peasantry stand in the council discussions on the 1928 Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill led to general disenchantment among peasants, specially the Muslim peasants, with the Congress. This led to an overwhelming Muslim participation in the praja movement in Bengal. Social and cultural segregation between the two communities added to the political bitterness. Against this background, during the 1930s, Huq organized the Krishak Praja Party as an inter-communal, though largely Muslim, party. By the beginning of the 1930s, Krishak Samitis had been formed in almost all the districts of East Bengal and north Bengal. In 1929 they all joined together to form an all-Bengal Praja Samiti. In April 1936, at a conference in Dhaka presided over by Fazlul Huq, the Praja Samiti turned into Krishak Praja Party. Huq was elected mayor of Calcutta Corporation in 1936 with support from leaders like Dr B.C. Roy. Apart from the prajas or tenants the KPP also claimed to represent small jotedars and Muslim professionals. It did not profess to be a Muslim or communal party despite the aspersions cast by researchers like De.¹

Suhrawardy, a barrister of liberal views, whose family was from Midnapore, joined politics as a lieutenant of C.R. Das. He came from the urban ashraf background and, like Huq, was an independent-minded politician who could not be purchased by titles. On the other hand, he could not go beyond his class interests and support land reforms. He left the

Swarajya platform after Das's death and gravitated to the Muslim League. The following comments from his memoirs are of great significance:

Entering politics in 1920, I became a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and joined the Khilafat Organisation. In the initial stages I was loosely associated with the Congress and was the Deputy Mayor of Calcutta with Deshbandhu C.R. Das as Mayor. He was a great Bengali, I say an Indian, scarcely less in stature than Mahatma Gandhi. I have had the good fortune to know him. He was endowed with vision, he was wholly non-communal, generous to a fault, courageous and capable of unparalleled self-sacrifice. His intellectual attainments and keen insight were of the highest order. As an advocate he commanded fabulous fees which he laid at the feet of his country. Towards the end of his days he renounced his profession, devoted himself to politics and the service of his country and died a pauper overwhelmed with debts. I believe with many that had he lived he would have been able to guide the destiny of India along channels that would have eliminated the causes of conflict and bitterness, which had bedeviled the relationship between Hindus and Muslims, which for want of just solution, led to the partition of India and creation of Pakistan.²

In 1937, when Nazimuddin lost to Fazlul Huq in the famous Patuakhali elections, Suhrawardy rehabilitated him by giving him one of the two constituencies from which he had won. But the two never got on with each other. Again, Suhrawardy got Huq and Nazimuddin together in 1937 to form the KPP–League coalition government. He had a somewhat questionable role during the war and the Bengal famine years and was accused by many of corruption. He was also known for his close contact with the Calcutta underworld. But in fairness to him, it should be said that he was the main fund manager for the Muslim League. In the early 1940s he, along with Abul Hashim, who was general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, did a lot to popularize the League among the Muslim masses in Bengal, and he led the League to an overwhelming victory in the 1946 elections. He is held responsible by many for the great Calcutta killings in August 1946, which, more than any single event, paved the way for Pakistan. And yet when he had to face Pakistan as an unavoidable reality, he projected the concept of a sovereign, united Bengal that, in his vision, was to be a non-communal socialistic state. His crusading role³ in East Pakistan politics in defence of the Bengali language and the

rights of the Hindu minority must also be highlighted in any overall assessment of this mercurial leader.

Khwaja Nazimuddin, a well-meaning and essentially moderate political leader, was a scion of the Dhaka nawab family. A veteran Muslim Leaguer, but not fanatically communal, he was of a bureaucratic temperament. He was not a mass leader like Fazlul Huq, nor a scheming player of realpolitik like Suhrawardy. He chose to be an unquestioning camp follower of Jinnah and generally maintained a low profile. As home minister in Huq's first cabinet and thereafter as prime minister in the Muslim League coalition government in Bengal between 1943 and 1945, he maintained good personal relations with many of the Congress leaders. Even as the first chief minister of the East Bengal province of Pakistan he did his best to protect the Hindu minority, although was often overruled by the anti-Hindu West Pakistan bureaucracy. He never got along with Suhrawardy and was party to Suhrawardy's expulsion from the Muslim League and from East Pakistan in 1949.

After the dramatic escape of Subhas Bose (1941), who commanded emotional loyalty from large sections of both Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, there was no Hindu leader of national stature left in Bengal. The four Hindu leaders who played key roles were Sarat Chandra Bose (Congress and then Forward Block), Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (Hindu Mahasabha), Kiran Shankar Roy (Congress) and Dr B.C. Roy (Congress), Sarat Chandra Bose, who had left the Congress with his brother Subhas in 1939 and formed the Forward Block, was in detention till 1945, and returned to the Congress on his release. He was elected to the Central Assembly and became leader of the Congress in the Assembly. He also briefly became a minister in Nehru's first interim cabinet, but had to leave the cabinet to accommodate Congress Muslims when the Muslim League joined. He was distrusted by the British Raj and ignored by the Congress high command. He joined Suhrawardy in mid-1947 in projecting the concept of a sovereign, united Bengal and continued his efforts till the very end.

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, son of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, came to public life as vice chancellor of Calcutta University. He started his political life as a Congressman and was elected to the Upper House of Bengal Legislative Council as a Congress candidate in 1929. But he resigned from both the council and the Congress when the civil disobedience movement began. He resigned from the council because Gandhi required this, and from the Congress because he was opposed to the movement. He was re-elected to the Bengal Legislative Council as an independent candidate in 1937 and again in 1946 from the Calcutta University constituency. In 1939, coming out against both the Congress and the Muslim League, he joined the All India Hindu Mahasabha because, in his opinion, the Congress was unable to protect the interests of the Hindus. He became its president and was destined to play a key role during the period. A nationalist par excellence, he was not against Muslims, but against the Muslim League and its communal policies. Passionately opposed to the partition of India, he ended up by proposing and working for the partition of Bengal. He was essentially not communal-minded. He believed in cooperating in politics with progressive Muslim leaders like Fazlul Huq, whom he joined in a coalition government in 1941. This was a shining example of collaboration in an age of communal polarization. Its success could have prevented Partition. But the coalition collapsed under constant attack from communalists on both sides and intrigues from the white officialdom led by Governor Herbert. Ironically, in 1947 when the partition of the subcontinent seemed inevitable, it was Shyama Prasad who spearheaded the call for a parallel partition of Bengal. He joined Nehru's cabinet after Independence after resigning from the Hindu Mahasabha and advising the Mahasabha to disband itself.

Kiran Shankar Roy, as leader of the Congress both before his arrest in 1942 and after the 1946 elections, played a very important role in the Bengal Assembly. He had considerable literary talent and was more of an intellectual than a politician. He played a role in the abortive Congress–KPP negotiations and had good personal equation with League leaders. He was, for a while, a supporter of a sovereign, united Bengal along with

Suhrawardy and Sarat Bose until he was overruled by the Congress leadership. He stayed in Pakistan for some time as leader of the Congress party in East Bengal Assembly, but came to India in 1948 when Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, on becoming chief minister of West Bengal, appointed him home minister. Bidhan Roy was a Congress leader who had shot into eminence as far back as in the 1920s, became a member of the Congress Working Committee in 1930, but preferred his medical profession to everything else. He kept up good personal equation as a doctor with all political opponents like Fazlul Huq, Jinnah and Suhrawardy. He disagreed with some of the major decisions of the Congress leadership and preferred to withdraw to the ringside and did not play any active role in politics during the years 1942–47. He was opposed to Partition and kept himself aloof from all negotiations on it.

THE ELECTIONS OF 1937

The announcement of the elections triggered off intense political activity. The Bengal Congress, somewhat weakened by internal squabbles and its growing estrangement from the Muslim masses, was still the strongest force. The Krishak Praja Party, originating from the praja movement of 1927, but formally founded in 1936 by Fazlul Huq and rapidly gaining support among the Muslim peasantry of East Bengal, was also a strong political party. The Muslim League, with its landlord base, had only minimal presence in Bengal. There was the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, not affiliated to the Muslim League, and strongly aligned to the interests of the Bengalee Muslims. Some of the Muslim leaders led by the nawab of Dhaka formed the United Muslim Party (UMP), in order to take part in the 1937 elections. M.A. Jinnah, who had returned to India in 1934 after his six-year, self-imposed exile in Britain and assumed the Muslim League's leadership, made serious effort to bring both KPP and UMP under the League's banner and fight the elections. UMP agreed to merge itself with the Muslim League. Its top leadership, including Nawab Habibullah of Dhaka, Khwaja Nazimuddin, H.S. Suhrawardy, Maulana Akram Khan, Tamijuddin Khan and Khwaja Shahabuddin were co-opted into the Muslim

League Central Committee. A prominent role was taken in these negotiations by Jinnah's close friend, M.A.H. Ispahani, a leading Calcutta businessman, who was Jinnah's trusted agent in Bengal from 1937 to 1947. Huq initially took part in the negotiations for a common election manifesto, along with Nausher Ali, Syed Badruddoza, Shamsuddin Ahmed and Hasan Ali of Bogra. But the negotiations broke down on the issue of Huq's insistence on including in the election manifesto a promise to abolish the zamindari system and introduce free primary education.

These demands were not acceptable to the landlord-dominated Muslim League. Huq and his colleagues, therefore, left the negotiating table. Addressing the students of Dhaka University shortly thereafter, Huq complained that Jinnah was under the influence of non-Bengalee zamindars and capitalists and of Calcutta-based leaders, and announced that he (Huq himself) would lead a struggle on behalf of the poor, the praja, the ryots and the farmers of Bengal against the businessmen and the capitalists. Interestingly, in the years between 1936 and 1947 the Muslim League did not think it necessary to hold its annual session or a meeting of its working committee or council in Bengal, nor elect a single Bengalee Muslim as an office-bearer of the All India Muslim League. Thus Bengal was not given its due weight in the top echelons of the Muslim League when, paradoxically, it was Bengal, more than any other province, which was pushing the League towards the goal of Pakistan.

In the election campaign, Huq promised dal-bhaat to the poor, while the Muslim League enlisted the support of the Muslim fundamentalist forces. The dal-bhaat appeal became very popular and East Bengal's Muslim peasantry sided with Huq, so much so that Fazlul Huq had a resounding victory over Nazimuddin from Patuakhali where too the Muslim peasantry sided with Huq in preference to their own zamindar who, as a member of the governor's Executive Council, also received official support. Huq had dared Nazimuddin openly and announced that he was in reality fighting Governor Sir John Herbert rather than Khwaja Nazimuddin.

The Congress high command committed a political mistake that cost Bengal dear, when it decided that the Congress would form ministries only

in those provinces where it had an absolute majority in the Assembly, and would not join hands with any other party. Thus, when Governor Sir John Herbert invited Sarat Bose as the leader of the single largest party to discuss the formation of a ministry, he declined the offer. Fazlul Huq, leading the Krishak Praja Party, requested Kiran Shankar Roy of the Congress, to join him in a coalition government under his leadership. Sarat Bose was inclined to agree and requested Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress president, for permission to join hands with Huq, taking into account the special situation in Bengal. This idea was also said to have the support of Subhas Bose who was soon to become Congress president. But the Congress high command turned it down despite repeated requests. History would have been different had the Congress agreed to Huq's offer at this juncture. Huq now turned to the Muslim League, which promptly seized the initiative and agreed to join the coalition under Huq's leadership. Even Bidhan Chandra Roy was reported to have favoured a KPP–Congress coalition and, on being disappointed when it did not happen, stayed aloof from active politics for several years.

The correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Bose some time later, when Bose became Congress president, clearly proves that, left to himself, Subhas would have liked to join up with Fazul Huq.⁴ As late as in December 1938 Gandhi wrote to Bose, then Congress president:

A long discussion with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Ghanshyam Das Birla has convinced me that the present ministry in Bengal (a coalition of the Muslim League and the KPP) should not be changed. Change will be of no avail. Rather, if the Congress forms a coalition ministry in Bengal with the Krishak Praja Party, it may be injurious to the province. Nalini Sarkar has told me that if the present coalition ministry takes any measure, which is against the country's interest, he will not hesitate to resign from it.

Subhas Bose's reply to Gandhi (21 December 1938) was:

Your letter came as a profound shock to me. I have had many discussions with you over the formation of a ministry in Bengal. The matter was also discussed with you some days back in Wardha. My elder brother, Sarat Chandra Bose, too has talked with you over the matter. Both of us clearly recall that you have every time supported the idea of a coalition ministry of Congress and Krishak Praja parties in Bengal. I cannot understand how you changed your views so soon after the discussion at Wardha. It is quite clear that your talks

with Azad, Nalini and Birla are responsible for the change of your views. The position therefore appears to be that you prefer to give more importance to the views of the above three persons than those of persons who are responsible for running the Congress in Bengal.

There is a hint that Gandhi was unduly influenced by G.D. Birla, representing Indian business interests, who may have strongly felt that political unity between the Muslims and Hindus in Bengal would threaten Marwari dominance of the business landscape in Calcutta. The existing arrangement in which the Muslim League, a party of vested interests, played the dominant role, with strong links with upcountry business interests through non-Bengalee industrialists like Ispahani, would suit both Marwari and British industrialists.

Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri, who was at the time secretary of Sarat Chandra Bose and dealt with Subhas Chandra's correspondence, also supported this view.

FAZLUL HUQ'S COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH THE MUSLIM LEAGUE

Thus, a KPP–Muslim League coalition government, with support from Scheduled Caste and some independent, upper-caste Hindu MLAs came to power. Fazlul Huq was the 'prime minister' of Bengal; Azizul Huq, an able lawyer, was elected Speaker of the Assembly; and Satyendra Chandra Mitra, a Congressman, was elected president of the Upper House of the legislative council with Congress permission.

There were five Hindu and five Muslim ministers. Interestingly, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, essentially a Congressman and one among the Congress's big five in Bengal, became the finance minister and the target of the Opposition from the beginning. From the Treasury benches Huq, Nazimuddin (home minister) and Suhrawardy were the main speakers. The Opposition benches also commanded many star performers, including Shyama Prasad, an independent. Incidentally, another costly blunder that had long-term impact on all-India politics was made by the Congress in the United Provinces. Here the Congress and the Muslim League had gone jointly to the electoral battle, but as soon as the Congress got an absolute

majority on its own, it forgot the understanding with the Muslim League about forming a government together and dumped the latter. Nawab Ismail Khan and Chaudhury Khalequzzaman, the two Muslim League leaders who were tipped to be part of the six-member cabinet, found themselves left out after they had enthusiastically campaigned for a Congress–League front. The League leadership never forgave the Congress for what it considered as a breach of faith and went on a collision course, which embittered Hindu–Muslim relations and paved the way for the ‘Pakistan’ slogan. Jinnah could from then on count on the full support of Muslim leaders like Khalequzzaman who were permanently alienated from the Congress with which they had till then very close ties.⁵ Soon the League complained of atrocities on Muslims in Congress-led provinces and appointed on 20 March 1938 a committee headed by the raja of Pirpur, to inquire and report on them. The Pirpur report highlighting alleged atrocities on Muslims in Congress-led provinces was a scathing document, which the Congress did not accept but which, nonetheless, worsened communal relations.

Muslim opinion even in Bengal was influenced by the report of the Pirpur Committee. It reported that in these provinces the minorities had ‘only secondary rights’, and cited the Congress decision to foist ‘Bande Mataram’, an ‘anti-Islamic and idolatrous song’, as the national anthem, the imposition of Hindi as the lingua franca, the withholding of licences for cow slaughter in some provinces and the abolition of Muslim representation in debt conciliation boards among instances of ‘atrocities’ against Muslims. These had no relevance for Muslims in Bengal, but nonetheless helped to fan the communal flame even here, and the Muslim attitude to the Congress stiffened. An inquiry ordered by Governor General Linlithgow found these stories of ‘atrocities’ highly exaggerated, but the report had done its mischief.

In retrospect, there can be no doubt that the Congress’s mistake in turning down Fazlul Huq’s request in Bengal, together with its blunder in the United Provinces, did pave the way for the partition of the subcontinent ten years later. The Muslim League took full advantage of its governmental authority in Bengal to extend its support base over the Muslim masses. It

also befriended Huq. In fact, in his anxiety to accommodate every interest that could support the government, Huq soon became a minority within the ministry. This, as also his abandonment of the election pledges, caused rumblings in the KPP. Once in March 1938, a majority of the KPP in the Assembly sat with the Opposition to register their protest. Shamsuddin Ahmed at the head of twenty KPP MLAs accused Fazlul Huq of abandoning the party's election promises. Huq expelled seventeen MLAs from the party. Then, Sayyad Nausher Ali led a group of dissidents out of the KPP, opposing Huq's acceptance of a proposal to start certificate proceedings against ryots to realize rent arrears due to the government. Literally placed between the devil and the deep sea, that is, the Muslim League, his coalition partner, and the Congress–KPP majority Opposition, and reduced to a minority in the coalition, Huq realized that he could save his ministry only with Jinnah's support and joined the League at its annual session at Lucknow in December 1937. Between 1937 and 1940, Huq was drawn into the vortex of Muslim League politics, although he never felt comfortable in that landlord-dominated party. Ironically, it was Huq, never a subscriber to the two-nation theory, who was made to move the so-called Pakistan Resolution in the Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940. This was not only Jinnah's cynical masterstroke, but a great propaganda victory for him. By bringing Huq, the undisputed leader of the Muslim peasantry of Bengal under his umbrella, he had gained for Muslim League, till then a weak player in Bengal politics, a strong foothold in Bengal. His short-lived honeymoon with Sikandar Hyat Khan, the Unionist premier of Punjab, was another feather in his cap. He skilfully used both Fazlul Huq and Sikandar Hyat Khan, neither of whom believed in the two-nation theory or the partition of the country, to mobilize Muslim support for these concepts.

The new ministry faced uneasy times from the beginning. Huq pressed his most important agenda of abolishing the zamindari system. This met with sharp opposition from the League ministers, one of whom, Nawab Musharraf Hussain, declared that he was willing to spend all his money to get Huq removed from the cabinet. Within a year the cabinet had to resign

and reconstitute itself when a minister, Nausher Ali, was asked to resign and refused to do so. Ten separate no-confidence motions were moved in the Assembly against the ten ministers, but they failed on account of deep divisions in the Congress ranks and the 25 European votes going in favour of the ministers. As Huq opened up a secret line of communication with the Congress led by Subhas Bose, the Muslim Leaguers were looking for an opportunity to throw him out. The Congress members moved a no-confidence motion on 8 and 9 August 1938 against some ministers. This provided an opportunity for confrontation.

As the League declared a hartal and the League supporters barricaded all streets in order to prevent Congress and anti-government MLAs from reaching the Town Hall, venue of the Bengal Assembly those days, many MLAs including Tulsi Goswami, Devendralal Khan, Tamijuddin Khan, J.C. Gupta, K.N. Barman, Abu Hussain Sarkar, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Atul Chandra Kumar spent the night in the Assembly premises. The Muslim League goons attacked Humayun Kabir's residence and insulted him. On 8 August, the no-confidence motion against Maharaja Srish Chandra Nandy, a minister, was narrowly defeated (130:110) with the help of the European members. Thus, Huq's government came to depend entirely on the League and the European members.

There was inevitably a hardening of attitudes on communal lines, with the Congress openly calling the ministry a Muslim government and Huq's supporters raising the cry of Islam in danger. The cabinet moved a resolution before the Assembly that India should be given Dominion status after the war and the constitution should provide safeguards based on the full consent and approval of the minority communities. Finance Minister Nalini Ranjan Sarkar refused to support this resolution and resigned from the cabinet (1939). Suhrawardy replaced him as finance minister. Huq's dependence on the League increased further. But amidst all his political turmoils, Huq never forgot the impoverished Muslim peasantry of East Bengal. By a series of administrative and legislative measures, such as the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act of 1938, the Money-lenders Act of 1940 and the debt settlement boards, he enhanced his popularity among the

Muslim peasants, who resented every move to bring down Huq as a betrayal of the Muslim cause. The first of these measures was opposed by both the League members as also the Europeans, but was passed by 110 to 27 votes.

There were several other significant developments. First, Huq appointed a commission of inquiry (the Flood Commission) to suggest changes in the Permanent Settlement of 1793. The commission recommended the replacement of the zamindari system by a *ryotwari* system in which ownership of the land would vest with the ryot and the land revenue payable by him could be revised from time to time; but these recommendations could not be implemented on account of deep divisions among ministers. Fazul Huq also proceeded with piecemeal amelioratory measures such as: (i) keeping in abeyance for ten years the right of the landlords to increase the rent payable by tenants; (ii) confining the landlords' right to enforce realization of arrears of rent (1937); (iii) protecting tenants' rights with regard to mortgaging their land (1938); (iv) fixing a ceiling through the Debt Relief Act of 1940 on the rate of interest that could be charged by moneylenders, banning compound interest and fixing the rate of interest on mortgages at 9 per cent and on unsecured loans at 10 per cent; (v) passing another Act creating a relief fund to meet the needs of relief during floods, famines and other natural calamities; and (vi) providing for one-and-a-half day's leave in a week and paid leave for fifteen days in a year, and working hours up to 8 p.m. in all public holdings.

In 1939 separate electorates were introduced for Muslim and Anglo-Indians for election to the Calcutta Corporation. Fazlul Huq himself justified this Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act by announcing that 'we have made it certain that Congress no longer dominates the Calcutta Corporation'. This provoked Hindu reaction. Two other contemplated legislations of the Huq government ran into serious controversies, namely, the Secondary Education Bill and the Communal Ratio Bill. The first aimed at shifting secondary education from the Hindu-controlled Calcutta University to a proposed Board of Secondary Education with fifty members, of whom twenty were to be nominated from among the Hindus and Muslims; five

from among Europeans and five from other categories; nineteen were to be directly nominated by the government. There was to be an executive council of fourteen of whom six were to be ex-officio government officials. This move was interpreted by the Hindu intelligentsia as a politically motivated move to communalize school education. So great was the feeling against this bill that even a close friend of Huq, Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, took a public stand against it.

The various efforts of the Huq ministry to ensure higher percentage of government jobs for the Muslims and the proposed Communal Ratio Bill met with stiff opposition and embittered communal relations. What Huq attempted to do was nothing more than what Chittaranjan Das had assured Bengal Muslims through his Bengal Pact. But Hindu opinion continued to be resentful. Other flashpoints were the Muslim demand for the removal of the lotus flower and the word shri from the Calcutta University's logo on the grounds that these were Hindu symbols; the demand for appointing a large number of Muslim professors and non-teaching staff in the university; and a systematic policy of appointing only Muslim League supporters as nominated members in the district and local boards.

Thus, the policy followed by the Huq–League coalition directly led to increasing popularity of the Muslim League among Muslims in Bengal, especially in the districts. This was reflected in the doubling of its membership in some districts. Communal relations continued to deteriorate culminating in several Hindu–Muslim riots from 1940 onwards. The most serious of them were the riots in Dhaka in 1940 and 1941 ignited on such pretexts as Hindu religious processions playing music in front of mosques, or Muharram processions making provocative noises in front of temples, or Hindus objecting to the sacrificial killing of cows in public on Bakr-Id. Agents provocateurs started the troubles and antisocial elements took advantage of the situation. In the rioting in Dhaka that started on 17 March 1941, the army had to be called in after many lives had been lost. Rioting also spread to neighbouring villages and about 10,000 Hindus had to run away from their homes. Hindus, being the more affluent community, became victims of looting by antisocials of the other community. Fazlul

Huq was accused by the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha of partiality to the Muslims. Huq advised Jinnah to arrive at a compromise with the Congress. Jinnah's reply was that this was not possible as long as the Congress considered itself as the only representative organization in the politics of India. There was a steady erosion in Huq's popularity and an ascent in Muslim League's strength among Muslims.

HOLWELL MONUMENT AGITATION

An important event in 1940 in which Fazlul Huq showed his courage in overruling the white officialdom was the Holwell monument agitation personally led by Subhas Bose, who asserted his political leadership through this emotional agitation and also won back the support of large sections of Bengalee Muslims. When Subhas, in the middle of 1940, demanded removal of the Holwell monument located at Dalhousie Square in Calcutta—now Benoy Badal Dinesh Bagh, commemorating the Black Hole tragedy—he found strong mass support. The Provincial Political Conference in Dhaka (25 May 1940) responded strongly in favour of the demand. Many Muslims joined in. Subhas gave an ultimatum at a public meeting held on 29 June at Albert Hall, Calcutta, that this monument must be removed from public view by 3 July, the anniversary of Siraj-ud-Daula's murder. He followed it up by threatening to personally lead a march to this monument on that day.

Subhas was arrested on 2 July, a day before his proposed direct action on the pretext of a seditious article he had published in his journal *Forward* of 15 June 1940, arguing that India could only gain from the collapse of the British (in the war). But the movement started with batches of demonstrators advancing towards the monument everyday courting arrest. On 13 July, a huge public meeting at Albert Hall presided over by Abdul Karim criticized government repression. The government issued a directive to the press prohibiting publication of any news of the movement. Students of the Islamia College replied by holding a protest meeting outside the college. But Fazlul Huq seized the initiative and defied official British opposition by announcing the removal of the Holwell monument from

public view. He also ordered release of all the detainees on account of this movement.

BEGINNING OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The outbreak of the Second World War with Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, brought unexpected relief for Huq. Along with the British declaring war on Germany, Viceroy Lord Linlithgow issued a bland proclamation on the same day that India was at war with Germany. No Indian leader had been consulted and India was dragged to a war with a country that was not a direct threat to it. Gandhi's initial hunch was to unconditionally support Britain. Nehru, on somewhat different emotional bent, wanted India to play its full part and commit all its resources to the 'struggle for a new order' by which he could have meant the abolition of both Nazism and colonialism. Subhas, still an important Congress leader and, therefore, invited to the meeting of Congress Working Committee (10 September) at Wardha, favoured that India should utilize the international situation, including the British Empire's discomfiture, to press for freedom.

The Congress Working Committee, overruling the arguments of Subhas Bose, preferred only to ask the British Raj to clarify its intention about India's independence. A disappointed Subhas returned to Calcutta from Wardha and started the movement of the Holwell monument. This, along with other international and domestic developments, gave the beleaguered Huq ministry a certain reprieve.

With the advent of the war, there was pressure on both the Congress and the League to take a stand in relation to the war, and also the future of British rule in India. Sandwiched between Subhas Bose's pressure for a confrontationist policy to British rule and Nehru's passionate antipathy to the Nazi-Fascist combine, the Congress Working Committee brought out a resolution that was a masterly combination of inconsistencies. It preached anti-Nazism and anti-imperialism at the same time, reflecting the contradictions within the Congress.

The Muslim League Working Committee met immediately after this statement and demanded that the British must recognize the League as the

sole voice of the Muslims and must revise the federal part of the 1935 constitution so as to reflect the demands of the League. On 17 October, Linlithgow made an announcement vaguely promising Dominion status after the war and also consultation on the revision of the 1935 constitution. In trying to incorporate the concerns of all parties, the consultation satisfied none. The Congress Working Committee now asked all the seven Congress provincial governments to resign by the end of October. They did so and the governors took over administration under Section 93 of the 1935 act. In retrospect, this decision to resign en masse from the provinces was politically unwise. Protest against the viceroy's unilateral declaration could have taken other forms. In resigning, the Congress played into the hands of Jinnah and left the field open for the Muslim League and the white officialdom. The Muslim-led governments of Bengal, Punjab and Sind continued. In Assam, a League-led coalition soon replaced a Congress-led coalition. Jinnah called for a 'Day of Deliverance and Thanksgiving for the Muslims on Friday, 22 December 1939 as a mark of relief that the Congress regime had at least ceased to function'.

PAKISTAN RESOLUTION

Jinnah followed it by the famous Pakistan Resolution at the Muslim League Council meeting in Lahore (21 March 1940). This was moved by Fazlul Huq who had by then been driven into the arms of the Muslim League. This resolution claimed that 'the Musalmans are a nation by any definition, not a minority' and asked the British to divide the subcontinent into 'autonomous national states'. The operative part of the resolution in its third paragraph was as follows:

No constitutional plan will be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz., that geographically continuous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India should form more than one independent state and the units comprised in these states should be independent and sovereign.⁶

Significantly, the word ‘Pakistan’ was not mentioned by Jinnah even once, nor did it find a place in the resolution, which was vague and liable to different interpretations by different interests. Fazlul Huq, the mover of the resolution, thought that there would be an eastern, Muslim-dominated state and a western one. In his *Foreshadowing of Bangladesh* Harun-ur-Rashid has convincingly demonstrated that for the majority of the Muslims of Bengal, the concept of Pakistan was different from that of Jinnah and that they were mainly thinking of an independent Muslim-majority eastern Pakistan, with Bengal as the centre or as a sort of Greater Bengal. Jinnah clearly intended to keep all options open as to use the slogan as a bargaining counter to gain as much concession as he could. But for the moment he had succeeded in defeating the Congress claim that it spoke for all sections of India, including the Muslims. Also, he had succeeded in making the British authorities turn to him as the only dependable ally who would support them in the war efforts. Thus, the Muslim League, in general, stood by the Empire whereas the Congress, in about a year, was to launch the Quit India movement.

THE SHYAMA PRASAD–HUQ COALITION GOVERNMENT

Huq’s honeymoon with the League was short-lived and his exit was as dramatic and sudden as his entry. Making Huq, a strong proponent of Hindu–Muslim unity, move the resolution for Partition was a great achievement of Jinnah; but the two shared a mutual distrust which surfaced very soon. Jinnah wanted from his associates complete subordination. Huq, with his strong views, could not put up with it. The Muslim League instructed its followers to observe 23 March as Pakistan Day. As the communal situation in Bengal was getting overheated, Fazlul Huq, with Suhrawardy’s support, issued instructions to League branches in Bengal in 1941 to put off this public celebration. But the Calcutta district Muslim League held a public meeting in open violation of this instruction.⁷ Huq was slowly coming to the realization that the Muslim League, having made full use of his stature, was determined to leave him high and dry. Jinnah

now issued a directive early in 1941 to the three League premiers, viz., Fazlul Huq, Sikandar Hyat Khan and Mohammad Shadullah of Assam, whom the viceroy had nominated to his Defence Council, that they must resign from the council. He resented the League members' appointment by the viceroy without his clearance. Sikandar Hyat and Mohammad Shadullah promptly resigned. But Huq, not a man to be cowed down by swashbuckling, refused to resign. Jinnah gave him ten days' time and threatened disciplinary action. Huq resigned under a lot of pressure, but at the same time he showed his anger by simultaneously resigning from the League Working Committee and accusing Jinnah of using arbitrary powers and being 'wholly unconstitutional'. An open split in the Muslim League now occurred between pro-Jinnah Leaguers led by Khwaja Nazimuddin, who had not forgotten his Patuakhali humiliation, and Suhrawardy on the one hand, and pro-Huq, former KPP elements on the other.

Huq looked for friends elsewhere and started secret negotiations with Sarat Bose, Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and the Scheduled Caste leaders. A new combination, viz., the Progressive Coalition Party, which included both the KPP and the Forward Block, was formed secretly with 110 members who unanimously elected Huq as leader. He thus showed his great capacity for survival. The Muslim League ministers led by Nazimuddin resigned en bloc on 8 December 1941 to put pressure on Huq. Apparently, the League leaders had reckoned that the governor would invite Nazimuddin to form the new government. But once again Fazlul Huq demonstrated his skill for flexibility and manoeuvrability when he contrived a majority with the announced support of twenty-five Congress MLAs and formed a nine-member cabinet on 12 December 1941 with four Hindu ministers and the nawab of Dhaka. One of the four was Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who became the finance minister. He responded to Huq's invitation as he felt that this way he would be able to keep Muslim League's communalism, British divisive policies and Congress's browbeating at bay, and would bring together both Muslim and Hindu nationalists on a common platform. In an interview with the Associated Press of India on the same day, Shyama Prasad stated: 'Bengal has shown today that in spite of internal

differences the important elements of our national life can combine for the good of the country.’⁸ Sarat Bose, a strong supporter of this coalition, was soon sent to south India. Poet Nazrul Islam also welcomed the ministry as a big step forward for Hindu–Muslim unity.

During the life of this ministry there was not a single instance of communal rioting. On 16 February 1942, while presenting the budget, the finance minister provided for one lakh rupees for the promotion of communal harmony—a unique gesture. Thereafter, Huq and Mukherjee jointly travelled to several districts of Bengal preaching the message of communal harmony. In a speech at Coronation Park, Dhaka, on 21 April 1942, Shyama Prasad said that the Bengal ministry was no longer for any particular community, but for all communities. He congratulated Huq for the courageous steps he had taken to eradicate communalism and regretted that Amery, the Secretary of State for India, did not have a good word for Fazlul Huq’s bold steps. This would not only solve the communal problem in Bengal, but would show the whole of India how to stand shoulder to shoulder in the face of common danger. He appealed for complete Hindu–Muslim unity and asked the Hindus to defend the mosques and the Muslims to defend the temples against attacks from goondas.⁹

Incidentally, two of the Hindu ministers were Forward Block members who showed ample flexibility to assume office under an oath to the British King-Emperor while their leader, Subhas Bose, had by that time reached Germany in a bid to enlist German support for India’s independence. He was in close touch with the goings-on in Bengal and was reported to have given his nod to this new arrangement. One of the Hindu ministers was from the Scheduled Castes. Premier Huq, who was expelled from the League on 10 December 1941, described the new government as a coalition between the two major communities in Bengal. The Muslim League called it a Hindu cabinet in effect. In actual fact this was a great experiment, one that could have turned Bengal’s history in a new direction had it been allowed to function for a reasonable length of time without being a victim of British policy of divide and rule and communal intransigence. No doubt,

this government was made possible by Fazlul Huq's personal charm, and the willingness of a number of Bengalee leaders, including Subhas Bose and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, following contradictory politics, to come together in Bengal's larger interest. In so doing, they defied the Congress high command as Fazlul Huq had defied Jinnah. Both felt that the central leadership of the Congress and the League were imposing policies that were not in the interest of Bengal.

Thus the Shyama Prasad–Huq ministry, as it was popularly called by contemporaries, though disliked by both Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers, received tremendous goodwill from the middle-of-the-road Bengalees, Muslim and Hindu. Fazlul Huq made no secret of his belief that the leaders from Bengal, or for that matter other provinces, must have a decisive say in forming political alliances, and the central leadership of political parties must accept this. Subhas Bose, who before his great escape had made friends with a number of Muslim League leaders in Bengal, notably Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, the mayor of Calcutta, M.A.H. Ispahani, the leader of the League in Calcutta Corporation and Jinnah's main financier and Nooruddin, was also reported to share this view. The Bose–League front jointly fought the elections to the Calcutta Corporation and won a majority. Unfortunately, neither the Congress high command nor the Muslim League central leadership agreed with this approach.

Huq's second administration took office at a crucial point in history. With Japan's dramatic entry into the war on 6 December 1941, on the side of the Axis powers, and the capture of Malaya, Singapore and Burma in quick succession, the war reached the backyard of Bengal. Thousands of Indian refugees from Burma trekked to Bengal. On 20 December 1941, the first Japanese air raid on Calcutta took place. There were several other air raids. The Japanese army attacked the borders of Bengal in Chittagong on 23 March 1942. Also, all-India politics became tense with the Cripps Mission and the Congress poised for launching the Quit India movement.

CRIPPS MISSION

On 23 March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, a British minister and a well-known Labour Party leader known to be a friend of India, was sent to India by Prime Minister Winston Churchill to win over the Congress leaders with the promise of Dominion status at the end of the war. After several long rounds of discussions with Indian leaders, Cripps outlined a scheme, which would have made India independent at the end of the war. If any province would not like to join the federation it could have its separate constitution or Dominion status for itself. But the proposal was not to the liking of either Gandhi who called it a 'post-dated cheque', nor Jinnah. Cripps returned to London empty-handed on 11 August 1942. In retrospect the Cripps proposals seem eminently practicable, and it also seems possible that their acceptance could have avoided much of the subsequent untoward happenings.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

With the failure of the Cripps Mission the Congress under Gandhi was gravitating to a direct anti-British agitation, something that Subhas Bose had pleaded for two years ago. The Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution at Wardha on 14 July 1942, calling upon the British to quit India forthwith and announced the resolve to start a non-violent movement if they failed to do so. It met again in Bombay on 7 August and confirmed the Quit India resolution. The 500-strong All India Congress Committee met in Bombay on 8 August 1942 and endorsed the Working Committee's Quit India resolution reiterating that 'a non-violent struggle would start all over India under Gandhiji's leadership'. Soon after this, in the evening hours Gandhi, all the members of the Congress Committee, and in fact all second-and third-rung Congress leaders all over the country were arrested under the Defence of India Act. The Congress was declared illegal and its offices were closed by the police. Gandhi, with his wife and a small retinue, was detained in Aga Khan palace in Poona. Nehru, Sardar Patel and all other Congress Committee members were taken to Ahmednagar Fort. This was the beginning of the August Revolution, also called the Quit India movement. It started with strikes and processions, but in the absence of the

leaders, incidents of violence and anti-British rioting were reported from places as far apart as Bombay and Bihar. Viceroy Linlithgow described it in a letter to Churchill as 'the most serious rebellion since that of 1857'.

So intense was the national feeling that Shyama Prasad, a minister in the Bengal government, wrote a letter to Governor General Linlithgow on 12 August 1942 emphasizing that 'the demand of Congress virtually constituted the national demand of India as a whole' and that 'an immediate transfer of power is essential to the solution of the Indian deadlock and there never was a period during the last hundred years when the feeling against the British was so bitter as it is today'.¹⁰ In Bengal, the August Revolution took its most pronounced and militant form in Tamluk and Contai in Midnapore district, which had already earned a reputation as the most anti-British or freedom-loving district in the subcontinent.

At many places the students and the Congress volunteers brought down the British Union Jack and hoisted the Congress tricolour, which flew for days. As the Congress leaders were arrested en masse in all towns and even in villages, there was little guidance at the grass-roots level. That was war time and the administration was busy with various tasks connected with arrangements of military movement. Thus everywhere, people, on their own initiative in a natural outburst of anger, took various steps as they thought best. Some of them even resorted to subversive actions. In Contai and Tamluk subdivisions of Midnapore district, a large number of Congressmen who had all along been non-violent freedom fighters under leaders like Birendranath Sasmal turned violent against the British authority and their local collaborators in the winter of 1943. The vestiges of British rule disappeared for months together and the revolutionaries themselves established virtual national governments. In Tamluk, the national government lasted from 17 December 1942 to 8 August 1944. The supreme leader of this government was Satish Chandra Samanta. Other leaders were Ajoy Mukherjee and Sushil Dhara. An official report described what happened as follows:

In Midnapore in Bengal, the operations of the rebels indicated considerable care and planning. All approach roads to these two subdivisions [Tamluk and Contai] were cut off

from the rest of the district by felling trees, digging trenches and destroying bridges. Military and police forces from outside could approach these areas after many months. An effective warning system had been devised and elementary tactical principles were observed, for instance, encirclements and flanking movements clearly on pre-arranged signals. The rebel groups were accompanied by doctors and nursing orderlies to attend the casualties and its intelligence system was effective.¹¹

The rebels formed a national government¹² under a supreme commander. To help him in the administration there were ministers in charge of justice, law and order, health, education, agriculture and publicity. A postal system was introduced. Steps were taken for using convicts who had been released from jail. A volunteer army was formed and captains were appointed under an army chief. Besides fighting men, the army had intelligence personnel, doctors, compounders and nursing orderlies; there were arrangements for removing the injured and sick soldiers. The British authorities retorted with ruthless suppression.

Some ministers of Fazlul Huq's government, notably Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, made local inquiries and protested against the repressive policies. Shyama Prasad raised his strong voice against police excesses and formed a Sufferers Relief Committee with Fazlul Huq as president and B.M. Birla, Dr B.C. Roy and himself as co-sponsors for providing relief to the survivors and relatives of the victims of police and military atrocities during the August uprising. These atrocities, according to Shyama Prasad, 'resembled the activities of the Germans in occupied areas as propagated by the British agencies'. Midnapore district was placed behind an 'iron curtain' and no one could come out without a permit issued by the government. But the officialdom was totally impervious. As there was a strong demand in the Assembly for an inquiry into the police excesses, premier Huq gave an assurance of such an inquiry. This provoked Governor Herbert to write to the premier in an intemperate language on 15 February 1943:

You have given today in the Legislature an understanding for an enquiry into the conduct of officials in the district. You are well aware that this subject attracts my special responsibilities and you are also aware of my views on the undesirability of enquiries into the matter ... I shall expect an explanation from you at your interview tomorrow morning of your conduct in failing to consult me before announcing what purports to be the decision of the Government.

Huq paid the governor back in his own coin by replying on 16 February:

It appears from your letter that you are not prepared to give your consent to the constitution of a committee of enquiry. If so, the only way left open to me is to make a statement in the House in which I shall endeavour to explain that my statement made yesterday should not be taken as a commitment on the part of the government to a committee of enquiry, and I propose to read out to the House your letter under reply so as to explain my position.

Even Viceroy Linlithgow expressed his reservation over the governor's overzealousness in a letter to the Secretary of State for India, Amery, but did not do anything concrete. Even when Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and, after him, Fazlul Huq resigned, such acts of oppression continued.

Premier Fazlul Huq admitted that during two weeks in the month of August, firing by the police had taken twenty lives and caused injury to 152 persons—the casualties actually numbered much more. Fazlul Huq also admitted that police firing on some occasions was not justified.

This unequal fight between the people and the government lasted about two weeks, but by the beginning of 1943 normality returned everywhere except in Contai and Tamluk.

People's attention turned to the Japanese attacks at the borders; the broadcasts of Subhas Bose from Singapore announcing the formation of the Azad Hind Government in exile and the Indian National Army and exhorting his countrymen to rise up against the British Raj; the Japanese air raids in Calcutta and Chittagong; the cyclone and tidal waves affecting Midnapore; and the approaching Bengal famine of 1943. People used to listen to Subhas's radio broadcasts with rapt attention. Such was his popularity with the Bengalees that Ian Stephens, the then editor of the *Statesman*, Calcutta, wrote that Subhas would only have to parachute on the maidan in Calcutta and 90 per cent of the people would rise up and follow him.

MIDNAPORE CYCLONE

An important event during this period was the Midnapore cyclone and tidal waves of 16 October 1942. Unprecedented tidal waves lashed the Contai

coast, killing hundreds of people and cattle and destroying scores of villages and miles of paddy land. While this natural calamity put a halt to the Quit India movement in Contai and Tamluk, it also exposed the officialdom to the charge of ignoring the relief and rehabilitation needs of the affected villagers. The white officialdom's feelings of revenge got the better of their humanitarian feelings. The affected people numbered 23.5 lakh. Shyama Prasad rushed to Midnapore on 30 October and held a meeting in the circuit house. So enraged were the officials at his outbursts that while returning he was briefly placed under arrest by the white officials at Kolaghat. On his return to Calcutta he held a meeting presided over by Huq. This meeting decided to place relief operations in the cyclone-affected areas under the direct supervision of a senior ICS officer, B.R. Sen, thus bypassing the district magistrate.

EROSION OF HUQ'S POPULARITY

Meanwhile, the ground was slipping away fast under Fazlul Huq's feet. The true winner in the situation created by the Quit India movement and the mass-scale incarceration of Congressmen was Jinnah, who had a clear field to himself and made the most of the government's unstinted support extended to him. He dramatically improved his standing among Muslims and was fast becoming a leader who was acknowledged as such by an overwhelming number of Muslims in undivided India. Several chance happenings like the untimely death of Sikandar Hyat Khan of Punjab, the indefatigable advocate of a united Punjab, and the assassination of Premier Allah Bux in Sind, who was not a friend of the Muslim League, helped him. In Bengal, Fazlul Huq was fast getting isolated among Muslims. The League activists systematically attended Huq's meetings, heckled him and attacked KPP workers. In the Bengal Legislative Assembly sessions the Muslim League trio—Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy and Tamijuddin Khan—launched bitter personal attacks on him calling him a Muslim renegade and appealing to the religious sentiment of the Muslims. Thus, on 24 February 1942, Suhrawardy declared in the Assembly: 'Fazlul Huq has betrayed his colleagues in his party and his community and as such Muslim society has

cast him away. Muslim Bengal will avenge his conduct.’ This provoked Shyama Prasad to say: ‘I strongly protest against the dirty calumny made by Suhrawardy—his party having been kicked out of the cabinet has been spreading calumnies to vent its spleen ... The new path that Fazlul Huq has chalked out with courage is the only way to save not only Bengal but India as a whole.’ The results of the League’s propaganda and the erosion of Huq’s popularity were evident from a by-election for a Muslim seat in the Assembly (1942) in which the League candidate trounced the KPP candidate by 10,843 votes to 840.

Huq’s government also became the victim of a set of repressive policies launched by the Government of India over which the provincial government had no control. With the Japanese army lurking on Bengal’s waters, the government stopped the plying of boats on rivers so as to deny transport to the invading Japanese when they came. This affected the movement of foodgrains, and prices shot up. The movement of people too was hindered. Indiscriminate arrests of people and restrictions on personal freedom also built up resentment.

Muslim League leaders also poisoned the ears of the British authorities, saying that since one of the coalition partners was Forward Block, the party of Subhas Bose who had joined the Axis powers, Fazlul Huq and his ministers had inevitable sympathy for Subhas’s anti-British activities. A provincial government such as the one in Bengal could not truly support the war efforts. Thus, a conspiracy was being hatched by the Muslim League, the governor and the twenty-five European MLAs to replace the Shyama Prasad–Huq coalition with a Muslim league-led coalition. Fazlul Huq’s overtures to Jinnah for rapprochement, and Shyama Prasad’s abandonment of Fazlul Huq at this critical hour, facilitated this. On 13 November 1942, Huq wrote a secret letter to Jinnah offering to return to the Muslim League with his party and suggested a meeting. Jinnah in his response laid down certain conditions, which Huq did not find it possible to accept. Jinnah now hit Huq below the belt by publishing the correspondence, a clear breach of faith. Huq lost his credibility among the Hindus as also his own party men.

Shyama Prasad was gradually coming to the conclusion that the bureaucracy was taking advantage of the wartime conditions and, with encouragement from the governor and the white masters at New Delhi, was determined to frustrate the efforts of the ministers to do anything concrete. Under the 1935 constitution, the secretary of a department could approach the governor directly and express his view, bypassing the minister. The governor under his special powers could uphold the secretary's view and overrule the minister. Sir John Herbert was taking full advantage of this provision and dealing directly with the officials, completely ignoring the minister. There was the ridiculous incident of the district magistrate passing Section 144 against Huq at Feni and preventing him from addressing the victims of military atrocities (1943). Governor Herbert ordered officials to remove foodgrains from several East Bengal districts and also strictly implement the 'boat removal policy' so as to obstruct Japanese advance. He did not even consider a memorandum on this submitted by the minister. As such instances multiplied, Shyama Prasad wrote a long letter to the governor on 26 July 1942, bitterly complaining that the officialdom in the Writers' Building was obstructing the functioning of Fazlul Huq's cabinet in every possible way and accused the governor himself of encouraging this defiance, favouring the Muslim League in its nefarious design, and not encouraging Fazlul Huq and his colleagues in their progressive efforts.

He raised the issue of police atrocities on the Congress agitators, especially in Midnapore district, and suggested a persuasive and conciliatory approach with the help of the elected ministers in dealing with the Congress's Quit India movement. As the governor once again turned down his proposals, he wrote to Viceroy Linlithgow on 12 August 1942, advising that India should be granted independence without delay and that a national government should be formed in the Centre and also in all the provinces consisting of representatives of all political parties. All power should be transferred to them except the actual responsibility of conducting military operations, which could stay with the commander-in-chief. He also wrote that 'the demand of the Congress is the national demand of India as a

whole'. He suggested a formation of national, all-party governments at the Centre as well as the provinces.

Without waiting for a reply, Shyama Prasad proceeded to resign from Fazlul Huq's cabinet on 16 November 1942, calling provincial autonomy a 'colossal mockery' and accusing the governor of allowing official advice to prevail over the minister, especially in matters concerning the rights and liberties of the people. Significantly, there was no difference of opinion with Huq nor any rancour between the two. They continued to be good friends amidst adverse political circumstances till Shyama Prasad's untimely death in 1953. His letter of resignation was suppressed under the Defence of India Rules. But in his statement before the Bengal Assembly on 12 February 1943, Shyama Prasad mentioned in detail the arrogance of the permanent British officers, how they put obstacles in the path of the ministers with the connivance of the governor, and stated that in the circumstances it was not possible for any self-respecting person to continue as a minister.

He also referred to the reign of terror let loose by the bureaucracy with the support of the governor in Midnapore and other places for suppressing the movement of 1942 and described how the people of the cyclone-devastated Midnapore district were denied relief as a punishment for their seditious activities, and were thus pushed into the jaws of death.

He complained that far from relieving the distress of the people, the officials did not even allow the news of this catastrophe to be published for a fortnight, with the object of preventing non-government relief from reaching the suffering people. He complained that the government followed a sinister policy of carrying on relief work during the day and looting and harassment at night.

FALL OF FAZLUL HUQ'S SECOND GOVERNMENT

After Shyama Prasad's resignation the fall of Fazlul Huq ministry was only a question of time. The Muslim League made overtures to Hindu legislators as no government could be formed without the support of some of them. On 27 March 1943, both Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy appealed to Hindus to discard Fazlul Huq and join the League in forming a new government.

Suhrawardy announced: 'I give this understanding on behalf of the Muslim League that if Fazlul Huq stands aside, we Hindus and Muslims jointly should be able to carry on the administration peacefully.' But Fazlul Huq still demonstrated his majority by winning on a cut motion the same day. In a memorable, emotion-packed speech he pleaded for a national government which alone could alleviate Bengal's distress.

But the very next day he was tricked into resigning by the wily governor, Sir John Herbert. The governor sent for him in the evening and from 7.30 to 9.30 p.m. discussed the possibility of the formation of a national government. Then he requested Huq to resign to facilitate the formation of such a cabinet and even placed a typed letter of resignation before him for his signature giving him an impression that he would invite Huq again to form an all-party national government. The letter read as follows:

My dear John,

Understanding that there is a probability of the formation of a ministry representative of most of the parties in the event of my resignation, I hereby tender my resignation of my office as minister in the sincere hope that this will prove to be in the best interest of the people of Bengal.

Yours sincerely

A.K. Fazlul Huq

Huq naively signed the letter¹³ and went home only to be informed at 10 p.m. that the governor had accepted the resignation. He expected an invitation to form a new government, but it never came. Clearly, the governor reneged on the understanding he had given Huq. Fazlul Huq himself never told the full story of what transpired in the Government House, but only stated in the Assembly on 5 July 1943 that he was forced to resign as a result of a deep conspiracy in which the governor was a party. He still asserted that he commanded the majority in the Bengal Assembly. The manner in which Fazlul Huq was made to resign perfidiously in 1942, by an intriguing, double-faced British governor will always remain a blot on British rule in Bengal. Fazlul Huq's coalition with Shyama Prasad (1941–43) was a shining example of right-thinking politicians shedding their political labels and coming together in the province's larger interest to

save Bengal from its journey towards political disaster. Also, it gave a good example of communal harmony in the enveloping communal darkness. But fate decreed otherwise.

NAZIMUDDIN'S MUSLIM LEAGUE COALITION GOVERNMENT

Governor's rule was proclaimed under Article 93 of the constitution but only as an interregnum for about a month. On 24 April 1943, Khwaja Nazimuddin, the leader of the Muslim League in the Assembly, was invited to form a cabinet. Evidently, this was what Governor Herbert and the officialdom had intended. This cabinet included some breakaway Congressmen like Tulsi Goswami and Barada Pyne as also some Scheduled Caste leaders. But it was essentially a Muslim League government, not a national government.¹⁴ The duplicity with which Fazlul Huq's cabinet was bundled off and a Muslim League-led government was installed came in for a lot of criticism. Both Huq and Shamsuddin Ahmed, the KPP parliamentary party leader, wired the viceroy demanding the installation of a national government in Bengal. A public meeting held in the Town Hall on the same day (24 April 1943) under the chairmanship of Abdul Halim Guznavi bitterly criticized the action of the partisan governor. Shyama Prasad said that the governor and the British trading community of Calcutta could not accept Fazlul Huq's independent attitude and had therefore entered into a heinous conspiracy to oust him. Huq himself complained that he was made to sign on a false assurance, and accused the governor of breach of faith and bringing through the backdoor the Nazimuddin ministry which was not 'national' but communal. The meeting adopted a resolution condemning the governor's action and demanding a national government. Needless to say, the British Raj remained unmoved. What must have weighed with the British authorities in removing Fazlul Huq and bringing in a government¹⁵ led by loyalist and pliable Nazimuddin was the fact that in the context of the deteriorating war situation for the British, the spectacular Japanese occupation of South-east Asia, the formation of the Azad Hind

Government led by Netaji Subhas Bose and their joint advance to Bengal's borders, they could not tolerate an independent-minded premier in Bengal.

THE GREAT FAMINE OF 1943

The single biggest happening of these two years apart from the raging world war—the one that overshadowed everything else—was the great Bengal famine of 1943. Occurring towards the end of British rule, and popularly called *Panchasher manwantar* (the great famine of 1350 BS), this famine is comparable in its magnitude with the great famine of 1770—the *Chhiattarer manwantar* (1176 BS)—that had ravaged Bengal at the commencement of British rule. Almost as many people died in this famine as those who were killed in the Second World War—a slow, lingering death by starvation. The official inquiry commission headed by Sir John Woodhead put the death toll at fifteen lakh. Unofficial estimates spoke of figures as high as five million. Applying the commission's own method for calculation, Amartya Sen estimated a figure around three million deaths.¹⁶ The importance of this great catastrophe, almost wholly man-made, also lay in the fact that it severely damaged Bengal's rural economy and rural life, and also played havoc with the social value system. The principal causes were the following:

- (i) The Japanese occupation of Burma had cut off the supply of rice from that country. Bengal had traditionally depended to a significant extent on Burma rice.
- (ii) The wide-scale confiscation of boats and other means of transport, such as bullock carts, by the government all over the province, in pursuance of the so-called 'denial' policy to Japanese invaders, affected the normal trade channels and caused acute scarcity in a large number of pockets. The ruthless manner in which this policy was implemented with the backing of the army created serious dislocation. Not only were the boats and carts destroyed or confiscated, the police even forcibly removed or destroyed stocks of paddy from the godowns of the rice merchants or often the peasants. Such destruction and seizure of paddy on a large scale took place in the districts of Midnapore, 24 Paraganas, Khulna, Bakharganj, Noakhali and several others. In his memoirs, Ashok Mitra has graphically described how Munshiganj subdivision, i.e. Bikramapur pargana, was rendered completely devoid of rice and paddy in 1942–43 and countless number of people died as a result of severe scarcity.¹⁷ In this area the price of rice which was Rs 3–4 per maund in February 1942 became Rs 90–100 per maund by December 1943. What was happening in Munshiganj by and large happened in many pockets all over Bengal along with the destruction of trade and

commerce through the 'denial' policy. The forcible removal of the inhabitants of a large number of villages in the coastal areas [speech by K.C. Neogy in the Central Legislative Assembly on 17 July 1942] also aggravated conditions.

- (iii) Large-scale procurement of foodgrains from the market for feeding the huge military personnel of the allied powers.
- (iv) The restrictions imposed by the government on movement of goods by railways and roadways also hindered the movement of foodgrains from other provinces to Bengal. This was further worsened by the choking of the available railway capacity by military movement.
- (v) Influx of several lakhs of refugees from Burma to Bengal and the need to feed so many additional mouths.
- (vi) Wide-scale hoarding of paddy and rice by dishonest businessmen with a view to black-marketeering and profiteering. It was rumoured that this was often assisted by dishonest ministers and government officials who had links with those traders. Appointing Ispahani's company as the sole buying agent for the government without calling for tenders and giving it an advance of two crore rupees came in for much criticism. The anti-hoarding drives conducted by the government agencies were more cosmetic than serious. In a radio speech, acting Governor Rutherford admitted that on account of the administration's laxity, the ration shop owners could sell essential articles to dishonest black marketeers at high prices and that a section of dishonest officials obstructed the policy of government distribution at fair prices.
- (vii) The farmers were removed from several parts of Bengal for war needs, and the lands remained fallow.

The disastrous cyclone of 1942 that ravaged Midnapore, 24 Parganas and other coastal areas reduced large sections of marginal farmers and landless labourers to poverty without any purchasing power. It also killed a huge number of menfolk, thereby condemning their womenfolk and children to penury. This was responsible for the presence of a very large number of famished women among the beggars that one saw on Calcutta streets and in other urban areas crying for food.

There was a certain spirit of revenge in Governor Herbert and a section of white officialdom against Bengal after Subhas Bose's escape from custody on 27 January 1941, thereby ridiculing the entire administration and security arrangements, and also because of the August movement, especially in Midnapore, which had for all practical purposes freed large areas from the colonial administration and turned them into liberated zones.

On 14 July 1943, Shyama Prasad thundered in the Bengal Assembly: 'The government was fiddling while the villagers in Bengal were crying for a morsel.' He blamed the British administration in India fairly and squarely.

But all the warnings were simply ignored by the government in both Calcutta and New Delhi.

It is possible to get at the truth of this phenomenal happening from the proceedings of the Bengal Assembly, in particular from the speech of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee on 29 February 1943, and from the speeches of Fazlul Huq on 29 March and 5 July 1943, and the proceedings of both the British parliament and the Indian Central Assembly. It was a clear case of the governor's administration enforcing certain high-handed policies in the interest of the war, but totally unmindful of their disastrous effect on the life of the common people, while the so-called provincial government only played a secondary role in a highly inept manner. This famine also received considerable academic attention even at that time from scholars like P.C. Mahalanobis, who did not have access to enough data, and subsequently from Amartya Sen in his seminal work *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, 1981,¹⁸ after nearly four decades. What is a matter of great surprise is that this famine, unlike its predecessors, did not affect the bhadralok class, but only the poorer sections of society, especially the rural poor who found themselves without anything to sustain themselves in their villages and were forced into cities and towns in quest for food, which was there in significant quantities in food shops in the towns for those who had the purchasing power. The famished poor had none. They had neither the money to buy food nor the revolutionary courage to defy the police and the army and start food riots. They simply starved and died in thousands in silence. Subhas Bose's offer in his radio broadcasts from Saigon to send two shiploads of rice for the dying people of his beloved Bengal and asking the British authorities to accept these ships and get them unloaded was rebuffed by both Allied Supreme Commander Mountbatten and Minister for India Amery who said that this would amount to appeasement of the nationalists.

The Congress leadership almost in its entirety was behind the bars. The Muslim League leaders were busy playing the power game. The officialdom was demoralized and incompetent. Part of it, especially the white officials were too busy enforcing wartime restrictions. Strict censorship kept

informed public opinion in the dark and suppressed all the warning signals. It was only when hundreds had died of starvation in the countryside, and thousands of famished villagers made their way to the metropolis of Calcutta and district towns, many of them dying in full view of the public, that the magnitude of the raging disaster dawned on the authorities and the world outside. Apathy in Delhi and incompetence and corruption in Calcutta combined together to bring about by far the worst famine in recent history, a largely man-made disaster. The whole of Bengal was rent with anguished cries of the hungry seeking *bhaat* or even *fan* (drained-out water from boiled rice). The streets of Calcutta were littered with dead bodies and dying men and women. The majority of those who used to beg for 'fan' day in and day out on the streets of Calcutta were women from Midnapore and 24 Parganas districts who had lost their men, the bread-winners, during the cyclone of 16 October 1942. The *New Statesman* of London in its issue of 24 September 1943, under the headline 'Black Death in Calcutta', said: 'The description of life in Calcutta reads like extracts from medieval chronicle of black death.'

But even when faced with this grim reality, Nazimuddin's government proved hopelessly incompetent. It came in for severe criticism in the Assembly from Fazlul Huq, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and many others. There were dark hints that some of the ministers were party to the hoarding of foodgrains, racketeering and black-marketeering. It was during this time that a new expression 'black market' entered the Indian English vocabulary. The civil supply department, of which Suhrawardy was minister, came in for criticism. All efforts by distinguished observers, like Hridaynath Kunzru who visited Bengal early in 1943, failed to make the government in Delhi take the steps to rush supplies to Bengal. But Jinnah acquitted Nazimuddin government by describing it as 'a fire brigade called too late to put out the raging flame'.¹⁹ There were, however, private relief efforts of a significant scale spearheaded by Shyama Prasad's Bengal Relief Committee in which prominent non-officials like B.C. Roy, G.D. Birla, Fazlul Huq, Saraogi and Anandilal Poddar participated.

It was only the departure of Linlithgow and the arrival of Field Marshal Lord Wavell as the new viceroy on 17 October 1943, which, for the first time, imparted a sense of urgency to famine control measures. Within a week after being sworn in as the viceroy, Wavell, with his instinct as a soldier, flew to Calcutta to study the Bengal famine for himself. He spent three days discussing with Bengal ministers and officials. At night he went round the streets to see piled-up dead bodies and sleeping destitutes. He spent one day in the Contai area of Midnapore which had been thrice ravaged, first by the Quit India movement, next by the unprecedented cyclone and tidal waves and now by the famine. He made the director general of the Indian Medical Services cancel all his programmes in Simla and rush to Calcutta to arrange for medicines to deal with starvation-related diseases that were stalking Bengal. He badgered both Churchill's government in London and his own administration in Delhi for shipment of foodgrains and other aid to Bengal, and at one point even threatened to resign if London did not arrange immediate shipments.

Wavell also instructed the Bengal government to take the following steps immediately:

- (i) Construction of shelters outside Calcutta for the countless famine-stricken people who were staying on the streets or in the open, and arrange to shift them there and provide them food;
- (ii) dispatch of foodgrains to the scarcity-affected village areas with the help of the army; and
- (iii) introduction of full statutory rationing in Calcutta.

After this, the civil supply department under Suhrawardy showed some signs of activity. But already the famine had taken a heavy toll. Wavell blamed the Bengal ministry for this man-made famine and, after his personal visit, was said to have recommended the dismissal of this ministry and imposition of governor's rule under Section 93. But the Home government did not agree. Thus Bengal was not only ravaged by a severe famine at the close of the British rule—as it had been by another even at its advent—it also suffered at the hands of its apathetic government.²⁰ It took long to recover from the ravages.

The famine coincided with another man-made scarcity—that of cotton textiles in 1944–45. They simply disappeared from the market. Once again,

there were complaints of large-scale hoarding by Marwari black-marketeers, and dark hints of the complicity of the civil supply minister Suhrawardy and the officials of his department. Day in and day out, there was mud-slinging between the Treasury benches and the Opposition in the Assembly.

FALL OF NAZIMUDDIN'S GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNOR'S RULE

Nazimuddin's government tried unsuccessfully to get a modified version of the KPP–League government's 1940 bill on secondary education passed by the Assembly, but once again the Hindu members were adamant and moved about three thousand amendments to the bill. The passage of the bill was deadlocked as before.

But all this added to the League's popularity among the Muslim masses, further helped by the mass contact programme launched by Abul Hashim after he was elected secretary of the BPML. The 'Pakistan' slogan was also steadily gaining ground. A straw in the wind was Muslim League's unprecedented success in the elections to the Calcutta Corporation. Securing 17 seats in the 1944 elections, when the Congress was divided between followers and opponents of Subhas Bose and with the Hindu Mahasabha further splitting Hindu votes, the League captured power in the corporation and got its nominees elected to all the aldermen's seats.

But the Nazimuddin ministry, which had lost popularity, was fast losing its legislative strength. On 28 March 1945, during the budget session, it was defeated on the floor by 106 votes to 97 on the grant for agriculture department. In a historic ruling the Speaker, Nausher Ali, declared Nazimuddin's government as invalid after its defeat on the floor. There were accusations that Marwari businessmen played some role with their money power to induce some members to leave the Treasury benches and vote against the government. Suhrawardy openly accused on the floor of the House: 'If the voting goes against us and we have to resign, the only reason for that would be that members would be casting their votes against us out of greed for money offered to them by hoarders, profiteers and black

marketeers. If we had not moved for de-hoarding illegally hoarded stocks, we would not have to face this predicament.’²¹

In a desperate move Nazimuddin asked for Jinnah’s permission to form a coalition with the Congress, and Jinnah gave his nod so long as the coalition was on honourable terms. But in a swift move Governor Sir Richard Casey, who had joined on 22 January 1944, after Sir John Herbert’s death, dismissed the Nazimuddin government and took over administration under Section 93. In his memoirs, Casey, who later became Australia’s foreign minister, made the following observations on his experience in Bengal: ‘It is a matter of great regret that a certain proportion of Muslim and Scheduled Caste politicians are seduced to defect from the party and do not hesitate to join another.’²² To set the record straight, we should also mention that the defection of Nawab Habibullah of Dhaka with ten followers, reportedly because of his not being given the supply portfolio which he wanted, played a major role in this government’s defeat. In a statement issued on 19 April 1945 the nawab and his ten followers accused the Nazimuddin ministry of ruining Bengal through their corruption and incompetence. They also accused the government of openly favouring Marwari businessmen and said that there was only one Muslim among the twenty agents appointed by the government for importing textiles from outside the province, all others being Hindu, mostly Marwaris. Thus, paradoxically, both Suhrawardy and Nawab Habibullah of Dhaka blamed the Marwari businessmen, the former for the fall of Nazimuddin ministry, and the latter for being hand in glove with that ministry. Perhaps both were partially right.

True, no tears were shed for the fall of an inept government, but in fairness it must be said that on account of the prevailing wartime conditions and of the Defence of India Rules the provincial government did not sometimes have the powers to set things right. Many of the officials took orders directly from the Government of India through the governor. And their priority lay in meeting the supply needs of the allied army fighting on the Assam, Manipur and Chittagong fronts, in facilitating military

movements and in organizing activities such as air raid precautions. Unfortunately, the rising communal divide also had a role to play. The more the Hindu press attacked the government and some of its ministers personally, the more would a section of Muslims treat it as an unfair attack on Muslims and would more often than not impart a communal colour to it. This served as a shield for the government.

In retrospect, it should be highlighted that during these years from 1937 to 1945 the Muslim League, a small, upper-class, marginal party in Bengal, was transformed from an elitist party to a mass-based party on account of a variety of circumstances. Entry to the League was made easier by reducing the annual membership fee from one rupee to two annas. Old pro-zamindar policies were replaced by pro-tenant policies. In this process, Suhrawardy, who was popular among students, and Abul Hashim with his leftist leanings played a major role. On his election as general secretary to the Bengal Provincial League in November 1943 Abul Hashim criticized the League's inability to meet people's needs. The League, according to him, had pawned itself thrice.²³

The League had pawned its political leadership to the nawabs of Ahsan Manzil since the time of Sir Salimullah; it had pawned its publicity rights to the owner of the daily *Azad*, Maulana Akram Khan, and its finances to the business tycoon Ispahani. Abul Hashim promised to free the League from these shackles and let the Bengalee Muslim middle class find its rightful place. He, as also Suhrawardy, toured the districts of Bengal extensively to build up grass-roots support for the League. Students were extensively used to move from village to village and propagate the League. KPP workers in large numbers joined the League. The Bengal famine of 1943 was seized as an opportunity to make mass contact in the name of relief. In 1944 the League socialists invited some KPP and Congress old guards to join the League. While Humayun Kabir and Ashrafuddin Chaudhury preferred to join the Congress, others like Maulana Abdullah-il-Baqi, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Shamsuddin Ahmed and Nawabzada Syed Hassan Ali joined the League. So great was the pull that a liberal lawyer and old follower of Gandhi and C.R. Das like Ali Ahmed Khan (1900–66) felt emotionally

compelled to join the League and was elected to the Bengal Assembly in 1946 on its ticket.

By 1944, in his annual report Abul Hashim, as general secretary of the BPML, could announce that the Muslim League had become a revolutionary 'mass' movement and had penetrated rural Bengal. He claimed that in 1944 about 5,50,000 new members had been enrolled in Bengal. By abandoning its traditional pro-landlord stand in UP for the demand for zamindari abolition in Bengal, the League had drastically transformed itself. Dhaka University, by no means a League stronghold till the mid-1930s, became one in the 1940s. Its students offered themselves as volunteers to the League for the 1946 elections. Huq faced black flag demonstrations from students almost in every town of East Bengal after he left the League in 1941. Thus by 1945, the Muslim League had become the overwhelmingly dominant party among Bengalee Muslims. The rising tide of Bengalee Muslim aspirations had no time for secular Muslims like Muzaffar Ahmed or Humayun Kabir, scholars like Saiyad Mujtaba Ali and nationalist politicians like Nausher Ali and Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chaudhury. With extreme communalism rearing its head on both sides, all moderate sections were simply pushed to the wall.

Unfortunately, Hashim's efforts to propagate some sort of Islamic socialism and turn the League into a leftist organization came a cropper. His experiment in setting up a Party House in Dhaka with a weekly paper *Hushiar* to carry on within the League a left-oriented movement that would eventually take over leadership from the Khwajas and ashrafs also failed in the prevailing atmosphere of Muslim solidarity caused by the explosive slogan 'Islam in danger'.

Rise and Fall of Netaji Subhas Bose

This is an appropriate occasion to take note of the life and activities of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose who dominated the freedom movement during the 1930s and was not only the last all-India leader of the Congress from Bengal, but was by far the lone challenger to Gandhi's dominance. Indeed, he became a sort of legend in his own lifetime, a legend that steadily grew even after his disappearance. He was the only leader in Bengal after C.R. Das who won support of considerable number of Muslims in general and Bengalee Muslims in particular. A halo was created around him by his uncompromising anti-British stand, his winning a second term as Congress president despite Gandhi's opposition, his daredevil escape from police custody in 1941, his radio broadcasts to the people of India asking them to rise against the British rule, his submarine journey from Germany to Singapore and the launching of the Indian National Army in South-East Asia which sent strong emotional appeals to all Indians and alarm signals to the British through the disloyalty of Indian soldiers on whom the British Empire largely depended. He had a relatively short span of political career of nineteen years (1921–40) in India of which six years were spent in jail and three years abroad for health reasons.

Born at Cuttack in Orissa, Subhas came to Calcutta in 1913 at the age of sixteen. Deeply influenced by Vivekananda's teaching of seeking God through service of humanity, Subhas left his college hostel in 1914 in quest of a spiritual master and travelled all over northern India. He did not meet the guru that he sought, but had first-hand experience of the social and economic realities of the country, in particular the distress of the poor, the socially exploitative caste system and the economically exploitative colonial system. He returned to the Presidency College in August 1914 as

suddenly as he had left and plunged into student politics. His alleged involvement in the controversial Oaten episode, when he was accused of leading an assault on the racist professor E.F. Oaten, led to his expulsion from the Presidency College. Thereafter he completed his BA (Hons) in philosophy from the Scottish Church College. He proceeded to England to take the ICS examination and secured the fourth position, but resigned immediately, as he felt he could not serve his country and the British masters simultaneously. It had to be one or the other. He returned to India when the non-cooperation movement under Gandhi's leadership was at its height.¹

AN ASSOCIATE OF C.R. DAS

A meeting with Gandhi on 16 July 1921 left Bose confused. Clearly, Gandhi's satyagraha, which centred on a change of heart in the British, was not for him. But a meeting with C.R. Das, with whom he was already in correspondence from Cambridge, filled him with enthusiasm and he claimed Das as his leader.² He served as chief executive officer of Calcutta Corporation under Das's mayoralty when as a part of Das's Bengal Pact he recruited Muslims to 75 per cent of the vacant jobs and thereby established his popularity among the Muslims. Like his mentor, Subhas also kept close contact with the revolutionaries and was instrumental in the Calcutta Corporation passing a resolution contrary to Gandhi's advice, eulogizing the terrorist Gopinath Saha. For this Subhas was arrested in October 1924 and kept in detention without trial for three years. These three years of his absence saw great changes in Bengal politics—the death of C.R. Das (1925); the emergence of Karmi Sangha consisting largely of released Jugantar-led revolutionaries; the emergence of the so-called Big Five as a powerful influence in bhadralok politics; the stepping of J.M. Sengupta to the legacy of Das; the repudiation of Das's Bengal Pact by the Krishnanagar session of the BPCC (1926); and the desertion of the Bengal Congress by majority of the Muslim members like Suhrawardy and Tamijuddin Khan by 1927–28.

With the detention of Subhas Bose, J.M. Sengupta became the undisputed leader of the provincial Congress. But within a year Subhas Bose made a stormy re-entry on his release from Mandalay prison in Burma and straightaway captured the centre stage. Now began an unfortunate Bose–Sengupta factional rivalry, more on a personal than on an ideological basis, for six years until Sengupta's untimely death in 1933.

Subhas was elected as BPCC president in 1928. He was also helped by his anti-Gandhi and anti-British militant image, and the public image of Sengupta as a Gandhian. His appearance in military uniform as the General Officer Commanding of the Bengal Volunteers in the 1928 Congress session in Calcutta helped the growth of this image especially among the youth. He was instrumental in the full independence resolution at the Lahore Congress of 1929.

RIVALRY WITH J.M. SENGUPTA

Shortly after Subhas's election as BPCC president, his primary concern was winning over as many District Congress Committees (DCCs) as he could and replacing pro-Sengupta office-bearers as soon as possible.

So ugly was their personal rivalry that in 1930, when Subhas contested the mayoralty of Calcutta Corporation, Sengupta supported the joint nominee of the European and Muslim councillors, Prince Golam Mohammed Shah, who lost to Subhas. All this at a time when the Congress was launching the civil disobedience movement.

Sengupta, not to give in easily, went on trying to enlist the support of the DCCs in his favour and succeeded in winning over twenty-two out of thirty-two. Thus, when the civil disobedience movement started there were two parallel Bengal Congresses—the BPCC setting up a Civil Disobedience Committee (CDC) and Sengupta forming a Bengal Council for Civil Disobedience (BCCD)—both pursuing their separate programmes much to the amusement of the then government. The two could be merged only in December 1930. The government looked on this scenario with glee and consequently tried to foment these factional squabbles. Thus on Subhas's visit to UP to address a gathering, the home department of the Central

government specifically instructed the UP government not to detain him, as 'owing to Subhas's differences with Sengupta, the Bengal government might prefer him to be out of jail'. Thus the civil disobedience movement in Bengal could not reach its full potential and become as effective as the non-cooperation movement, although Bengal accounted for the largest number of arrests (15,000) as well as the highest incidence of violence.

Unfortunately, the Muslim peasantry remained sightseers although there was some support at the level of the educated Muslim elite whose participation, to quote Tanika Sarkar, 'was by no means negligible'.

Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chaudhury and Shamsuddin Ahmed, two MLCs (members of legislative council), resigned from the legislative council and joined the civil disobedience movement. But these were isolated examples.

After the failure of the Round Table Conference, the Subhas group repudiated the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and gave a call for an anti-government agitation at the Baharampur Political Conference in December 1931. Things became quieter only after Sengupta's death in 1933 and Subhas Bose's externment from Bengal (1933-35).

The no-holds-barred rivalry between Bose and Sengupta had caused much damage to the image of the provincial Congress machinery precisely at a time when the Muslim leaders and large sections of the Scheduled Castes were getting estranged from the Congress and consolidating themselves on communal lines. The Bengal Congress had for long been dominated by Hindus of rentier classes. When these nationalists were forced to choose between their opposition to foreign rule and the loss of their long-standing social and class interests, most of them opted for protection of these class interests. Presumably, this would have held had the tenants and ryots been fellow Hindus. The fact that most of them were Muslims merely made it easier for the British Raj to use its divide and rule strategy.

STORMY PETREL IN CONGRESS POLITICS

But while Subhas easily captured the captaincy of the Calcutta-based elite leadership in particular and the bhadralok class in general, he had to try

hard to win over the predominantly Muslim peasantry and the industrial labour. The first task was difficult in view of his known prorentier stand on the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act, his dependence on the Big Five and the former revolutionaries and the dominance of Fazlul Huq's leadership over Bengal peasantry. He made some serious efforts to build up a support among industrial labour by participating in the jute workers' strike in 1929, the Bengal Nagpur Railway and the East India Railway strikes (1928) and the Tata Iron and Steel and Tinplate Company of India strikes in Jamshedpur (1928–29); but the task was complicated by the Great Depression of 1929–30, which weakened the position of labour while strengthening the position of the industrialists. Then, the exclusiveness shown by the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the communist elements in participating in these strikes also weakened them. For Subhas, the primary concern was to enlist the working class movement as a mass base for Congress's nationalist ideology and programmes as shown in his Luluah speech to railway workers on 16 August 1929 and his presidential address at the 1935 session of the AITUC. But the main interest of the communists while remaining in Congress was to assert that the working class movement had an independent character as a part of the Moscow-directed international workers' movement and the nationalist movement was strictly secondary. In fact, the communists broke away from the 1931 AITUC session to form the Red Trade Union Congress. Subhas's attitude to working class struggle had an element of ambivalence. He could not, as labour leader, accept 'dictates of Moscow' or cease to be primarily a member of the Indian National Congress.

During these years Subhas sharpened his attack on Gandhi's politics, in fact, on his leadership. This was shown in his presidential address at the Students' Conference at Lahore in 1929 opposing Gandhi's ban on student participation in politics, his refusal to sign the statement from the Congress accepting Dominion status and his reiteration of full independence, in his forming the Congress Democratic Party within the Congress and the Bengal Volunteers in 1928 and in fact, in his rejection of both Gandhi's Sabarmati line and Aurobindo's Pondicherry school. In his *Indian Struggle*, published

in London in 1934, Subhas had justified application of violence as a legitimate means of anti-British struggle, because (i) that alone would bring a response from the West, and (ii) recourse to it was an apt answer to Macaulay's characterization of the Bengalees as cowards. He admired leaders like Kamal Pasha of Turkey and De Valera of Ireland. With his strong international sense he was also thinking on the one hand of establishing *samyabad*—communism or an egalitarian society—in India and on the other of taking support from anti-British powers in achieving India's independence.

As soon as he came out of prison—his second term—following the Gandhi–Irwin Pact of 1931, Subhas accused Gandhi at the Karachi Congress of a blunder in making peace with the authorities and not securing the release of all political prisoners. In fact, he led a black flag demonstration at the Karachi railway station when Gandhi arrived. The Karachi Congress was also marked by a struggle for leadership of the Congress leftists between Subhas and Jawaharlal Nehru.³ He followed up the line by issuing a statement from Vienna in 1933, jointly with Vithalbhai Patel, elder brother of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, criticizing Gandhi for suspending the civil disobedience campaign in 1933, and calling for a new party within the Congress comprising radical elements to provide an alternative leadership—all this while maintaining an outward show of deference and respect for Gandhi.

His speeches and acts caused much concern to the British authorities. M.O. Carter, chief secretary, Bengal, corroborated the fear and anxiety of the British when Subhas decided to organize a civil disobedience in Bengal for release of political prisoners after the Gandhi–Irwin Pact.⁴ So concerned was the British government that when Subhas went to Europe between 1933 and 1936 for treatment of tuberculosis he was not permitted to visit Britain because Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, felt that he would instigate destructive activities.⁵ Nor was he permitted to visit his parents in Calcutta because the IB was frightened of Bose getting in touch with the old terrorist friends if he were allowed to go back there.⁶ Subhas used his three years in

Europe to propagate the cause of India's independence. He was financially strained in this task, all the more so when he was denied access to a fund, which the late Vithalbhai Patel left for him for foreign propaganda, through machinations of the Congress. He was denied interview with Hitler. But he was impressed with Mussolini who showed much sympathy for India's cause. But he soon outgrew his fondness for Fascism and was to criticize it strongly in his presidential address at the Haripura Congress session (1938).

Slowly, his mind was turning to socialism, the concept of a modern industrial state and national reconstruction on socialistic lines. He was pleading for a comprehensive scheme of industrial development under state ownership and control, a radical land reforms programme for modernizing agriculture, including the abolition of the zamindari system, and revival of cottage industry not on Gandhian lines, but on the basis of competition among factories on equal terms. In these socio-economic views he was moving closer to Nehru. Earlier, in his Rangpur address in 1929, and his Midnapore address of the same year he had openly advocated samyabad for India.

While Subhas Bose had strong antipathy to much of Gandhi's thoughts, he shared a great deal of commonality with Jawaharlal Nehru, especially when both emerged into the political scenario in the early 1920s. Both came from affluent families, had the best of education at home and abroad, and had a modern and scientific approach to problems of India. Both also shared a certain orientation towards international affairs and believed in representing the cause for India's independence at international fora. They both opposed Gandhi's preoccupation with the charkha as a means to swaraj. But while Subhas was vocal about it, Nehru, under Gandhi's near-hypnotic influence, liked to keep his thoughts to himself and did not speak openly. Also, there was one discordant note. Nehru was strongly anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi and had an idealistic reverence for British liberal views on world affairs. But, for Subhas, attaining India's independence was the foremost consideration and he would not hesitate to take help from any quarter, be it Nazism, Fascism or Soviet communism, which would further

that cause. In Bose's reckoning, the foreign policy for a colonial nation like India must be guided by pragmatic rather than idealistic considerations.

Nehru and Bose both appeared close to each other until 1935–36. The relationship continued even afterwards although Subhas was arrested immediately on his return to India. Nehru became the Congress president in 1936 and had very good rapport with Subhas's elder brother Sarat Bose. But serious differences cropped up between Subhas and Nehru from 1937 onwards. A major domestic issue on which they differed was the question of forming coalition governments in Bengal, Assam and Sind with progressive partners. Subhas favoured such coalitions in the larger interests of containing communalism and bringing about a broad anti-British coalition of parties led by the Congress. Thus, Subhas favoured a coalition between the Congress and Huq's KPP in Bengal in 1937. But the Gandhian-led Congress high command preferred that the Congress would only form the government where it could do so by its own legislative strength.⁷

AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Meanwhile, Subhas having secured the leadership of all leftists in the all-India Congress, staked his claim to Congress presidency at the Haripura Congress (1938). His unanimous election was an all-India recognition of his national role. His Haripura address was an exposition of his political, social and economic ideals. He advocated a modern industrial state, a casteless classless society, due safeguards to Muslims while preaching a composite patriotism on Das's model, and a broad socialistic line both nationally and internationally. He wanted the British to leave India immediately giving full independence. His crowning achievement was forming a National Planning Commission with Nehru as its chairman in October 1938 at a meeting of the industry ministers of Congress-ruled provinces over which Bose himself presided. This was the only occasion when Subhas was able to win away Jawaharlal Nehru from Gandhian orthodoxy and use him as a bridge between his own economic thoughts and Gandhian economics. In a way this also marked an interesting convergence of Indian big business, trade

unions and the Congress. ‘Slowly a tacit understanding was evolving between the capitalists and left-inclined politicians like Nehru and Bose.’⁸

But when Subhas decided to seek re-election in 1939, there was strong opposition from Gandhi and others although there were precedents for two consecutive terms—Nehru himself had held it as recently as in 1936 and 1937. But this was not acceptable to Gandhi, Patel and the Congress high command which had just about tolerated Subhas for one term and now wanted to see him out. Gandhi recommended Pattabhi Sitaramiah, a leader from Andhra. The AICC issued a press release requesting Subhas to withdraw. So did Nehru in a personal appeal to avoid a split in the Congress. The temporary convergence of the two was clearly over. But Subhas was adamant. Why should this question arise in his case when it was not raised earlier? For him this election was a fight between the right and the left.

In 1939 presidential elections all left forces in the Congress ranging from Jayaprakash Narayan (CSP), Swami Sahajananda (Kisan Sabha) and P.C. Joshi (CPI) on to M.N. Roy (Radical Humanist Group) in a rare show of solidarity threw themselves behind Subhas and ensured his victory over Sitaramiah by a comfortable margin of 203 votes.⁹ Even poet Rabindranath Tagore, not a Congressman, felt compelled to put aside his close rapport with Gandhi and wanted Subhas’s re-election. Significantly, apart from Bengal, Subhas received substantial majority votes from UP, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Kerala, Karnataka, Assam and Delhi PCCs.

Gandhi’s characterization of Sitaramiah’s defeat as ‘my own defeat’ reduced his popularity in Bengal. Gandhi himself did not attend the session on flimsy grounds, but the rightist leaders under his influence opposed Subhas’s proposal to issue an ultimatum to the British to leave India within six months or to face total civil disobedience. Subhas, never diplomatic in his utterances, branded the rightists as collaborators of the British Raj. All of them promptly resigned from the Working Committee, leaving a small rump of three with which the Congress president could not function. Every action thereafter by the Congress high command to hit Subhas Bose eroded

Congress popularity among Bengalees, Hindus and Muslims alike. The sustained pressure by Patel-led pro-Gandhi members at Tripuri forced Bose's resignation even before the session began, culminating in the passing of the resolution moved by G.B. Pant, UP premier, in the Subjects Committee, reiterating faith in Gandhi's leadership and asking Bose to nominate his new Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhi.

Such was Gandhi's mesmeric hold over the Congressmen that, faced with the inevitable choice between Gandhi and Subhas, there was a spectacular erosion of Subhas's following, even in his home province of Bengal where only a minority of left Congressmen stayed with him. Nehru who stood midway tried to mediate but in vain, and eventually cast his lot for Gandhi when the rift became either/or and too personal. Finally, at the stage-managed Calcutta session (29 April 1939) Subhas, unable to constitute the Working Committee and to get a majority behind him in the face of growing left disunity and literally pushed to the wall, resigned. The 'rump' Working Committee appointed Rajendra Prasad as the new president. This was a cruel blow to leftist cause. Bose himself attributed his defeat at Tripuri Congress to 'Nehru's failure to support me and the neutrality of the CSP'.¹⁰ He bitterly complained: 'Nobody has done more harm to our cause in the crisis than Pandit Nehru. If he had been with us we would have got a majority. Even his neutrality would have probably given us a majority.' Nehru himself regretted to Taya Zinkin later that he had 'let Subhas down'.¹¹

Bose's exit from the Congress was only a question of time. Rajendra Prasad was named interim president even before Subhas's resignation was accepted by the AICC at the special Calcutta session. A new Working Committee was constituted which included B.C. Roy and P.C. Ghosh, two prominent anti-Subhas leaders from Bengal; but Subhas showed his clout in the Bengal Congress by getting himself re-elected as the BPCC president on 21 April 1939 on the eve of the AICC session in Calcutta and obtaining a BPCC decision to vest in him complete power to nominate the executive

council. Subhas also announced the formation of the Forward Block within the Congress. For a while things were quiet, but when Subhas called for an all-India protest on 9 July against the AICC resolution banning civil disobedience without PCC's permission, the high command opposed it and used this as an excuse to remove him from the BPCC presidentship. Most of his supporters left him, giving first priority to Congress unity. The only groups left with him were Sahajananda's Kisan Sabha and some ex-Anusilan Marxists. The BPCC, by a majority, rejected the decision to organize a protest day and called it unconstitutional and 'an open breach of discipline'. Clearly, the Gandhi-led Congress high command was determined to finish Subhas as a force unless he submitted meekly and totally. All Nehru's mediatory efforts failed. Gandhi himself asked Subhas to resign voluntarily and, on the latter's refusal to do so, drafted a Working Committee resolution removing Subhas from his position in the Congress and banning him from holding any executive office for three years.

An ad hoc BPCC was appointed. The pro-Subhas executive council and the BPCC retaliated by passing a resolution on 25 August reaffirming its full confidence in Subhas Bose and questioning the validity of AICC action. The high command appointed a three-member election tribunal, all three well-known Gandhians, to weed out known followers of Subhas from the DCCs. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the Second World War put Subhas and Nehru on opposite sides. At the Wardha meeting of Congress leaders to which Subhas, still in the Congress, was invited, he took the view that Britain's discomfiture was India's opportunity. Nehru, on the other hand, took a clear stand against the rising imperialism of Germany, Italy and Japan.¹² Gandhi nipped the controversy in the bud by asking Britain to define her war aims and announcing that the Congress would finalize its stand on the war only after receiving this clarification. Nehru immediately accepted Gandhi's ruling, thus playing safe and isolating Subhas. Thus the Congress in Bengal was a hopelessly divided house when the Second World War came, unable to take an initiative either with the Muslim majority, which had abandoned it, or with the British rule.

Subhas took a lot of interest in the elections to the Calcutta Corporation under the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment) Act, 1937, passed by the Fazlul Huq ministry which had sought to increase the number of Muslim seats from 19 to 22 and introduce the principle of separate electorates for these seats. This was designed to deprive the Hindus—who formed 70 per cent of the total population of Calcutta, 76 per cent of the total taxpayers and 80 per cent of the total voters of the corporation—of their legitimate claims. Muslim leaders like Nausher Ali and Abu Hussain Sarkar also opposed it. Abu Hussain Sarkar (KPP) pointed out that Fazlul Huq himself had been elected under joint electorate on a Congress ticket. He accused the bill of protecting the interests of the Urdu-speaking non-Bengalees—Iranis, Suhrawardys, Siddiquis and Adamjees and Currimbhoys, who are in a majority among Calcutta Muslims and whose forefathers had come to exploit Bengal, but seeing it was impossible, joined the Campbells and Morgans, the representatives of European interests in Bengal.¹³

The act, as passed, provided for 47 seats to non-Muslim voters in a house of 93 with separate electorates. Subhas found in the elections an opportunity to show his clout and regain his strength. In the elections held on 28 March 1940 the Bose group got 21, Muslim League 18 and Hindu Mahasabha 16 seats. Subhas played a masterstroke by concluding an agreement with the League (the Bose–League Pact) under which a League representative would become the mayor with two League aldermen, while three aldermen would be from the Bose group. On behalf of the League, Suhrawardy was the main negotiator. A.R. Siddiqui was elected mayor with P.N. Brahma, from the Subhas group, as deputy mayor. Bose himself was one of the three aldermen elected. This agreement, according to Subhas, was ‘a great achievement not in its actuality, but in its potentiality’ which would ensure amicable relations between the two communities.¹⁴ The working of the Corporation of Calcutta during these troubled years was refreshingly free from the communal virus and provided a contrast to the Bengal Assembly which was always deadlocked on communal issues. According to Sir John Herbert, governor of Bengal, by the Bose–League

alliances the Europeans were removed from the power nucleus of the Calcutta Corporation and Subhas ensured that he kept his fingers on some of the resources of the Corporation.¹⁵ Bose was bitterly criticized by the Congress high command, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Calcutta press.

Another step Subhas took to consolidate Muslim support for him in Calcutta was leading an agitation for removal of the Holwell monument at Dalhousie Square in Calcutta. His selecting this issue for launching a sustained agitation confused the government which, at that time, was at the point of arresting him for his anti-British seditious speeches. Subhas showed deep strategic sense; the agitation united Muslims and Hindus. It inflamed opinion against British rule. Even the Fazlul Huq ministry could not oppose it. Both Huq and Home Minister Nazimuddin, in fact, pressed for an agreement with the Bose brothers on this issue, as there should be no opportunity on Subhas's part to start any form of direct action in which he could claim and obtain Muslim sympathy.¹⁶ Even the Hindu press of Calcutta gave complete support to this joint Hindu–Muslim effort. A mammoth public meeting was to be held at the Town Hall, Calcutta, on 3 July 1940. On the previous day, Subhas, along with several others like Hemanta Bose, was arrested. Resolutions were passed in the meeting urging deletion of matters derogatory to Siraj-ud-Daulah, and giving an ultimatum to the government to remove the Holwell monument by 15 July failing which a satyagraha by the Council of Action would start on 16 July. Muslims in large numbers participated in the meeting, including the Muslim League student organization leaders like Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was to become the founder president of independent Bangladesh. This disturbed the Muslim League ministers. Home Minister Nazimuddin gave vent to this when he pressed for Subhas's release and a quick decision on the monument issue. D.B. Brayden, on behalf of Central Intelligence, expressed reservations about Bose's release in the following words: 'as Subhas Bose was an all-India figure ... the Government of India would be interested in his fate.' Nazimuddin quipped that the Central government could not take any action against Bose 'as they had already allowed Nehru to make

speeches as objectionable as Subhas Bose'.¹⁷ The Holwell monument was removed by a government decision at Huq's instance. But overruling the Bengal ministry, Subhas was kept imprisoned by the British till December 1940.¹⁸ Thus the Holwell monument agitation was a remarkably successful movement. It succeeded not only in achieving its declared objective, but also in uniting the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal temporarily and gave a pointer about the shape of things to come. But it was the last flicker before Subhas bowed out from the stage only to reappear on a new stage outside India wearing a different hat and a military uniform.

It will always remain an unsolved question in history as to what would have happened if Subhas Bose in 1939 had fought the challenge of the organizational leaders as Indira Gandhi successfully did three decades later. If he had proceeded to form his own cabinet and carried on as Congress president in defiance of Gandhi, he might have emerged a stronger leader, possibly carrying the leftists in general with him. But then Indira Gandhi in 1969 had the power of the Indian state behind her. Subhas in 1939 did not have this advantage. Moreover, the left was not united. And above all there was Mahatma Gandhi's mesmeric hold over Congress politicians in the face of which even Nehru, despite his love-hate relationship with Subhas Bose, made last-minute efforts for a compromise, but succumbed. The end of Subhas's hold in the Congress did not mean the end of his political power. He was still destined to write a unique glorious chapter through his Azad Hind Fauj. Had he not disappeared after an air crash, 'he would have proved a most formidable rival to Nehru and influenced for the better the course of Indian history after Independence'.¹⁹ There are many old-timers in both Pakistan and Bangladesh who sincerely believe that Subhas's presence in India during the crucial years 1945–47 might have avoided the partition of the subcontinent. Typical was a comment of M.A.H. Ispahani, a Calcutta Muslim League businessman: 'Had Bose remained in India he may well have boldly struck out for Muslim friendship.'²⁰

Now Subhas Bose made one of the most daring escapes in history.²¹ On 29 November 1940, while in detention, he started a protest hunger strike demanding that the government release him. As his health deteriorated, the government shifted him by ambulance to his own house at Elgin Road where he was kept under house arrest. He avoided all public contact for some time as a spiritual recluse and grew a beard. At midnight on 16 January 1941, he left home in a car dressed as an upcountry bearded Muslim in pyjamas and a long sherwani, was driven by his nephew Sisir Bose to Gomoh and boarded a long-distance train to Peshawar. He was Mohammed Ziauddin, a travelling insurance inspector working with the Empire of India Life Insurance Company. From Peshawar he made his way to Kabul through the Khyber Pass accompanied by one Uttam Malhotra, reaching there on 27 January 1941. He got in touch with the German ambassador, Dr Pilger, who was not particularly helpful. After a lot of delicate negotiations through the Italian ambassador, the Germans agreed to let him proceed to Berlin to plan a German–Italian overture to Indian soldiers. On 18 March Subhas left with a fake Italian passport arranged by Pietro Quaroni, the Italian ambassador, for the Soviet Union, reaching Moscow by train via Bokhara and Samarkand. From Moscow he flew to Berlin on 2 April 1941. He soon submitted to the German foreign ministry a memorandum, the first among several with the title *A Plan for Cooperation between the Axis Powers and India*. In this, he proposed the setting up of a Free India government in exile in Berlin. On 27 April, he had a meeting with the German Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop at Hotel Imperial in Vienna. The German government granted him 12,000 Reich Marks as personal allowances, one million for anti-British propaganda among Indians and a house at 6–7 Sophienstrasse in the fashionable Charlottenburg district of Berlin. In October 1941 Subhas started his Free India Centre at 10 Lichensteinallee in the Tiergarten diplomatic area and started broadcasting from time to time to the Indian people, using a false name, exhorting them to rise against the British Raj. These broadcasts made the British authorities, till then in the dark about the whereabouts of this one sworn enemy in India, realize where Subhas was.

On the whole Subhas found the Germans unenthusiastic about India, too engrossed with their war with Great Britain, which they thought they were to win in a short while and which made them confident of dividing the world with the British. Remote India did not figure in their scheme of things. He was not even allowed to use his own name in his broadcasts to the Indian people, but was allowed to use his false name, Orlando Mazzotta, under which he had travelled from Kabul to Berlin. With the entry of Japan in the war, he decided to make another daredevil adventure by journeying to South-east Asia, close to India, to launch his anti-British Azad Hind movement.

His Dramatic Submarine Journey to Japan

The Japanese had attacked the British and driven them from countries adjacent to India. Also, after the German defeat at Stalingrad there was no chance of the Germans reaching anywhere near the Indian border. On 18 January 1943 Subhas boarded a German U-boat at Kiel on another of his daredevil missions, accompanied by his man Friday, Abid Hussain. He left behind his Austrian wife, Emilie Schenkl, whom he had married earlier—a marriage that had been a very private matter. Off the coast of Mozambique Subhas and Abid Hussain were shifted to a Japanese submarine which took them to Singapore to complete their ninety-three-day odyssey. From Singapore they flew to Tokyo where Subhas had a meeting with the Japanese prime minister Tojo on 19 June 1943. The Japanese proved much more positive than the Germans. On 18 June, Tojo pledged before the Japanese parliament his government's support to Indian freedom.

His Grand Climax of the Formation of the Azad Hind Government

Subhas returned to Singapore and formally took charge of two nonfunctional outfits, viz., Indian Independence League run by the old-time revolutionary Rashbehari Bose, who was out of touch with conditions in India and voluntarily stepped down, and the inchoate Indian National Army (INA) formed by some captured Indian soldiers and commanded by Mohan

Singh. Both were galvanized under Subhas. The provisional Azad Hind (Free India) Government was established in Singapore on 21 October 1942. Subhas was the prime minister, foreign minister, war minister and commander-in-chief of the INA forces. The Indians residing in Singapore, Malaysia and elsewhere in South-east Asia made handsome donations in cash and jewellery to the Azad Hind Government for the great cause of their motherland's independence. Some of them also joined the INA. On 23 October the new government declared war on Britain and the USA. At an impressive march past in Singapore Esplanade, Tojo and the commander of the Japanese forces in South-east Asia, Field Marshal Terauchi, joined Subhas in reviewing the INA forces. A women's battalion commanded by Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan was also created—the Rani of Jhansi Regiment—named after the heroine of the 1857 uprising, Rani Laxmibai. The Indian prisoners of war joined the INA in overwhelming numbers, most of them with lofty patriotic motives of freeing their country. It was a good mix of all communities—Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs—true to Subhas's popularity as a leader cutting across communal barriers. He himself gave up civilian clothing and took to military uniform and gave a clarion call to his soldiers to march across the mountains and rivers on to the motherland that lay beyond, and on to Delhi.

INVASION OF INDIA

Subhash soon moved his headquarters to Rangoon where the entire Burmese cabinet formally received him as a head of state. He also paid a visit to the Andaman Islands, the only liberated part of India which was formally handed over by the Japanese to the provisional government. Here he hoisted the Indian tricolour with a springing Royal Bengal tiger on it at Port Blair, the Andamans' capital. He renamed the Andaman Island the Shaheed (Martyrs') Island, and the Nicobar Island the Swaraj (Freedom) Island. Subhas's tactical objective was to put part of his army into India, preferably Bengal, and to carve out and defend a liberated enclave. Unfortunately, the Japanese military command did not accept his idea to make Chittagong the first point of attack, but decided to invade across the

Burma–Manipur border in the north-east; but Subhas was at least successful in persuading the Japanese not to indulge in ruthless bombing of Calcutta and other towns of Bengal which they were planning to do. This saved a lot of civilian life and property in Bengal.

The invasion started on 7–8 March 1944, when General Mutaguchi's forces accompanied by the 3,000-strong Subhas Brigade of the INA commanded by Lt Col. Shah Nawaz Khan crossed the Chindwin River into the Indian border at Moirang and attacked Imphal in Manipur and Kohima in Assam (now in Nagaland). After fierce fighting they were close to success by the end of March. But they were beaten to it by the early monsoon rains that bogged down the Japanese and the INA forces. With the supply line from Burma cut off by rains they retreated to Burma.

Meanwhile, the Gandhi and Azad Brigades led by Colonel Mohammed Kiani took part in an assault on Imphal in which they suffered heavy casualties. The besieged and dug-in Allied forces both at Imphal and Kohima held on, and what had appeared as a sure victory for the Japanese became a major defeat, indeed the turning point in the war in South-east Asia. By July 1944, the Japanese and the INA forces were back on the Chindwin line. Subhas's great expectations remained unfulfilled. Even his experiment of sending INA personnel by submarine to Baluchistan and Bengal came a cropper, as they were apprehended. But Subhas Bose, undaunted by all military reverses, went on broadcasting to the Indian people weekly, assuring them that the INA was determined to march into India 'as soon as all preparations were complete' and exhorting the people in powerful language to rise up against the British. At this critical hour, Netaji told his soldiers on the eve of his departure from Burma, 'I have only one word of command to give you, and that is that if you have to go down temporarily, then go down fighting with the national tri-colour held aloft, go down as heroes; go down upholding the highest code of honour and discipline. The future generations of Indians, who will be born, not as slaves but as free men, because of your colossal sacrifice, will bless your names.'

²²

SUBHAS'S DISAPPEARANCE

On the day of Japan's surrender on 15 August 1945, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose issued his last order of the day: 'The roads to Delhi are many, and Delhi still remains our goal. The sacrifices of your immortal comrades and yourselves will certainly achieve their fulfilment.' His broadcasts addressed to the people of India continued almost till the day when, three days after Japan's surrender, he mysteriously disappeared. The person who last saw him alive was his faithful ADC Captain Habibur Rahman. In his broadcast on 21 May 1945, he had declared that 'there is one man who holds in his hands the destinies of the European nations for the next few decades. That man is Marshal Stalin'. On 17 August, with seven of his staff, Subhas took off from Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in Vietnam on his way to Manchuria presumably with the Soviet Union as his eventual destination. The intrepid rebel was now planning an alliance with the Soviet Union against British Raj. But he could not anticipate that the Soviet Union would declare war on Japan just before Japan's surrender, upsetting his calculation. After refuelling at Taihoku airfield in Formosa (Taiwan), as the Japanese bomber took off, it caught fire and crash-landed. According to eye witnesses, including Habibur Rahman, Subhas survived the crash, although badly burnt, and died in a military hospital shortly afterwards. His body was cremated on 20 August 1945. His ashes are said to be kept in a casket at Renkoji temple in Tokyo and the Government of India is rumoured to be secretly paying a rental to this temple for this storage.

But many people in the subcontinent never believed the story of his death. To many of them this was a cover-up by the Japanese to enable him to slip into the then Soviet Union in a bid to obtain the assistance of the USSR in securing India's independence. They argue that with the Soviet Union's declaration of war against Japan at the last moment, circumstances underwent a dramatic change and he was presumably held by the Soviet authorities and kept in custody or in detention secretly to prevent him being handed over to the Allied forces as a war prisoner. Even if this theory is held to be correct, it is not understood why Subhas should not have appeared after India attained independence in 1947. According to another

theory he always had a tendency towards spiritualism and on India attaining independence, to the extent his life's mission having been achieved, he might have decided to abandon the world and live the remaining years of his life as a spiritual recluse as indeed once he had done for some time in his student days.

Three commissions of inquiry appointed by the Government of India have gone into the question of the authenticity of Taihoku air crash and the end of the meteoric career of Subhas Bose, namely, the Shah Nawaz Commission of Inquiry in the 1960s, Justice G.K. Khosla Commission of Inquiry of the 1970s and the one-man Justice Mukherjee Commission in the late 1990s. Both the first and the second commissions came to the conclusion that Subhas Bose died in an air crash on 18 August 1945 at Taihoku in Taiwan. They examined various eyewitnesses who were present at the time of Netaji's death, including Captain Habibur Rahman, Netaji's ADC and constant companion, and the Japanese doctor who treated him after the crash. But there are still many missing links in the whole story. One of the theories is that his name continued to be in the war criminals maintained by the British and the Americans and, therefore, it was not possible for the Soviet authorities to release him knowing that he would fall into the hands of the allies. A lot of people have castigated Nehru and his government for failing to prevail upon the British and the American authorities to get his name deleted from the list of war criminals. The British government clarified that Bose's name does not figure in the list of war criminals. This declaration by the British government was in reply to a letter from the Indian government in pursuance of an order from Orissa High Court which had asked the Government of India to get Bose's name deleted from the list of war criminals. There are demands from time to time from the members of Netaji's family and from the Forward Block on the Indian government to formally request the Russian government to make available these materials. The Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry ignored all the evidence taken into account by the two earlier commissions, including the evidence of Habibur Rahman and held that while Netaji could not have been alive all these years, clearly the story of the air crash at Taihoku was

concocted by the Japanese to help Subhas Bose's escape. Obviously, this commission took the line of least resistance and followed a compromise to satisfy the sentiments of those who believed that Netaji did not die in the air crash, as well as those who are sure that Netaji could not have been alive all these years.²³ But Subhas Bose did become, after his mysterious disappearance, even more of a legend than he had been during his lifetime and this cast a profound influence on the memory and imagination of the people in the Indian subcontinent that persists even now.²⁴

The Last Hour of United Bengal

The Second World War ended in 1945 with the surrender of Germany (8 May) and Japan (15 August), after the Americans dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Politics in India had reached a virtual deadlock after the en masse arrest of Congress leaders and the petering out of the Quit India movement. The only beneficiary was the Muslim League under Jinnah, who became British Raj's convenient ally. Bengal under governor's rule, and still suffering from the disastrous 1943 famine, was in a sullen mood. The authorities now released Gandhi. His talks with Jinnah at Poona between 9 and 27 September 1944 broke down because Gandhi was not willing to accept Jinnah's two-nation theory, although he gave his nod to the concept of an autonomous, Muslim-majority Pakistan. But, Gandhi, by his tacit acceptance of the idea of a partition and by calling Jinnah 'Qaid-i-Azam' (Great Leader), strengthened Jinnah's position among Muslims. Also, Jinnah, sensing victory, raised his stakes high. Even those opposed to him now started flocking under his banner.¹

SIMLA CONFERENCE

Governor General Wavell called leaders of all political parties to a conference at Simla. The main proposition that Wavell put before the Indian leaders was a fully Indian executive council with near-full powers. But the Simla Conference lasting from 25 June to 14 July 1945 ended in a fiasco, as the Muslim League and the Scheduled Castes Federation demanded the right to nominate Muslim and Scheduled Caste members respectively in the Governor General's Executive Council, and the Congress rejected these demands, claiming the right to represent all sections of Indians, including

the Muslims. Meanwhile, in the British elections on 26 July 1945, Churchill's Conservative Party was defeated and the Labour Party formed the new government with Clement Attlee as prime minister. India's independence was one of the election pledges of the Labour Party. On 21 August, Attlee announced that elections to the Central and provincial legislatures would be held immediately and thereafter a conference would be arranged for drafting a constitution for independent India.

THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY TRIALS

At this time, the trials of the INA officials who had deserted the British Indian Army and joined Subhas Bose's Azad Hind Fauj and fought the British, galvanized the whole country. Not only did it spark off countrywide protests, but also brought about a temporary Hindu-Muslim unity. Thus Subhas, when he was no more, proved a much greater trouble for the British Raj than when he was alive. The INA trials shook the whole subcontinent.

The first in a series of fifteen court martials was held in the Red Fort of Delhi, from 5 November 1945. The accused were Lt Col. Shah Nawaz Khan, Captain Sehgal and Major Gurbax Singh Dhillon, the first a Muslim, the second a Hindu and the third a Sikh. The result was an emotional union of all the three communities in protesting against the trial. Public outcry compelled the Congress and the Muslim League leaders, initially hostile to the INA, to join together on this issue. Congress leaders like Bhulabhai Desai, and even Nehru appeared as lawyers before the military tribunal at the Red Fort to defend these officers. There was a frenzied public feeling against these trials, which also focused the spotlight on Subhas and the INA. In Calcutta, on 21 November 1945, there was widespread popular disturbance leading to police firing, in which forty were killed, and there was burning of trams, buses and police vans. The military tribunal sentenced the three officers to transportation for life. But on Gandhi's personal request and in response to popular feelings, the government commuted these sentences to dismissal from military service. Even the members of the Indian armed forces made no secret of their sympathy with the INA prisoners. Auchinleck commented in a report that every Indian

commissioned officer is a nationalist.² The British were confused to see the intensity of Indian reaction and realized what a big political mistake they had made.

On 1 December, Auchinleck announced that the charge against the INA, accused of waging war against the King, would be dropped, and that further trials would be only for murder or brutality against other prisoners of war (POWs). But this failed to satisfy public opinion.

The trial of Captain Rashid Ali, one of the last in the series, on 11 February 1946, created a great deal of public hysteria. There were pitched battles between the police and the demonstrators in Calcutta, leading to fatal casualties. Hindus and Muslims faced police bullets and lathi charge shoulder to shoulder in this near-revolution, and eighty-four people were killed and 300 injured, including British and US soldiers. The Muslim League, the Congress and the communists jointly took part in the movement. The army and the police took two days to restore normality. The Hindu–Muslim togetherness seen in Calcutta on that occasion was unbelievable. None could anticipate that in a few months, they would actually fight each other on the same streets in Calcutta during the Muslim League’s Direct Action Day on 16 August 1946.

NAVAL MUTINY

If the INA trials focused on the widespread anti-British feelings among the armed forces, another happening, namely, the mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy (18 February 1946) also highlighted this widespread phenomenon of wavering of loyalty in the armed forces. On that day, a number of Royal Indian Navy ships in Bombay and Karachi naval bases openly revolted against the British, starting with protests against the court martial of a Bengalee naval rating, P.C. Dutt, for scribbling Jai Hind—the INA slogan—on the walls. The mutiny spread like wildfire to seventy-eight ships and twenty shore establishments. Some of these ships opened fire against British naval ships. As the news of this revolt in the harbour reached Bombay there was widespread anti-government rising in the city, leading to the killing of

about 200 men. Both Vallabhbhai Patel and Jinnah intervened and persuaded the mutineers to lay down arms and surrender. The naval mutiny did play a role in unsettling the psychology of the British rulers. Also, the low morale of the British soldiers in India, anxious to return home, unnerved them.

On 19 February 1946, Prime Minister Attlee announced that a Cabinet Mission consisting of Lord Pathick Lawrence (leader), Sir Stafford Cripps and A.V. Alexander would be visiting India in a few days to negotiate with the Indian leaders a time frame for the British to leave India and the future constitution of free India. Clearly, the British had realized that they could no longer count on the loyalty of Indian soldiers to hold India and should, therefore, hand over power to Indians.

CENTRAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

The elections held in December 1945 for the Central Assembly and in March 1946 for the provincial assemblies returned the Congress to majority in the Central Assembly and in most of the provinces and the Muslim League to majority in Bengal and Sind and to the largest party position in Punjab. The Congress won 91.3 per cent of the votes in the general (all except Muslim) constituencies, nearly eliminating all other parties including the Hindu Mahasabha. Similarly, the Muslim League secured 88.6 per cent of the votes in the Muslim constituencies and bagged all the Muslim seats, thereby establishing the fact that it alone could, for the time being, speak on behalf of the Muslims. The new Central Assembly, which had limited legislative powers under the Government of India Act, 1935, was composed of the following (figures in parentheses show the strength in the previous Assembly): Indian National Congress—57 (36), Muslim League—30 (25), Nationalist Party—0 (10), Akalis—2 (0) and Europeans—8 (8). Sarat Chandra Bose, who had been welcomed back to the Congress on his release in 1945, and was elected to the Central Assembly as a Congress candidate, was elected leader of the Congress party in the Assembly. But there are reasons to believe that the British were never happy to have dealings with

Sarat Bose, brother and close ally of their arch enemy, Subhas Bose, and the Congress leadership soon realized this.³

Thus, in the entire negotiations for the transfer of power in 1946, the leader of the Congress in the Central Assembly was bypassed completely against normal constitutional practice. Nehru, Patel and Azad negotiated on behalf of the Congress, leaving Sarat Bose severely alone.

BENGAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

In the campaign for Assembly elections in Bengal, the Muslim League made Pakistan the single issue and asked Muslims to vote only for Muslim League candidates to show that the League alone represents the Muslims.

The Muslim League enlisted the support of both Muslim students and the mullahs in its campaign, and also launched a terror campaign on all non-League Muslim candidates. There were a number of complaints of assault on such candidates, their kidnapping in some cases, or forcibly detaining some of them in their own houses. Even such well-known persons as the Speaker of the Assembly, Nausher Ali, and KPP leaders like Syed Jalaluddin Hashemi and Azhar Ali were attacked. Some of the mullahs put the fear of divine punishment in illiterate Muslims, warning them to vote only for the League candidates.⁴

The result was a resounding success for both the League and the Congress. The League got 115 seats out of 121 Muslims seats, and the Congress got 87 out of 90 general seats wiping out the Hindu Mahasabha, except the university seat won by Shyama Prasad. In 1936 the Congress had secured only 39 seats. This shows convincingly that the Bengalee Hindus, including 80 per cent of the Scheduled Castes, had made the Congress their choice. The KPP and the communists got only 4 and 3 seats, respectively. The only exception to the general tide was Fazlul Huq's convincing victory in the 2 seats that he contested although his party KPP was eliminated. The Europeans had 25 seats. The Assembly election results showed that the anti-British unity, seen during the INA trials, had as good as disappeared. In the elections, the Muslim League was led by H.S. Suhrawardy, who had

intrigued to scuttle Nazimuddin's nomination as a Muslim League candidate. Complaints of widespread rigging, manipulation and open partiality by government officials in the elections came from politicians as far apart as Abul Kalam Azad and Fazlul Huq. Others like Nausher Ali and Syed Badruddoza proposed in the Assembly that a commission be appointed to inquire into the allegations of complicity by British officials in favour of League candidates. Suhrawardy denied these allegations and pointed to the narrow margin with which the League candidates won in many seats. He was elected leader of the League in the Assembly and was invited on 2 April 1946 by Governor Frederick Burrows to form a ministry. The Bengal Muslim League, like the Bengal Congress, was riven with factionalism. Suhrawardy was apparently not even sure whether the diehard followers of Nazimuddin or Tamijuddin Khan would not ditch him on the floor of the house. He was reported to have even secretly proposed an alliance with the Congress through Kiran Shankar Roy, the leader of the Congress in the Assembly. But nothing came out of it, although negotiations continued for about two weeks, partly in Calcutta and partly in Delhi, and leaders like Kiran Shankar Roy, Maulana Azad and even Jinnah and Governor Burrows were involved.⁵

Suhrawardy now formed his League ministry with only Muslim Leaguers except Jogendra Nath Mandal who represented the Scheduled Castes Federation. The formation of a cabinet with only Muslims, save one, and the omission of caste Hindus from ministers hardened the Bengalee caste Hindus and sent a strong message to them that the government was determined to rule Bengal without associating with the bhadralok class. For them this was a foretaste of what was likely to happen to them if the whole of Bengal went to Pakistan. Till then the League always associated some breakaway caste Hindu leaders with the government. Now it was out and out a Muslim League ministry. It was this hardened mindset which explains why the Bengalee Hindus, by and large, campaigned intensively for the partition of Bengal in 1947, and for the creation of a separate Hindu-majority province that would remain part of the Indian Union, and refused

to have anything to do with the United Bengal proposed by the Suhrawardy–Sarat Bose duo.

The fact that the Muslim League ministry could retain power on the basis of the unfailing support of the European members (twenty-five in a house of 250) illustrated the extent of the British Raj's support to the League. But at the all-India level, the provincial elections did not record as overwhelming a success for Jinnah as in the Central Assembly elections. In sharp contrast to the Congress forming governments in eight provinces, including the overwhelmingly Muslim NWFP, and a coalition government in Punjab with the Unionists and the Akalis, the League could form governments only in Bengal and Sind, and that too with the support of the European members. But two impressions were clear. First, by winning 442 out of 509 Muslim seats in these assemblies and nearly 87 per cent of the Muslim vote, Jinnah had demonstrated his overwhelming hold over Muslims. Secondly, his success was total in those provinces which would never be part of Pakistan, if formed, but much less so in provinces, except in Bengal, which were envisaged as part of the proposed Pakistan. In the face of such overwhelming evidence, Congress leadership should perhaps have accepted his claim to be the representative of the Muslim community within the Indian Union.⁶ That might have made negotiations easier.

THE CABINET MISSION

The Cabinet Mission had prolonged and tortuous meetings for seven weeks at Simla with not only the Congress leaders, including Gandhi—officially not even a member of the Congress, but really still the supremo—Nehru, Azad and Patel and the Muslim League leaders (Jinnah and Liaquat Ali), but also with leaders of all other political shades like the Scheduled Castes Federation (Ambedkar and J.N. Mandal), and the Akalis (Master Tara Singh and Baldev Singh). In general, nearly every political party agreed to disagree with each other. Jinnah insisted that he should be accepted as the sole spokesman of the Muslims, a claim that was summarily rejected by the Congress. The Akalis pressed for Sikhistan, but each leader had his own

concept. Among the Scheduled Castes, the followers of Ambedkar sharply clashed with those of Jagjivan Ram.

Eventually, the Cabinet Mission announced and broadcast its plan on 16 May 1946. It rejected the concept of a sovereign Pakistan as unworkable and impractical, as with the two wings being separated by 800 miles, the communication between them in war and peace would be dependent on the goodwill of India. It also ruled out any partition of the two provinces of Bengal and Punjab. On the whole it tried to maintain a facade of united India with complete self-government for the provinces. It was somewhat influenced by a three-tier scheme suggested by Azad. In a nutshell, the Cabinet Mission proposals were as follows:

- (a) India would constitute a federal Union with both the British Indian provinces and the princely states as constituents. The Union will be in charge of foreign affairs, defence and communications (railways, posts and telegraphs, etc.) and all other subjects will be under the provinces and the princely states.
- (b) The provincial assemblies and the princely states would elect 296 members to form a Constituent Assembly to frame a constitution for the Union. These members were to be elected on the basis of separate electorates.
- (c) The British Indian provinces would be grouped into three: (i) a group comprising Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan, all Muslim-majority provinces; (ii) Bengal and Assam; and (iii) the rest of the provinces, all of them with Hindu majority.
- (d) There would also be a loose regional government for each of these groups, and the representatives of each separate group would draw up the constitution for the provinces in the group concerned.
- (e) The new constitutions, both provincial and national, would continue for ten years after which any province would have an option to consider the matter and leave the Union and form a separate state.
- (f) Until the new constitution was in place, the country would be run by the executive council to be designated as an interim government consisting of Indian leaders. This would also include a war member, a position the British were unwilling to part with in 1942; the Indian leaders were determined to have it.
- (g) The paramountcy of the British Crown over the princely states would lapse. The precise status of the states would have to be negotiated during the building up of the new constitutional structure.

The proposals met with a mixed reaction. The two main parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, were initially silent. On 6 June, the Muslim League accepted the Cabinet Mission's three-tier formula. A few days later, the Congress agreed to participate in the Constituent Assembly

but not to join the interim executive council. Any agreement on the issue of interim government was not possible on account of the Congress's known position that it also represented the Indian Muslims and, therefore, had a right to nominate Muslim members in the interim government while the Muslim League was absolutely adamant on the point that it alone represented the Muslims. After three weeks of debate, the Congress Working Committee was persuaded by Nehru and Azad on 25 June to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan subject to a few reservations such as the proposed grouping of Assam with Muslim-majority Bengal and the grouping of the Congress-ruled NWFP with the North-West Group of states which would be dominated by the Muslim League. When the Cabinet Mission members flew back to Britain on 29 June, they thought that the mission was by and large successful. The All India Congress Committee accepted the plan by a massive majority on 6 July 1946.

NEHRU'S CONTROVERSIAL FAUX PAS

In the same AICC session on 6 July 1946, at the end of Azad's term as Congress president, Jawaharlal Nehru took over as the new president. He was imposed by Gandhi and not chosen by a majority of provincial committees who had a clear preference for Vallabhbhai Patel. Gandhi felt that Nehru understood the English language and English mind better than Patel. But Gandhi's judgement was mistaken in several respects. Firstly, the replacement of the captain of the boat in the middle of the negotiations was in itself unfortunate. Secondly, Nehru did not share Azad's commitment to the Cabinet Mission scheme. Above all, there was a basic incompatibility between him and Jinnah.

Nehru was in the habit of thinking aloud, and it was in one of his spells of loud thinking at a press meeting at Bombay on 10 July 1946 that he put a spanner on the whole issue. At a juncture in history 'when circumspection should have been the order of the day and there was much to be gained by silence,' Nehru decided to make, to quote Michael Brecher, his biographer, 'one of the most fiery and provocative statements in his forty years of

public life'.⁷ Asked whether the Congress had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan in toto, he answered that his party was 'completely unfettered by any agreements and free to meet all situations as they arise'. Nehru also announced that notwithstanding the fact that the Congress had accepted the three-tier formula, 'we are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided to go into the Constituent Assembly'. In his opinion the Constituent Assembly would be a sovereign body free to do whatever it chose and the Central government would also be much more powerful than what the Cabinet Mission scheme had envisaged.

Nehru did not realize that after both the Congress and the League had accepted this compromise formula, which did not fully satisfy anyone, he was once again reopening the issue and thus sabotaging the cause of Indian unity. He was bitterly criticized by Maulana Azad, in his memoirs *India Wins Freedom*: 'I have to say with regret that he is at times apt to be carried away by his feelings. Not only so, but sometimes he is so impressed by theatrical considerations that he is apt to underestimate the realities of a situation ... The mistake of 1946 proved costly. Nehru played into the hands of Jinnah and gave him the excuse that he needed to repudiate the agreement.'

All hopes of a united India were shattered and the idea of an independent Pakistan, which Jinnah had compromised in accepting the Cabinet Mission's Plan, was revived. In Jinnah's reckoning the Congress had given a foretaste of how exactly the Hindus would behave towards the Muslim minority after the British had departed.

This was too much of an affront to him after he had climbed down from his declared aim of Pakistan to persuade the League to accept an arrangement minus a 'sovereign Pakistan'. Also, he was somewhat disillusioned by what he had thought was a let-down by Wavell on his promise to ask the League—which had first accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan—to form an interim government after the Congress refused to take part. On 27 July, the League Council met to withdraw its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Jinnah accused the Congress, the Cabinet Mission and the viceroy for repeatedly going back on their commitments over the

interim government. Feelings ran very high and the Muslim League Council prompted by Jinnah adopted a resolution to the effect that it instructed its followers to prepare for a 'programme it instructed its followers to prepare for a 'programme of Direct Action to organise the Muslims for the coming struggle to be launched as and when necessary'. The Working Committee gave a call for the declaration of 16 August as a 'Direct Action Day', which was to be a 'Universal Muslim Hartal'. Jinnah also gave a provocative speech in the course of which he announced that he was 'giving a goodbye to constitutional methods' and threatened to wield a pistol.

THE CALCUTTA RIOTS

This directly triggered off the communal holocaust in Calcutta, then India's largest city with a population of twenty-five lakh. The violence that erupted during 16–19 August 1946 sparked off a chain of communal violence that led to the partition of the country within a year. Suhrawardy's government declared 16 August, the Direct Action Day, as a public holiday for both Muslims and Hindus, unlike in Sind and in Punjab, the two other Muslim-dominated provinces. Whether or not Suhrawardy had a sinister design in mind it is difficult to say. But many contemporaries believed that the clear object of calling a hartal on that day was to enable the murderous gangs to identify for attack those shops and establishments that opened their shutters in defiance of the hartal and were, by implication, not Muslim-owned. In fact, these attacks started in the Muslim localities in a pre-planned manner. In these localities there were murderous assaults on unsuspecting Bihari rickshaw-pullers and milk vendors from early morning. Also, at Shyambazar and Hatibagan, violence started with efforts by Muslim League supporters to compel Hindu shopkeepers to close their shops.⁸ Further, the crossing of the river early in the morning, from the Howrah side, of a substantial number of Muslim toughs on a string of boats with the clear intention of violence could not have been spontaneous. How the violence of those four days began can best be described in the words of Leonard Mosley, an objective British researcher:⁹

To Suhrawardy the decision of Jinnah to declare 16 August 1946 as 'Direct Action Day' seemed a golden opportunity to demonstrate his power over Bengal's Muslims and his enthusiasm for Pakistan. He announced that 16 August would be a general holiday in Calcutta for Muslims and Hindus alike; and when Hindu members of the provincial legislature protested that they had no wish to share in a Muslim political hartal, he ordered his party machine to vote them down. On 5 August, under the nom-de-plume of 'Shaheed', he wrote an article in the *Statesman*, Calcutta, in which he said, somewhat cryptically: 'Bloodshed and disorder are not necessarily evil in themselves, if resorted to for a noble cause. Among Muslims today, no cause is dearer or nobler than Pakistan.' In a speech in Delhi on 10 August, he threatened to turn Bengal into a separate government if Congress went ahead and formed an interim government on its own. 'We will see that no revenue is derived from Bengal for such a Central Government, and will consider ourselves as a separate government having no connection with the Centre,' he declared. And in a declaration on the eve of Direct Action Day, one of his aides called upon the Muslims to adopt the slogan of *Lar ke lenge Pakistan!*, which could be translated as 'Pakistan by Force!' ... The stage was set for the demonstration that was to split India in two ...

They crossed the Hooghly River from Howrah to Calcutta soon after dawn. They were armed with lathis, knives, bottles and automobile cranks and other kinds of iron bars. Most of them at this time were Muslims. They waited in doorways and alleyways until it was time for shops to open, and they watched to see which shops did open (in the circumstances, they were bound to be non-Muslim). The doorkeeper who opened the shop was swiftly clubbed down, or kicked, or stabbed; then the contents of the shop were smashed or looted.

In the beginning there were isolated incidents. By noon, however, the small, evil spurts of violence had begun to develop into flames and fires. It was catching. At first, it had been only groups of *goondas* who killed and battered, while small scatterings of wary onlookers followed them and looted and smashed shops or helped to overturn cars. But, gradually, the onlookers became participators in the killings. Now, from many parts of Calcutta, the noise of human voices began to be heard; voices raised in anger or in pain, a steadily increasing keen sound that rose and fell, like the voice of hell, for the next four days to come.

Suhrawardy held a mass meeting at the maidan on the afternoon of 16 July, thanking his followers for their enthusiasm, as the looting and killing continued unhindered. The Calcutta police too were unsure of how to respond since they were mostly Muslim. Eventually, on the third day the general Hindu retaliation was spearheaded by the Sikhs from Bhawanipur area branching out across the city in their vehicles with guns and swords and attacking the Muslims wherever they could be found all over the city. The whole of the metropolis was now literally on fire. There was a pitched battle near the Howrah Bridge as Muslim mobs from Howrah tried to

advance into Burra Bazaar, the central business district of Calcutta. The Sikhs, Calcutta's motor mechanics and drivers, jumped into the fray and charged through Muslim localities, killing anyone they could lay their hands on without mercy. It is established that the army was not called by the government till the third day although several battalions of British forces were ready in Fort William. It was only when the whole metropolis was involved in the worst form of communal violence that the army was called in, following a conversation between the viceroy, Lord Wavell, and the governor of Bengal, Frederick Burrows. Suhrawardy himself was visibly panicky by the third day and was spending most of his time in the control room of the Calcutta police. Hounded by the question of his direct complicity in starting the riots, he clearly saw that what had happened had gone far beyond what he had initially conceived of on a limited scale. His detractors cite his presence in the control room as yet another proof that he was masterminding the whole thing.¹⁰ His apologists, on the other hand, point out that he was truly trying to control the situation with his personal presence and supervision.¹¹ The *Statesman* observed:

We wrote two days ago that conditions in Calcutta were horrifying. They have gone beyond since. Whatever the appropriate adjective is, they were nothing in comparison with what we have subsequently seen. The last estimate of dead is 3,000. The injured number many thousand and it is impossible to say how many business houses and private dwellings have been destroyed. This is not a riot. It needs a word found in medieval history, a fury.¹²

Fazlul Huq narrated in the Assembly instances where the police either connived in looting or remained mere spectators. For example, during the looting of the Mahishadal Palace, around 100 traffic policemen were in a barrack in the neighbourhood, but did not stir out. He commented in anguish: 'I have felt that the greatest disturbances did not arise in a moment, but seem to be a well-planned action—maybe on one side or maybe on both sides.'¹³ There were innumerable reports in the first two days where the police, on being told of violent incidents, either did not pay heed, or said they had no instructions to take action.¹⁴

Suhrawardy made no statement defending himself. It seems certain from his subsequent behaviour and actions that even he was bewildered by the great massacre. Both Nehru and Jinnah were quick in their condemnation. Jinnah issued a statement condemning the acts of violence and deeply sympathizing with those who were suffering.

But in his heart of hearts he must have no doubt noted with some satisfaction that if there was one lesson that the Calcutta riots had taught it was that when India became independent, Hindus and Muslims could no longer live together and civil war would be the inevitable result.¹⁵

But there were still signs of sanity and humanity as evident in many stories of how during the carnage, when some Muslims were killing Hindus, and some Hindus killing Muslims, others tried to save innocent victims from their co-religionists. There was still a gleam of light in the midst of gloom. All over the city, examples of Hindus who had died trying to save Muslims, of Muslims who had sheltered Hindus at the risk of their own lives and, towards the end, bands of young Muslims and Hindus marching through the streets, crying *Hindu-Muslim Ek Ho* (Hindus and Muslims Unite), with the flags of the Congress and the League tied together, came to light. In her memoirs *From Purdah to Parliament*, Begum Ikramullah records a moving account of how a Hindu doctor risked his life to provide medical help to her critically ill father in a Muslim locality. There is also the well-known story of how some Hindu neighbours saved Dr Qudrat-i-Khuda, professor, Presidency College, who was attacked in his home at Bhawanipur, and escorted him and his family to the safety of a Muslim locality, endangering their own lives. There were many such events to demonstrate that there was still some fellow feeling left in the ugly city of Calcutta, and that there were still some secular people who could work and fight together in spite of their religious differences and uphold a common humanity. These shining examples sharply contrasted with the venomous hatred that marked other sections of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in Calcutta at that time.

Meanwhile, the British and Gurkha troops were pouring in from the third day of rioting. By the end of 19 August, there were 45,000 British soldiers

in the city. On that day a peace committee was formed and, on its behalf, Muhammad Ali of Bogra made a public broadcast on All India Radio appealing for peace. A peace procession, including prominent leaders like Nazimuddin, Kiran Shankar Roy and Muhammad Ali of Bogra went round the streets of the disturbed localities. Slowly, life in the metropolis returned to normal.

The question of the degree of Suhrawardy's involvement in the unfortunate and regrettable killings in Calcutta from 16 to 19 August 1946 has remained a mystery ever since and perhaps will always remain so. Many contemporaries sincerely believed that he was the main schemer behind this tragedy. His apologists have felt that he had been more sinned against than sinning.

The following observations by two recent researchers argue the former case:¹⁶

In Bengal, however, and particularly in Calcutta, things quickly got out of hand, thanks largely to the Chief Minister and Leader of the League in Bengal, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy. Shortly before Direct Action Day, Suhrawardy threatened to declare Bengal an independent state, withholding all revenues, if Nehru was allowed to form a central government.

On Friday, Suhrawardy had planned to address a mass meeting on the *maidan*. Intelligence reports said that Suhrawardy himself had told the huge Muslim crowd at the Ochterlony monument that 'Direct Action Day would prove to be the first step towards the Muslim struggle for emancipation'. He had urged the crowds to return home early and said that he had arranged with the police and military not to interfere with them. Whether this promise of immunity was meant as an invitation to loot and kill is hard to say—but a number of well-known Muslim *goondas* were among the crowd, and they needed no second bidding. When the meeting ended, they set off into the narrow streets of the city and soon Hindu shops, easily identifiable as they were not closed in response to the *hartal*, and houses were being looted and burnt. Hindu *goondas* soon retaliated. At 4.15 p.m., Fortress Headquarters sent out the code-word 'Red' to indicate that there were incidents all over Kolkata.

Suhrawardy's apologists, on the other hand,¹⁷ point to his association with C.R. Das and the Swarajyists, his secret parleys with some Congress leaders even after the 1946 elections to form a coalition government, his joint call for a sovereign, united Bengal with Sarat Bose, his association with Gandhi in 1946 and 1947, when he often risked his own life for the

sake of preventing communal violence and his subsequent role in Pakistan politics in favour of the Hindu minority and Bengali language to disprove his alleged complicity with the riots in Calcutta in 1946. Suhrawardy himself stated in the Bengal Assembly that miscalculation on his part of the explosive effect of Jinnah's call for Direct Action, rather than mischievous intent, was the real culprit.

As against these contradictory views, the following balanced observations from a scholar, on the whole unbiased, but in sympathy with Suhrawardy, are relevant:¹⁸

Suhrawardy has been accused not only of being responsible for the Calcutta killings in 1946 but also of having organised them. Though as Chief Minister, Suhrawardy was responsible for law and order in Bengal, it must be remembered that 16 August was declared Direct Action Day by Jinnah, not Suhrawardy.

Abul Hashim's statement to the press issued on 13 August declared that the Muslim League would observe Direct Action Day to demonstrate its grievances against British imperialism. But in effect the target of Direct Action in Calcutta became the Hindus as the British and the Christians were left unmolested. He places the blame squarely on the 'Mahasabha and Hindu communalism'. M.A. Masud who defended Suhrawardy recalls that the earliest incidents of rioting occurred at 8 a.m. that day. Others have suggested that it began at 6 a. m. It started with the looting and burning of an entire Muslim area in Bow Bazaar Street in central Calcutta. Suhrawardy drove alone to the spot to try and bring the incident under control. A strike had been called on that day and several meetings were scheduled to be held, such as the one at Islamia College at 4 p.m. and another at the maidan at 3 p. m. Muslims were totally unaware of the trouble brewing. M.A. Masud, Abul Hashim and others went to the maidan with their little children. Muslim women students from Munnujan Hall, a postgraduate hostel for women, headed for Islamia College on foot and waited there for several hours before being warned that a communal riot had started. In the meantime, the hostel had been attacked, the valuables looted and furniture burnt. The women had to take shelter in the office of the weekly *Millat*. At 3 p.m. Suhrawardy requested the Muslim public to return to their homes;

for while the men had assembled at the maidan leaving their homes unguarded, Muslim pockets and *bustees* (slums) had been attacked. To quote M.A. Masud:

Hindus planned to make Direct Action Day unsuccessful so that the British Government would think that the people of Bengal did not want Pakistan ... while the Muslims were coming to the Maidan and returning back to their homes they were attacked by gunfire from rooftops and with bricks which were collected in Hindu houses along the main roads.

The accusation of premeditated action against Suhrawardy seems implausible on one count. He would not have organized a public meeting at the maidan in such a way as to encourage Leaguers to attend it with their children; and women would not have been encouraged to participate in these public meetings if rioting on such a scale was anticipated. Abul Hashim writes in his memoirs that when Suhrawardy realized that the Calcutta police was not strong enough to tackle the situation, he requested Burrows, the governor, to call out the army, but the army did not come. In the meantime, Suhrawardy himself took charge of the control room at Lal Bazaar police headquarters and directed the police operations at grave risk to his life. He could not rely on the commissioner of police who was a European, but received help from his Hindu friend, Hiren Sarkar, who was an inspector of police. Another factor which helped quell the riots was a peace procession on 21 August, led by all party leaders, including Khwaja Nazimuddin, Kiran Shankar Roy, M.A. Ispahani, J.C. Gupta, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Abul Hashim, etc.

To quote Tazeen Murshid again,

The accusations against Suhrawardy came primarily from the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha, British officials and other non-Muslim scholars. It is not the intention here to discuss the merits and demerits of these charges except to point out that Muslims had a totally different perspective on the issue. Apportioning blame for the riots instead of attempting to understand why they happened is an exercise in futility. The evidence cited is generally unreliable and faulty, as the witnesses were inevitably partisan. Impartiality could not be expected of British officials, including Governor Burrows whose inaction or belated action contributed to the spread of the carnage. Few are willing to talk about those horrific and shameful events today, let alone admit to participating in them, although many are still alive. The Hindu Mahasabha had made clear in no uncertain terms that it would prevent the observance of *hartal* on Direct Action Day. Along with the Congress,

it resented the declaration of a public holiday on this day by the government and resolved to foil it. The police force was guilty of inaction. The Congress had exhibited total disregard and contempt for Muslim aspirations by refusing to come to any understanding with the Muslim League on the formation of an interim government. The Muslim League ministry obviously wanted Direct Action Day to be successful in terms of the observance of *hartal* and had built up a sense of fervour in order to 'win Pakistan' by force if necessary. The League ministry, though in charge of law and order, had to rely for help on senior European and Hindu officials, which was not forthcoming. The scene was therefore set for accusations and counter-accusations.

On an impartial assessment of the available evidence it seems plausible that Suhrawardy had planned violence on a modest scale and that he failed to take adequate precautionary steps to prevent it from getting out of hand, which he had perhaps not anticipated. Possibly, he wanted to demonstrate how serious the Muslims were in their demand for Pakistan and also that the League and he himself represented Muslim Bengal. If the League could organize such demonstrative violence in a city where Muslims were very much in a minority, there was every case for the whole of Bengal, including Calcutta, going to Pakistan. But the extent of the violence that actually occurred surpassed his own calculations. Also what is overlooked is the massive preparations that were made by extremists on both sides, influenced by communalist propaganda, for a showdown. Eventually, Suhrawardy was struck by remorse, which drove him to Gandhi's umbrella.¹⁹ He tried his best to atone for his sins of omission and commission in his subsequent politics in India and Pakistan.

The scars of those four maddening days of the holocaust of Calcutta took long to heal. For quite some time after this the city continued to be divided into Hindu zones and Muslim zones with little cross-movement, especially at night. Even the public buses and tram cars would ply through notoriously riot-disturbed localities with armed sentries. Hindus would not get off in Muslim localities and Muslims would not get off in Hindu localities. There was universal fear of the unknown assassin's knife lurking somewhere and striking at an innocent passer-by. The 'Great Calcutta Killings', as they came to be known, had indeed changed the course of Bengal's history by making Partition certain.

THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT IN DELHI

Neither Nehru nor any of the top Congress leaders, nor even Jinnah, found time to visit riot-ravaged Calcutta, India's premier city. They were politicking for or against the formation of the interim government. Only Wavell, the viceroy, felt compelled to visit the city. He had written to both Nehru and Jinnah on 22 July 1946 and requested them to join the interim government. He had expressed the British leadership's firm decision to install an Indian interim government in Delhi as quickly as possible, making use of the viceroy's Executive Council. The Congress rejected the offer straightaway. The Muslim League also rejected it, while at the same time giving a call for Direct Action. After the riots of Calcutta, Wavell could persuade Nehru and the Congress to join the interim government without any more delay. On 24 August, only a few days after the Calcutta riots, Wavell announced the names of the members of the interim government which was to take office. Nehru had wanted to have nationalist Muslims in 2 of the 5 Muslim seats, but the viceroy announced the names of three of them hoping that Jinnah could still be persuaded to make announcement for the two remaining Muslim vacancies. Between his announcement and swearing-in of the interim government, Wavell visited Calcutta for eighteen hours to see the situation for himself and to share the sorrows and sufferings of the citizens. The visit convinced him that the Congress and the League must make a show of unity if further catastrophes were to be avoided. On 27 August, Wavell summoned both Nehru and Gandhi, narrated to them his experience in Calcutta and requested them to agree on a formula under which the Congress would formally announce that it accepted the intentions behind the Cabinet Mission's formula.

He also told them what he had seen in Calcutta and appealed to them to accept this as the last chance for a peaceful transfer of power. Its acceptance by them could perhaps still have saved the subcontinent's unity, but it was not destined to be. Both Gandhi and Nehru refused point blank to sign a draft announcement that Wavell proposed. Their ground was that this would amount to surrendering to the Muslim League's blackmail. They also raised the old argument that the Congress was not pro-Hindu or pro-Muslim and

would never legislate against the interests of the Muslims. Also, they would not accept the Muslim League as the only representative body of the Indian Muslims. Thus, Wavell's meeting with Gandhi and Nehru ended on an acrimonious note.

In a way this interview was also the end of Wavell's viceroyalty, for immediately thereafter Gandhi cabled to Attlee that the viceroy had become 'unnerved owing to the Bengal tragedy and needed to be bolstered by an even mind'.

But Wavell, under considerable pressure from Attlee, could persuade the Congress to join the interim cabinet and went ahead with the swearing in of the cabinet on 2 September 1946, minus the Muslim League. The new government consisted of the following: Nehru, designated as deputy chairman of the viceroy's Executive Council, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari, Asaf Ali, Sarat Chandra Bose,²⁰ John Matthai, Baldev Singh and C.H. Bhaba. Shafat Ahmed Khan and Sayid Ali Zaheer would join after a little while.

The Muslim League still stood away protesting against the Congress nominating two Congress Muslim leaders in the cabinet. Jinnah had demanded an exclusive right to nominate Muslims—a claim that seemed quite convincing in the light of the League's demonstrated hold over Muslims of the subcontinent as shown in the 1946 elections, and yet was not acceptable to the Congress. Wavell went on patiently negotiating with Jinnah. Eventually, he succeeded in persuading Jinnah to let the Muslim League join the interim government. This was indeed a great diplomatic achievement on his part. But when five members of the Muslim League joined the interim cabinet on 26 October 1946, Jinnah, like a master chess player, disputed the right of the Congress to speak for the Scheduled Castes and nominated Jogendra Nath Mandal as a Muslim League nominee. This was his quid pro quo to the Congress claim of representing Muslims. He himself did not join the interim cabinet, as that would mean accepting Nehru's superior status as deputy chairman. He left it to Liaquat Ali to lead the Muslim League contingent. But, interestingly, apart from Liaquat, Jinnah did not nominate any heavyweight Muslim League leader like

Nazimuddin or, for that matter, any Muslim leader from Bengal, the province where the Muslim League was the strongest.

As the Congress could nominate only five ministers, and was keen to nominate a Muslim, Sarat Chandra Bose was excluded at the last minute. Thus his tenure as a Central minister lasted barely two months.

THE NOAKHALI RIOTS

The great Calcutta killings had triggered off the Noakhali anti-Hindu riots in October 1946 and the Bihar anti-Muslim riots shortly thereafter, both vitiating the communal situation in Bengal to a point of no return. In Noakhali district, which was predominantly Muslim (82 per cent), and in some adjoining areas of Tippera district, violence started on 10 October 1946—on a day dedicated to the worship of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of prosperity. Organized gangs of Muslim League miscreants attacked Hindu villagers, a helpless minority, killing them, burning their houses, looting their possessions, dishonouring their women, abducting and forcibly marrying many of them, forcibly converting people to Islam and desecrating Hindu temples in order to spread terror and force them to emigrate from their hearths and homes. The police force was by and large inactive. One of the most sensational cases was the open attack on the house of Rajendralal Roychowdhury, a respectable zamindar, in broad daylight and the killing of the whole family of twenty-three. Such incidents were pre-planned to create terror among the Hindus systematically. Wavell himself commented in a letter to Pathick Lawrence that the riots were deliberately planned by the worst political elements—‘those in East Bengal by a discarded supporter of the Muslim League’.²¹ The news of what was happening in Noakhali countryside was not allowed to be published in the press for a week under orders of the Bengal government. Strangely enough, the leader of the murderous gangs was a former Congressman, Golam Sarwar, an ex-MLA who had joined the Muslim League. Sarwar was not apprehended by the administration despite a warrant of arrest against him. As news started slowly trickling out to the outside world from 17 October

onwards and the magnitude of the disaster came to be known, there was an outcry all over the subcontinent. The press reported that around 5,000 Hindus had been killed and about 1.5 lakh lost their homes and possessions. Suhrawardy flew over Noakhali to see the extent of destruction and simply commented that the newspapers reports were grossly exaggerated.

True, official sources invariably described the newspaper reports as highly exaggerated, but even if we had to discount them, there is no doubt that what happened was itself of huge proportions. General Butcher of the Eastern Command admitted that the Hindus had sufficient cause for running away. The news of the happenings in Noakhali caused much consternation all over the country. Gandhi felt extremely disturbed and decided to proceed to Noakhali. The government of Bengal deputed Simpson, a high-ranking official, to Noakhali and Tippera for an on-the-spot study of the situation and for a report on what happened and remedial steps needed to be taken. This report was not released, but according to newspaper reports, it had supported the story of widespread killing, looting, and raping and abduction of women. The gist of the report was leaked out in the *Statesman* of 13 November 1946. It brought out that no substantial structure was found standing in most of the Hindu localities. It also supported reports of forcible mass conversion of Hindus to Islam, confining Hindu womenfolk in large numbers to force them to change their religion and marry Muslims. Around that time, Gandhi visited Ramganj village and found telltale evidence of destruction all around. Gandhi started from Sodepur near Calcutta on 6 November 1946 and reached Noakhali the following day. He stayed there for about four months and left Noakhali on 2 March 1947. He toured the disturbed areas on foot, lived in Muslim villages, held numerous meetings trying to re-establish communal amity, appealing to both the communities to live peacefully and amicably as before. His Noakhali tour produced different reactions among different sections of the people. It obviously had a considerable effect on Suhrawardy.

Noakhali and Tippera continued to be in the grip of fear for many months. The following portion from a 'confidential, top secret' report sent

by the commissioner of the Chittagong division to the government on 13 May 1947²² illustrates this.

Though outwardly Noakhali is quiet, the Hindus there are still panicky; the reason for the panic is the petty oppression of the Hindus by the Muslims in the countryside away from the towns and the abuses they are subjected to. The Hindus comprise four lakh out of a total population of eighteen lakh and, remembering the October atrocities, they, particularly the upper class among them, are passing their days in fear and terror. They do not dare to report to the police station the harassment and oppression they are subjected to ...

The Gandhi camps and other volunteers did not succeed in affording much relief to the distressed people. The volunteers have no contact with the local Muslims; they regard each other with suspicion.

The main reason for the moral and psychological weakness of the Hindus is the partisan attitude of the government for the miscreants in the October disturbances leading to an increase in the latter's surge for oppressing and harassing the Hindus. After the disturbances, 1,529 criminal cases involving over 13,000 persons were instituted but cases against 164 accused persons only are now going on. Of the 677 persons arrested by the police only 50 are in detention. The Hindus know that the police do not want to arrest the miscreants and the miscreants know full well that they will not have to suffer punishment. The police cannot trace out the two master criminals, Abul Kasem and Ali Akbar, though they are freely moving about and are addressing public meetings saying that it was a mistake not to have done away with all the Hindus on the last occasion and that this mistake would not be committed at the clash to come. In spite of all this, the police do not arrest them and this has resulted in adding to the apprehensions of the Hindus ... Correct information of the indifference, partisanship and oppression of the police is not forthcoming and the government is giving out that the trouble is at an end. It is this conduct and attitude of the police that made the terrible killing of October last possible and very likely there is going to be a repetition of the same.

There is no doubt that the Noakhali atrocities served to harden the attitude of the Bengalee Hindus in favour of the partition of Bengal.

HOLOCAUST IN BIHAR

If Noakhali hardened the Hindi attitude, the Bihar riots had the same effect for the Muslims. In Bihar, it was the turn of the Muslims to suffer at the hands of armed murderous bands of Hindus who had been inflamed by reports from Calcutta of mass killings of many Bihari rickshaw-pullers and milk vendors by Muslim goondas in August. As the news of the atrocities had spread to the villages in Bihar, invariably there was retaliatory action on a scale that surpassed the Calcutta killings. Armed mobs went round the

countryside attacking Muslim villages in a planned manner. It was a replay of Noakhali with the only difference being that there was no forced conversion or dishonouring of women. Village after village was burnt, the inhabitants killed or injured and the movable property looted. While the Bengal government was accused of inaction in the early days of violence in Noakhali, in Bihar the army was deployed in the very first instance to check widespread rioting and arson. The prime minister of the interim government, Jawaharlal Nehru, and some of his Hindu colleagues who had not thought it necessary to visit riot-torn Calcutta and Noakhali, rushed to Bihar. Nehru even threatened aerial bombing unless the rioting stopped. As Noakhali had hardened Bengalee Hindu opinion in favour of Partition, the happenings in Bihar hardened the attitude of Muslim Bengalees in favour of not staying in 'Hindu' India.

ARRIVAL OF MOUNTBATTEN

Wavell came to the conclusion that the British simply would not be able to govern India for more than eighteen months or so. He kept two contingency plans ready from April 1946. One was for the emergency evacuation of British civilians. The other was for the withdrawal of the British army and administrators province by province (called Operation Ebb-Tide), after making conditions reasonably safe in each province, and their eventual convergence in Bombay and Karachi from which ports they could sail home. Meanwhile, things were moving fast in London. On 20 February 1947, Prime Minister Clement Attlee made the following historic announcement in the British parliament: 'His Majesty's government wishes to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect the transfer of power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948.' In spite of determined opposition from Winston Churchill who had for nearly four decades opposed every move towards India's independence, the House of Commons overwhelmingly endorsed Clement Attlee's decision to end British Raj in India by June 1948. The same speech also announced the replacement of Field Marshal Wavell by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten as Governor General and viceroy. It was

rumoured that Nehru, through his associate in London, Krishna Menon, who had close contact with the British Labour Party, had canvassed with the British government leaders in favour of replacing Wavell with Mountbatten. Nehru had struck friendship with Mountbatten during his visit to Singapore where Mountbatten, the supreme commander of the Allied forces in South-east Asia, had treated him like a head of government. Nehru had never got on with the matter-of-fact Wavell during the negotiations. Incidentally, general mistrust rather than confidence was the order of the day. Nehru did not trust Jinnah. Jinnah also had total mistrust for Nehru. Nehru did not fully trust his colleague, Patel, just as Jinnah did not trust Suhrawardy. Also, Nehru had mistrust for Wavell, and the Governor General fully reciprocated this feeling. There was mistrust between Wavell and Prime Minister Attlee, who overruled Wavell's decision to postpone the swearing-in of the interim government until the Muslim League would agree to join, and enforced its swearing-in with only Congress ministers.

In retrospect, the replacement of Wavell by Mountbatten as Britain's last Governor General in India was somewhat unfortunate for the ongoing negotiations on transfer of power. Wavell had tried to prevent partition of the country as best as he could and, therefore, continued his seemingly endless negotiations. In that process he had even become unpopular with Indian leaders, who often lost patience with him. But Mountbatten, who arrived on 19 March 1947, saw his role as a military commander who had to accomplish a task, namely, British withdrawal from India, as fast as possible. His announcement to advance the date of transfer of power from June 1948 to August 1947 produced a lot of unforeseen and unfortunate effects, directly paving the way for the communal holocaust in Punjab.

PUNJAB CIVIL WAR

Meanwhile in Punjab, many people felt that their immediate future was uncertain and took recourse to arms to ensure things in their own way. The government was simply not prepared to face the situation that emerged in Punjab. While Bengal during these months remained relatively quiet, except for Calcutta, the storm centre moved to Punjab where the situation

deteriorated very fast. At that time Punjab was under the administration of a coalition government of the Congress, the Akalis and the Unionists under Khizr Hyat Khan who was the premier. The Muslim League, although returned as the largest party in the Assembly after decimating the once-formidable Unionist Party, was in the Opposition because three other parties chose to form a coalition.

With Pakistan in sight, the Muslim League started an armed confrontation with the coalition government in power through a no-holds-barred civil disobedience movement. The League's National Guards and the Hindu Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) clashed everywhere and, for all practical purposes, created civil war conditions. Sikhs scattered all over Punjab in innumerable pockets felt insecure and tried to protect these pockets with their arms or migrate to safer areas in what was likely to be a part of the Indian Union, using force ruthlessly. Muslims all over western Punjab started an orgy of violence in trying to drive out the Hindus and Sikhs from their hearths and homes. Hindus and Sikhs in eastern Punjab in retaliation started a similar process of ethnic cleansing. Faced with civil war conditions, Khizr Hyat Khan resigned on 2 March 1947. The governor of Punjab, Sir Evan Jenkins, invited the Khan of Mamdot, leader of the Muslim League in the Punjab Assembly, to form a government. But such was the electoral arithmetic in the Punjab Assembly that the League could not have a majority of its own, and both the Congress and the Akali Party refused to extend support to it. Unavoidably, governor's rule under Section 93 followed. But the Muslim League, determined to seize political power by force, and carry into effect the slogan 'Lar ke lenge Pakistan', started widespread rioting. This started in Lahore and engulfed the whole of Punjab like wildfire. It also spread to neighbouring NWFP where armed Muslim League supporters tried with brute force to overthrow the Congress government elected only a year before, led by Dr Khan Sahib, the brother of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the legendary Frontier Gandhi. So strong was the communal contagion that Jawaharlal Nehru, on a special visit to the province which he had thought all along was a Congress-friendly one, was heckled and almost manhandled and had to return so disappointed that he

never took a strong stand on the issue of asking the NWFP to go through a referendum to decide whether to join India or Pakistan. The Congress could have taken a strong stand against referendum in a province which had voted for it only eighteen months ago.

With all this experience, in particular the experience of a deadlocked administration in the interim government, caused by Liaquat Ali in charge of finance blocking all proposals from Congress ministers, and by Liaquat Ali's controversial anti-business budget of February 1947 which set the business classes against united India, slowly Nehru and the Congress leadership were getting reconciled to the inevitability of partition. In a conversation with Leonard Mosley several years later Nehru confided, 'We were tired men. We were not prepared to go to jail again.' Mountbatten now accepted that a united India was virtually impossible and that it was inevitable that the British transferred power to two Central governments, one representing Muslim-majority Pakistan and the other representing Hindu-majority India on the basis of Dominion status. Once Nehru and Patel accepted that partition was inevitable, V.P. Menon quickly formulated an outline plan, got the viceroy's approval and sent it to the India Office in London.²³

THE IDEA OF PARTITION OF BENGAL

But just when Pakistan had become a certainty and so also was the inclusion of the whole of Bengal in it, a totally unforeseen development took place, namely, the idea of a partition of Bengal, which, paradoxically, Bengal had rejected half a century ago. Taking the cue from Punjab where a decision was taken to divide Punjab on religious lines in early March, a proposal was mooted for a partition of Bengal under which all Hindu-majority districts were to be given an option to remain in India. This proposal, first suggested in the Tarakeshwar Conference of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (4–6 April 1947) rapidly gathered support like a rolling snowball. In his presidential address, N.C. Chatterjee said: 'Let us declare today that as the Muslim League persists in its fantastic idea of

establishing Pakistan in Bengal, the Hindus of Bengal must constitute a separate province under a strong national government. This is not a question of partition. This is a question of life and death for us, the Bengalee Hindus.’ One of the principal advocates of this was Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who declared: ‘I conceive of no other solution of the communal problem in Bengal than to divide the province and to let the two major communities residing here live in peace and freedom.’ The West Bengal Congress accepted this idea almost immediately and passed the following resolution:

If His Majesty’s Government contemplate handing over its power to the existing Government of Bengal which is determined to the formation of Bengal into a sovereign state and which by its composition is a communal party Government, such portions of Bengal as are desirous of remaining within the Union of India should be allowed to remain so and be formed in a separate province within the Union of India.

Thus the cycle had made a full turn since 1905. Bengalee Hindus, who in 1905 had launched a full-scale political movement to protect the unity of Bengal, now started a political movement for Bengal’s partition in order to protect their Hindu identity. There was a hartal in Calcutta in support of partition of Bengal. Fifty jurists of the Calcutta High Court, in a statement, pressed for the partition of Bengal on the ground that by going to Pakistan the Bengalee Hindus would only exchange one form of slavery for another, and that they needed a homeland of their own. On 1 April 1947, eleven members of the Constituent Assembly from Bengal submitted a memorandum to the viceroy supporting the partition of the province. On 24 April 1947 the *Statesman*, Calcutta, commented that the minds of the middle-class Bengalee Hindus had been so embittered that nothing except a partition of the province would satisfy them. The Marwari business interests of Calcutta led by G.D. Birla also lent their solid support to the proposed partition of Bengal. On 30 April 1947, a meeting of the Chambers of Commerce held in Calcutta supported the partition of Bengal. According to G.D. Birla, this was not only unavoidable, but an excellent way out of the problem. On 1 June, addressing the Bengalee community in Delhi, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee called for a division of Bengal on ‘linguistic, cultural and

economic considerations if India had to be divided'. Even the Muslim business interests wanted partition, which would free them from unequal competition with the dominant business houses in India that were largely non-Muslim. Thus when the decision to partition Bengal was announced in Mountbatten's broadcast on 3 June 1947, this was relayed through microphones on street crossings of Calcutta by jubilant crowds who saw in this proposal a liberation from the dark days of Muslim League rule. For many of them, tired of a winter of discontent (1946–47)—caused by communal riots and economic misery through scarcity and rising prices of essential commodities and an economic slump that followed the end of the war—this mirage of early independence (for Hindus of West Bengal an independent India and for Bengalee Muslims the promised homeland) seemed to be the light at the end of the tunnel.

THE COUNTERVAILING IDEA OF A SOVEREIGN, UNITED BENGAL

Suhrawardy was totally unprepared for such a move for partition of Bengal. At a press conference in New Delhi on 27 April 1946, he described it as a suicidal move and pleaded for 'an independent, sovereign, undivided Bengal in a divided India'.²⁴ For him a Pakistan without the city of Calcutta was simply not acceptable. Also, his relations with Jinnah were already under strain. He even expressed his willingness to accept joint electorate to allay the suspicions of the Hindus. He appealed to the Hindus to accept his proposal and said that the future of independent and undivided Bengal was very bright. 'I promise,' he said, 'that the future will be unlike the present. Bengal's wealth, peace and happiness will befit a great nation. If the Hindus can forget the past and accept the proposal, I promise to fulfil their hopes and aspirations to the full.' He also announced that 'independent Bengal will frame its own constitution and its Legislative Assembly will take the final decision in the matter. We Bengalees have a common mother tongue, and common economic interests'.

In his statement on 27 April, he proceeded to say:

And let us pause for a moment to consider what Bengal can be if it remains united. It will be a great country indeed, the richest and the most prosperous in India, capable of giving to its people a high standard of living, where a great people will be able to rise to the fullest height of their stature, a land that will truly be plentiful. It will be rich in agriculture, rich in industry and commerce and in course of time it will be one of the most powerful and progressive states of the world. If Bengal remains united, this will be no dream, no fantasy. And one who can see what its resources are and the present state of its development, will agree that this must come to pass if we ourselves do not commit suicide.

If we can have an unsecured [sic] Bengal, if all of us are united with a purpose of making this great [nation], then surely our claims to the districts of Manbhum and Singbhum, perhaps the district of Purnea, certainly to the Surma Valley, if not to Assam as a whole (of course with their consent which I think will be forthcoming when the tussle disappears and gives way to co-operation and mutual reliance) are bound to find favour on the principle of self-determination and then we can have a portion of the world that will certainly surpass any other country of like dimensions.

He got in touch with several other kindred souls like Sarat Chandra Bose and Kiran Shankar Roy who were also opposed to the prospect of a divided Bengal. Their response now was an independent, sovereign Bengal as a third succession state after the withdrawal of the British, along with India and Pakistan. For a while this idea also caught the imagination of some people. Many Bengalee Muslims supported this idea. Abul Hashim, who had emerged as the spokesman of the progressive sections of the Muslim League made the following statement:

Let the Hindus and Muslims agree to C.R. Das's formula of 50:50 enjoyment of political power and economic privileges. I appeal to the youths of Bengal in the name of her past traditions and glorious future to unite, to make a determined effort to dismiss all reactionary thinking and save Bengal from the impending calamity.

But the concept of a united, sovereign Bengal was stillborn. Its success largely depended on the support of the Hindu Bengalees, which was not forthcoming. Suhrawardy, according to P.S. Mathur—at that time his press secretary—had envisaged that the proposed undivided, independent Bengal would include the districts of Manbhum, Singbhum and Purnea from Bihar and the Surma Valley of Assam, with the result that there would not be substantial difference in the numerical strength of the Hindus and the Muslims. In fact, the two communities would be evenly balanced in an independent and enlarged Bengal. This was Suhrawardy's way of allaying

the misgivings of the Hindus. Whether Bihar or Assam would have agreed to readily part with their territory is a different issue. Also, apart from Suhrawardy, some of his trusted followers like Abul Hashim and Mohammed Ali, and two Hindu leaders, namely, Sarat Chandra Bose and Kiran Shankar Roy, there were very few takers for this idea of a third state in the subcontinent. Both the Congress leadership and the Muslim League leadership cold-shouldered the idea of an independent Bengal. Kiran Shankar Roy soon backed out under pressure of the Congress leaders.

Above all, the Hindus of West Bengal were, in 1947, not convinced about a united Bengal and were in no mood to settle for continued Muslim domination in the politics of undivided Bengal, after experiencing for nearly two decades so many irritants like the reservation of an overwhelming majority of government jobs for Muslims. Many of them had suspicions that this was Suhrawardy's camouflage to lure them into an eastern, Muslim-dominated, sovereign state. Even the Muslim business interests opposed this as yet another Hindu conspiracy to keep Muslims in bondage. There were reports of meetings both in Calcutta and in the districts to protest against Bengal's division. In Rangpur and Mymensingh, where the communist-led Tebhagha movement was at its height, slogan-shouting peasants were reportedly saying: 'We will not divide Bengal. We will not kill each other.'

The joint proposal formulated by Suhrawardy and Sarat Chandra Bose envisaged the following arrangement:

- (i) Bengal would constitute an independent state which would determine the relationship it would establish with other states of India, but without a two-thirds majority vote in the Legislative Assembly it would not join either India or Pakistan.
- (ii) Election to the Legislative Assembly would be on the basis of adult suffrage. The number of seats for the two communities in the Legislative Assembly would be determined by the numerical strength of the communities, respectively, but the electorate would be a joint one.

Much has been said about Gandhi's support for a united, independent Bengal. Gandhi did at one stage lend his half-hearted support, but not the full-throated support that was needed. Sarat Chandra Bose met Gandhi on several occasions with the proposal for an undivided Bengal. On some of these visits he was accompanied by Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim. Hashim

told Gandhi, 'Language, tradition and history have created an unshakeable bond of unity between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. We are after all Bengalees in spite of the difference in religion. It is a matter of shame that Pakistan would rule us from a distance of thousand miles.' Gandhi advised Suhrawardy and Hashim to gain the trust of the Hindus first. Suhrawardy and Sarat Chandra Bose did not give up their hope for an undivided Bengal and fought a valiant rearguard action till the end.

But the Congress leadership made its position clear in no uncertain terms. So did the strident Hindu Mahasabha led by Shyama Prasad. At a meeting on 23 May, when Mountbatten raised Suhrawardy's proposal, Nehru made his task simpler by saying that the Congress could accept a united Bengal if it stayed in India. Both the Congress and the Muslim League accepted the partition of Bengal and Punjab in terms of the viceroy's declaration of 3 June 1947. Still, Sarat Bose and Suhrawardy did not abandon hope and continued their efforts till the end.

Needless to say, nothing came out of these efforts. The fact is that, in the face of strong opposition from both the Congress and the Muslim League leadership and strong reservation from the majority of the Hindus of West Bengal, the concept of a united, sovereign Bengal was simply unworkable.

THE MOUNTBATTEN PLAN

Mountbatten took over as viceroy and Governor General on 24 March 1947 with a clear mandate to arrange transfer of power to a unitary government, if possible, but in any case to two governments by 1 June 1948. He was given time till 10 October 1947 to persuade the Indian parties. But, with communal violence at its crescendo and with the Muslim League's persistent refusal to join the Constituent Assembly, partition seemed inevitable. On 2 June 1947 Mountbatten announced the following proposals in a meeting with seven leaders—Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, J.B. Kripalani (representing the Congress), M.A. Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and Abdur Rab Nishtar (representing the Muslim League) and Baldev Singh (representing the Sikhs):

- (i) A separate, independent state will be constituted with Muslim-majority provinces, but before that representatives of the Hindu-majority areas in Bengal and Punjab would be at liberty to opt for a partition of these two provinces.
- (ii) A plebiscite in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) would decide whether that province would form a part of Pakistan.
- (iii) The people of the Bengali-speaking district of Sylhet in Assam would also decide through a plebiscite whether that district will form part of Pakistan.
- (iv) A Boundary Commission would be appointed for demarcating the boundary of the Hindu-majority and Muslim-majority areas in Bengal and Punjab, which would go to India and Pakistan, respectively.
- (v) No immediate change is envisaged for the princely states, but they are advised to join either of the two Dominions on the lapse of the British paramountcy.

Significantly, there was not a single representative in this meeting from Bengal, the province that along with Punjab had the most at stake. It is a measure of the extent to which Bengal politicians—Hindu and Muslim—had abdicated their authority and surrendered it to political leaders from other parts of the subcontinent. It also demonstrated that, whether in the Congress or in the Muslim League, Bengalee leaders were no longer counted as front rankers. All the parties concerned gave their consent formally or informally. Mountbatten virtually steamrolled all ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ to which Wavell would perhaps have lent a patient ear and used his negotiating skills. Mountbatten summarily dismissed Nehru’s feeble plea for independence as a third option in the NWFP referendum, stating that the Congress could not ask for it when it had denied the same option to Bengal.

True to his proverbial speed, Mountbatten met Gandhi immediately after his meeting, secured his approval and announced this scheme the same evening (3 June 1947) in a broadcast over the All India Radio. He was followed in that radio programme by Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh, each of them announcing the acceptance of the partition scheme and praising Viceroy Mountbatten. The British House of Commons also approved on the same evening what came to be known as the Third June Plan. Next morning Mountbatten, in a press conference, casually announced that the transfer of power would take place not in June 1948, but on 15 August 1947, that is, in just about two months’ time. If there was any single event that contributed most to the communal holocaust that followed, it was this advancing of the

date of Partition and Independence. Mountbatten, therefore, has to share the responsibility for the holocaust.

The NWFP referendum passed off peacefully during 6–17 July 1947. The Congress with rare naivety accepted this referendum, but also decided to abstain from it in protest. With the Congress and the Red Shirts, with total lack of logic, abstaining from it to register their protest, the result in favour of Pakistan was a foregone conclusion. Similarly the referendum in Sylhet, of more concern to Bengal, passed off peacefully. The people of the district decided to join Pakistan by a clear majority. But in Punjab the situation deteriorated very fast, the whole province becoming a vast killing field.

Second Partition of Bengal

The last nail in the coffin of united Bengal was struck on 20 June 1946 when the Bengal Legislative Assembly voted for Pakistan. Thereafter, in a separate session, the MLAs from the notional Hindu-majority districts voted in favour of partitioning the province and staying in India. The Muslim League MLAs of both East and West Bengal voted against partition. H.S. Suhrawardy announced in anguish that the idea of a sovereign, undivided Bengal had been stabbed in the back and that the partition of Bengal was inevitable. On 3 July 1947 a shadow cabinet was formed for the province of West Bengal with Dr P.C. Ghosh—a member of the Congress Working Committee and a Gandhian—as chief minister. The idea was that although the Suhrawardy cabinet would continue for the whole of Bengal till 15 August, all matters concerning the new territory of West Bengal would need the concurrence of the shadow cabinet.

Later on, the Muslim League members from East Bengal districts elected as their leader Khwaja Nazimuddin, who was to take over as the first chief minister of the province of East Bengal in the new dominion of Pakistan. Suhrawardy was elected leader of the Muslim League in the West Bengal Assembly.

Thus Jinnah's Pakistan had no use for the man who, next to Jinnah, perhaps contributed most to the creation of Pakistan. In fact, he was destined to be expelled from the Pakistan Constituent Assembly and later from the province of East Bengal in 1948 by his own Muslim League colleagues for his strong support for the Bengali language and the rights of the Hindu minority; he was snubbed as anti-Pakistan and even anti-Muslim. He stayed in India till 1949 and then moved to Pakistan to build up the Awami League brick by brick and, in association with his old rival Huq and

Maulana Bhasani, stormed the citadel of the Muslim League in East Bengal in 1954 which he had personally done so much to build a decade ago.

Several other proposals, essentially in the nature of trial balloons, need to be mentioned. In a bid to protect the interests of the 20,000-strong foreign community in Calcutta city, its trade and industry, and its character as an international city, Governor Burrows proposed that Calcutta be turned into a free city and free port serving both India and Pakistan, but not becoming a part of either. For the present, the British government was to nominate a governor to be assisted by a council of advisers consisting of an equal number of Hindu and Muslim members and two nominated members, one representing the British community and the other, the elite. A year after Independence, the citizens of Calcutta were to decide by a majority vote whether they would like to join India or Pakistan, or prefer to continue as a free international city. Needless to say, the proposal did not receive support from either the Congress or the League and died a natural death instantly.

The other proposal, a stray thought from Jinnah, was for an 800-mile-long corridor connecting Pakistan and East Bengal. It was impracticable even on the face of it, like Jinnah's other proposal for the exchange of Hindu and Muslim populations between India and Pakistan. It was rejected straightaway by Nehru and Patel.

Meanwhile, with the future of Calcutta still uncertain, there was a relapse of communal violence in the city from 29 May till the end of July. On 28 June, Governor Burrows informed Viceroy Mountbatten that the situation in the city was explosive with both the rioting sides having stored huge quantities of explosives and arms. On 18 July he further wrote to the viceroy that any announcement about Calcutta remaining in India could be followed by large-scale rioting, with the city being divided into two armed camps. All kinds of panicky rumours were circulating, adding to the tension. Peace appeals jointly from Gandhi and Jinnah were being circulated from aeroplanes flying over the city. In this phase of rioting the Muslim bustees were mainly at the receiving end. The removal of Muslim police officers by the shadow cabinet of P.C. Ghosh at one stroke not only removed a protective umbrella but exposed them to attacks from Hindu

antisocials. Several bustees were burnt at Beliaghata, Kashipur and Entally in the first half of August. The en masse departure of Muslim officials and businessmen for Dhaka in the beginning of August left many of the Muslim localities vulnerable. Suhrawardy, who had gone to Karachi, cut short his programme there on hearing of the fresh outbreak of violence and returned to Calcutta on 10 August. He appealed to Gandhi not to proceed to Punjab and return to Calcutta.

The British House of Commons passed the Indian Independence Act on 14 July 1947 and the House of Lords did it a day later. The Act announced that the province of Bengal Presidency as under the Government of India Act, 1935, would cease to exist. With the decks cleared for the inevitable Partition, all attention was focused on the division of government personnel, including the army, and assets of the undivided Government of India and of a provincial government of Bengal, which itself was going to be partitioned. In the Bengal secretariat in Calcutta and the headquarters of many of the districts there was feverish activity. Nothing like this had happened in all history. The date for Independence or transfer of power was advanced to the night of 14 August 1947. Mountbatten wanted to be the common Governor General for the Dominions. Nehru and the Congress readily accepted him, but not Jinnah who himself wanted to be Pakistan's first Governor General, with Liaquat Ali as the first prime minister. Jogendra Nath Mandal was nominated as the law and labour minister in Pakistan in the first Central cabinet. Jinnah flew to Karachi from Delhi on 9 August 1947 after selling his house in Delhi. At the airport he was reported to have confided to a British ADC that he found it difficult to believe that he was finally getting Pakistan.¹ Government officials were asked whether they would want to serve India or Pakistan. As expected, the Hindu officials with a few exceptions exercised their option for India, while the Muslim officials, once again only with a few exceptions, opted for Pakistan. The British ICS officers, by and large, decided to quit except some who opted for Pakistan. All the Hindu ICS officers opted for India and all the Muslim ICS officers, except one, opted for Pakistan. Sir Frederick Bourne was appointed governor for the East Bengal province of Pakistan and C.

Rajagopalachari, a front-ranking Congress leader, became the governor of West Bengal. A joint statement was issued by Premier Suhrawardy, chief minister-designate for West Bengal Dr P. C. Ghosh, and chief minister-designate for East Bengal Khwaja Nazimuddin on 9 August:

We ... appeal to the people not to take the law into their own hands, but work in a peaceful and orderly manner. We want to give a fair deal to minorities in both parts of Bengal. But the minorities also must cooperate with the majority in making the states happy and prosperous.

About a week from now, transfer of power from British to Indian hands will take place. Undoubtedly, it is an event of great historical importance. By agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League, power will be transferred to two Dominions on 15 August. The boundaries of the two Dominions are not yet fixed. The matter will be decided by the Boundary Commission.

Both the Congress and the Muslim League have agreed to abide by the decision of the Boundary Commission. We do appeal to all sections of people in Bengal to accept the decision of the Boundary Commission, however unpalatable it may be to one community or to the other. We have no doubt that the vast majority of the people with allegiance to the Congress and the League will respond to the wishes of these organizations.

But during the transitional period, some undesirable elements may try to create trouble for their own interests. If they do so, the government would deal with them sternly.

The flag of the Dominion of India has been accepted by the Constituent Assembly. We do hope that the flag will be hoisted by all sections of the people in West Bengal and, in the same way, whatever flag is accepted by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly it will be hoisted by all sections of the people of East Bengal.

We are going to be masters of our destiny. Let us hope God will give us courage and wisdom to shape it in the interest of the toiling and starving masses.

History was to show that these lofty wishes were followed more in the breach than in the observance.

RADCLIFFE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

Meanwhile, two boundary commissions had been appointed, one for Bengal and one for Punjab, both presided over by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British jurist. For Bengal, the two Muslim members were Justice A.M. Akram and Justice S.A. Rahman and the two Hindu members were Justice Bijan Mukherjee and Justice C.C. Biswas. Radcliffe arrived from England on 8 July 1947. He realized within a few days after visiting Calcutta and Lahore and meeting members of the two boundary commissions that the Hindu and Muslim members could not agree on any point. He thereupon decided not to

sit physically with either of the two commissions and stayed in New Delhi itself, going through the records of the proceedings every day and the voluminous materials submitted by the counsels representing various parties, flown to Delhi every evening. Eventually he took upon himself, for all practical purposes, the entire responsibility of drafting the report on all contentious points. He overruled both the sub-reports and gave his own Award. Radcliffe attached importance to the following issues:

- (i) To which state was the city of Calcutta to be assigned, or was it possible to adopt any method of dividing the city between the two states?
- (ii) If the city of Calcutta must be assigned as a whole to one or other of the states, what were its indispensable claims to the control of territory, such as all or part of the Nadia river system or the Kulti River, upon which the life of Calcutta as a city and port depended?
- (iii) Could the attractions of the Ganga–Padma–Madhumati river line displace the strong claims of the heavy concentration of Muslim majorities in the districts of Jessore and Nadia without doing too great a violence to the principle of our terms of reference?
- (iv) Could the district of Khulna usefully be held by a state different from that which held the district of Jessore?
- (v) Was it right to assign to eastern Bengal the considerable block of non-Muslim majorities in the districts of Malda and Dinajpur?
- (vi) Which state's claim ought to prevail in respect of the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, in which the Muslim population amounted to 2.42 per cent of the whole in the case of Darjeeling, and to 23.08 per cent in the whole in the case of Jalpaiguri, but which constituted an area not in any natural sense contiguous to another non-Muslim area of Bengal?
- (vii) To which state should the Chittagong Hill Tracts be assigned, an area in which the Muslim population was only 3 per cent of the whole, but which it was difficult to assign to a state different from that which controlled the district of Chittagong itself?

Annexure A of the report described the demarcated boundary line, and Annexure B contained a map of the two Bengals. In case of any divergence between the description of the boundary and the map, the description in Annexure A was to prevail. The Award on Bengal was submitted to Mountbatten on 9 August and the one on Punjab after a few days. Radcliffe sailed for home on 15 August, having accomplished his task in less than five weeks, for which he did not accept any fee. Mountbatten chose not to publish the reports until after Independence Day on 15 August. Thus, on the midnight of 14 August 1947, undivided Bengal disappeared from the map of the world and in its place the new provinces of West Bengal (in India)

and East Bengal (in Pakistan) came into being. On the day of Independence there was a sort of notional division. All the Hindu-majority districts hoisted the Indian tricolour to celebrate India's independence and all the Muslim-majority districts hoisted the Pakistani flag. On 17 August 1947, the Radcliffe Report of sixteen pages was released, of which nine pages were devoted to Bengal.

There were many surprises. Khulna and Chittagong Hill districts, which had hoisted the Indian national flag two days ago, became part of Pakistan, while Murshidabad and Malda districts, which had hoisted the Pakistan flag, were made part of India. The districts of Jalpaiguri and Nadia remained in India while losing substantial territory to Pakistan. On the other hand, although Jessore and Dinajpur were allotted to Pakistan, a subdivision of each from both the districts (Bongaon subdivision in Jessore and Balurghat sub-division in Dinajpur) were allotted to India. The state of West Bengal as it emerged from Radcliffe's scissors was also moth-eaten. The districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri were separated from the West Bengal mainland.

What weighed with Radcliffe in giving Murshidabad to India while, as a compensatory measure, giving Khulna to Pakistan was that the entire length of the Hooghly River from the point where it branches off from the Ganga should remain with India in order to maintain the navigability of Calcutta port. The predominantly Buddhist district of the Chittagong Hill Tracts had been given to Pakistan, as its normal communication routes to the outside world lay through the Chittagong district and apparently that had influenced Radcliffe's judgement, although he failed to notice in his haste that the hill tracts of Chittagong had a long border with the Lushai Hills district of the Indian province of Assam. As all the parties had given a guarantee that they would accept Radcliffe Award without any question, they had to keep quiet and accept whatever had been decreed by Radcliffe in what was by far the strangest, most illogical and arbitrarily drawn boundary line in history between two countries.

On 15 August 1947, Bengal was free, after two centuries, from British rule. In that process it was also partitioned, two-thirds of it joining Pakistan and one-third remaining in India. No Bengalee wanted the partition of Bengal and yet the partition happened because the Hindu Bengalees, especially those from West Bengal, did not want to leave India and go into a predominantly Muslim state whereas the Muslims in East Bengal did not want to merge themselves into a predominantly Hindu India. The fact that despite much provocation and tension there was communal peace in all the districts of Bengal except Calcutta, Noakhali and Tippera was ignored by politicians. Even when communal violence was rampant in Calcutta and Noakhali, the Muslim and Hindu peasants of the Tebhagha movement in predominantly Muslim Rangpur and Dinajpur were fighting under the charismatic leadership of Ila Mitra, and opposing Partition. Such examples were ignored. The Congress leadership except Gandhi was as responsible as Jinnah and Mountbatten for accelerating the movement of events that made Partition inevitable. Gandhi, on the other hand, opposed the division till the very end and even in his last meeting with Mountbatten requested the British not to partition the country, but to demit power either to the Muslim League or to the Congress to run India as a whole. If there was to be chaos, let that chaos be faced by Indians. On 31 March, he announced that the Congress could agree to the country's partition only over his dead body. He was conspicuous by his absence from the festivities at New Delhi and preferred to stay at a dilapidated Muslim house in riot-torn Calcutta—the Hyder Manzil—at Beliaghata. His companion was Suhrawardy, the man the Hindus of Calcutta at that time hated the most, whom he had invited to live in the same house with him. In his daily prayer meetings, in meeting countless groups and in the course of journeying through the disturbed localities of Calcutta driven by Suhrawardy himself, Gandhi preached communal harmony and unity of religions and brought about a miracle. What the 50,000-strong boundary force in Punjab, led by General Rees, could not do was accomplished in West Bengal, to quote Mountbatten, by this 'one-man boundary force'. West Bengal remained trouble-free and there were unprecedented scenes of Hindus and Muslims rejoicing and

celebrating together India's Independence Day, 15 August 1947. This was Gandhi's great achievement.

In any case, undivided Bengal disappeared from the atlas on 15 August 1947, thanks to the sins of omission and commission by two generations of its leaders. In spite of a common language of which every Bengalee is proud, a shared culture and lifestyle and a common history for at least a thousand years, Bengal was irretrievably partitioned between two sovereign countries. The Bay of Bengal remained a mute witness to what had been old Bengal, by far the most prosperous tract of the subcontinent. It was only the emergence of an independent Bangladesh in 1971 that was to partially restore the old historical pattern.

The question remains whether the 1947 partition of Bengal which, to quote the poet Akhtaruzzaman Elias, was 'so catastrophic, so deplorable, so heart-rending and meaningless that we are realizing it more every day, could have been avoided'. There can never be a unanimous answer to the question. Fazlul Huq, as chief minister of East Bengal in 1954, announced in public that he did not understand the political boundary separating the two Bengals. Suhrawardy chose to live in Calcutta until 1949. Annada Shankar Roy, the writer and former civil servant, chided the political leaders for breaking Bengal as little children break glass pots. Nirad C. Chaudhuri never accepted the partition and never got reconciled to a West Bengal without the mighty rivers of East Bengal. For Ritwick Ghatak, the film-maker, the indivisible Bengal was an article of faith and the cruelty of dividing this unity was shown in his series of memorable films. For Kayes Ahmad, the novelist, the partition was only 'the freedom to be a refugee'.

EAST BENGAL UNDER PAKISTAN

The Decimation of the Muslim League

From 14 August 1947, East Bengal and West Bengal stopped sharing a common political history. On that day, the new state of Pakistan was formed with East Bengal as one of its provinces. The province now included the Sylhet district of Assam (minus Cachar and Karimganj), which had decided to join Pakistan through a referendum. A Muslim League government headed by Khwaja Nazimuddin took charge in Dhaka, the capital of the province of East Bengal. There was no place for Suhrawardy, thanks to Jinnah's intense dislike for him. The Congress constituted the main Opposition both in the East Bengal Assembly and the Pakistan National Assembly. Kiran Shankar Roy stayed on in Dhaka as the leader of the Congress Opposition, but only till February 1948 when he took over as West Bengal's home minister in B.C. Roy's cabinet. In a speech to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on 11 August, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Governor General of the new country, assured the people:

You are free, you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosque or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed. That has nothing to do with the business of the state. We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste and creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state ...

He continued, 'I think we should keep this in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and

Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of one state.’ However, he emphasized, ‘Let me make it clear to you that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language.’ Two things became clear. First, Jinnah would not, left to himself, have developed Pakistan into a theocratic state. Second, he showed his political misjudgement when he ignored the sensitive issue of language with regard to East Bengal. This was to become a festering wound for East Bengal.

From the very beginning the people of East Bengal found themselves in a dilemma. They had become part of Pakistan by giving primacy to their Muslim identity. But culturally they were very different from the people of what came to be known as ‘West Pakistan’. They spoke and wrote Bengali and were unfamiliar with Urdu. Therefore, they resented Jinnah’s overemphasis on Urdu as the single national language of Pakistan and the denial to Bengali—the language of the majority of the people of Pakistan—of its rightful place. Besides, their idea of Pakistan since the Lahore Resolution had not been the kind of centralized state, which Pakistan eventually became, but a kind of very loose federation where there was a virtually independent Muslim-majority East Bengal, loosely affiliated to Pakistan, or as a sort of ‘Greater Bengal’.¹ Also, close to 30 per cent of the people in East Bengal were Hindus or Buddhists, who expected to enjoy all the rights of shared Pakistani citizenship available to the majority Muslim population. This also created a peculiar situation for East Bengal, different from West Pakistan, where they had solved the problem of minorities by resorting to ethnic cleansing in the very early years of the formation of Pakistan. Hence there had to be some kind of secular character, which was recognized even by Jinnah. Thus the demand for autonomy, which in a way had guided the Bengalee Muslims’ fight for Pakistan, still remained the central driving force for Bangladesh politics from day one as part of Pakistan. This feeling of separateness was accentuated all the more since East Bengal was separated from West Pakistan by 800 miles. The people of East Bengal painfully realized soon enough that their aspiration for regional self-rule had been usurped by the Central Government of Pakistan. So long

as this government was democratically elected, the demographic majority of the Bengalees within Pakistan was bound to assert itself. But after the advent of military dictatorship from 1958, this possibility was as good as gone. Now the denial of autonomy for Bengal manifested itself in the exercise of political power by a non-Bengalee ruling elite, drawn from the feudal classes of West Pakistan. These, in turn, were closely allied with the military and bureaucratic elite, from which Bengalees were virtually excluded. Thus, as far as Bengalees were concerned, the constitutional contract for self-rule was trampled upon, virtually from the beginning of shared nationhood with Pakistan.

BENGALI OR URDU

From the very beginning of the new state, the issue of giving Bengali the status of a state language became important and was soon to unite all sections of the people. Even as early as 1906, when the Muslim League was being formed in Dhaka, Maulvi Abdul Karim had stated at the AIMEC that ‘the Muslims of East Bengal cannot do without Bengali, the vernacular of the province. They could do without the other languages, i.e., Urdu and Persian’. This reflects the distinctiveness of the Bengalee Muslims even at that time. As early as on 15 September 1947, Tamaddun Majlish, a cultural organization among Muslim intellectuals, brought out a book titled *State Language of Pakistan: Bengali or Urdu?* demanding that Bengali be made one of the state languages of Pakistan. Professor Abul Kashim, secretary of the Majlish and professor of physics at Dhaka University, convened a literary meeting in the Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall of Dhaka University to discuss this issue. Very soon a political party was formed called the Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party with Professor Abul Kashim as the chairman, to focus on the claim of Bengali to be Pakistan’s official language. The rising feeling was expressed forcefully by the famous declaration by Dr Shahidullah in his presidential address at the East Pakistan Literary Conference on 31 December 1948 in Dhaka: ‘While it is a fact that we are Hindus or Muslims, the more important fact is that we are Bengalis.’

On 23 February 1948, Dharendra Nath Dutta, a member of the Congress Opposition in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, moved a resolution in the very first session of the Assembly for recognizing Bengali as a state language along with Urdu and English. Both Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and, regrettably, Khwaja Nazimuddin and the non-Bengalee members in the Assembly opposed this move. Even when Dharendra Nath Dutta came up with a few amendments in the original resolution, these were opposed by the West Pakistanis and their Bengalee stooges. On 25 February 1948, Begum Ikramullah stated in the Constituent Assembly: ‘A feeling is growing among the East Pakistanis that Eastern Pakistan is being neglected and treated as a “colony” of West Pakistan.’ This shows that along with the Bengali language, the alleged discrimination against East Bengal and its economic exploitation was also becoming a major issue. On 2 March 1948, Nazimuddin, chief minister of East Bengal, told the members of Parliament: ‘We must have a fair and proper share in the armed forces.’

On 6 March 1948, H.S. Suhrawardy,² who till 1949 remained in India dividing his time between the two countries, stated in a memorable speech in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly: ‘If this State [Pakistan] is not founded on the cooperative goodwill of all the nationals, a time will come when the State will destroy itself. I am reminded of one of the statements of Mahatma Gandhi that if the Indian Union eliminates Muslims within its fold and forms a Hindu state, Hinduism will be destroyed in the Indian Union, and if Pakistan eliminates non-Muslims from within its fold and forms a Muslim state, Islam will be destroyed in Pakistan. We have to think it out very carefully.’ In the same month the ‘objective’ resolution of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly recognized the legitimacy of the demand for provincial autonomy by proposing a federation wherein the units would be autonomous, with certain boundaries and limitations on their powers and authority.

The demand for Bengali as a state language, equal in status to Urdu had gathered momentum among all sections of the people of East Bengal. This had got the spontaneous support of the Bengalee civil servants, academics, students and various groups of the middle class. On 23 February 1948,

when Chief Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin announced in the Legislative Assembly that the people of East Pakistan (the name the East Bengalees used to get heard by the Pakistani government) will accept Urdu as their state language, this provoked huge protests all over the country. Several members of the provincial Assembly, including some ministers, were reportedly active in supporting the movement. The East Pakistan Muslim Students' League, founded on 4 January 1948 by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then a university student, was in the forefront of the agitation. By the end of February 1948, the controversy had spilled over to the streets. A committee of the students of Dhaka University representing all shades of opinion—leftists, centrists and others—was formed to carry on the objective of achieving national status for the Bengali language. This was known as the Students' Committee of Action. On 2 March a meeting at Fazlul Huq Hall formed an all-party State Language Action Council. The council called for a general strike. On 11 March 1948, students demonstrating for Bengali as an official language were lathi-charged and many of them arrested in Dhaka. The situation gradually worsened and shortly before 19 March 1948, when Jinnah was to visit Dhaka, Chief Minister Nazimuddin, under great public pressure, entered into negotiations with the Committee of Action with the help of Muhammad Ali of Bogra. An agreement was signed between the government and the committee, which provided: (i) the provincial Assembly shall adopt a resolution for making Bengali the language of East Bengal and the medium of instruction at all stages of education in the province; and (ii) the Assembly shall pass another resolution recommending to the Central government that Bengali should be made one of the official languages of Pakistan.

The whole thing reached a climax on 24 March 1948, when Jinnah, on the occasion of Dhaka University's convocation, held in Curzon Hall, announced that while the language of East Bengal could be Bengali, 'the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language and anyone who tries to mislead you is an enemy of Pakistan'. He viewed the language controversy as really one aspect of a bigger problem—that of provincialism. But he was ruling out the strong claim of the language

spoken by the larger number of the people in the country. The remark evoked immediate vocal protest from the students who took it as an affront to a language that was spoken by over 50 per cent of the population of Pakistan. The protest was led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was taken into custody. Jinnah met the representatives of the Students' Committee of Action to persuade them to have only one national language, but failed to convince them. The government then resorted to repressive policies in order to crush the movement. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali announced, 'We must kill this provincialism for all time.' Bengalee public opinion bitterly resented this assault on their cultural identity. Bengalees also felt that their national identity was facing a challenge.

Jinnah died in 1949. Khwaja Nazimuddin succeeded him as Governor General. Nurul Amin became East Bengal's chief minister. But they proved to be puppets of West Pakistan, not having the political courage to reflect the strong feelings of East Bengal. Meanwhile, when the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was formed on 23 June, Mujib, still in prison, was elected its joint secretary. On his release he led an anti-famine procession in Dhaka (1950) on the occasion of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali's visit. He was again arrested and jailed for two years.

In 1950 serious anti-Hindu riots, encouraged by West Pakistan officials, broke out in Dhaka and several other districts such as Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet. These led to large-scale exodus of minorities to West Bengal and Assam on an unprecedented scale and to the Nehru–Liaquat Pact (1950) providing for safeguards against communal violence in both East Bengal and West Bengal. But the proposed measures failed to check the spread of communal riots. Even J.N. Mandal, then Pakistan's law and labour minister and an associate of Jinnah and Suhrawardy, left Karachi on hearing about the disturbances and proceeded to Dhaka. He stayed in Dhaka for eight months at a stretch, visiting the affected places like Khulna and Gopalganj and trying to stop the anti-Hindu riots and then went to Calcutta seeking asylum in India. He sent his resignation³ dated 9 October 1950 (see [Annexure A](#)) from Calcutta to Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. He claimed that the Hindu minority was not safe in Pakistan and accused West

Pakistani officialdom and Liaquat Ali Khan of personally inciting the communal violence in a bid to throw out the minority from East Bengal with the object of neutralizing East Bengal's demographic advantage over West Pakistan. Fazlul Huq too, in his meeting with Liaquat Ali Khan at the Barisal Circuit House, accused the Muslim League of fomenting anti-Hindu riots. Inevitably, the riots provoked anti-Muslim rioting in some areas of West Bengal leading to the influx of largely non-Bengalee Muslim refugees to East Bengal, especially from the industrial areas around Calcutta.

Slowly but surely, a distinct national identity was evolving among the Bengalee Muslims based on their own language and their feeling of being discriminated against by West Pakistan. For most of the people of East Bengal there was no true freedom; only a change of rulers, from the white men to the rich families and landed aristocracy of West Pakistan, specially of Punjab. The Bengalee Muslims, who, in their frenzy for a Muslim homeland, had struggled hard, did not take long to realize that they had only second-class status in Pakistan and that the West Pakistanis gave scant regard for Islam as a binding force between the two wings. A growing disillusionment soon set in among the people. It grew stronger and stronger every passing year. This disillusionment soon turned the people to avowed fighters for their right to self-determination. Along with the highly emotive language issue, economic exploitation of the eastern wing by West Pakistan became another sore issue with the Bengalees to bitterly complain of. While East Bengal, with a population of 75 million (as against West Pakistan's 45 million) demanded more funds for education and health, more industries and river control schemes, allocations from Pakistan were woefully inadequate. The disparity between the two wings therefore grew. East Bengal became poorer, West Pakistan richer. East Bengal earned much more foreign exchange through its jute, and yet most of it was spent for the western wing's development. Of the total foreign aid received by Pakistan, 80 per cent was spent in West Pakistan. Representation in Central government employment was a meagre 15 per cent for the Bengalees. In the armed forces they were barely 10 per cent. East Bengalees often complained of Pakistan's steady refusal in the early days to conclude a

long-term treaty with India for import of jute by India for feeding its jute mills which were lying idle. This was due to West Pakistan-centred political reasons. This suicidal policy kept East Bengal undernourished for years. The 1957 census of manufacturing industries indicated that 70 per cent of these industries were located in West Pakistan. On the other hand, East Bengal was treated as a ready market for consumer products of all variety produced in West Pakistan. Thus West Pakistan's industrialists grew to prosperity, while the Bengalees in the east were being steadily pauperized. As summed up by a distinguished scholar, 'It was the failure of Pakistan to remove the sense of relative deprivation of the people of East Bengal which fuelled the forces of Bengali nationalism that finally led to the emergence of an independent Bangladesh in 1971.'⁴

Yet another oft-repeated complaint was that no Bengalee became chief secretary in the first ten years and that out of nineteen secretaries to various departments in the Central government, none was from East Bengal. East Bengal groaned under the weight of these disparities. The failure to build an integrated nation state during 1947–71 originated in the refusal of the dominant classes of West Pakistan to share power and to concede self-rule to the Bengalees. This compulsion to retain power within West Pakistan came from the control vested in the Pakistan State over the use of economic resources, both domestic and externally derived. The Bengalees' sense of deprivation was sustained by their awareness of these realities of political power in Pakistan and their sense of frustration at not being able to control the levers of power so as to correct this deprivation.⁵

On 28 September 1950, the Basic Principles Committee (BPC) of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan submitted its first interim report. Its recommendations included the creation of a federal legislature, consisting of the House of Units and the House of People. The House of People would be directly elected, while the House of Units would comprise representatives elected by the provincial legislature. The two Houses would have equal powers. The official language of the state would be Urdu. The proposal for giving equal powers to the two Houses was attacked by the

Dhaka Bar Association as ‘definitely framed to cripple East Pakistan’. There were widespread protest demonstrations in which even officials of the Muslim League, the government party, took a prominent part. Also, East Bengal strongly objected to the choice of Urdu as the only official language to the exclusion of Bengali. Other events included a hartal by students against the BPC’s decision, protest meetings and demonstrations and demand for setting up of a university committee on the issue of national language.

The distribution of various language groups in Pakistan as tabulated during the decennial census conducted in 1951 is given below:

Table 35.1: Distribution of various language groups in Pakistan (1951)

Language Groups	Percentage of the Total Population
Bengali	54.6
Punjabi	28.4
Pushto	7.1
Urdu	7.2
Sindhi	5.8
English	1.8

This indicates that the Bengali-speaking people had an absolute majority.

On 17 October 1951, Nazimuddin became prime minister of Pakistan after the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan by unknown assailants. But he failed to be a champion of East Bengal’s interests and continued to sing the tune of the West Pakistan leaders. Nurul Amin, the chief minister of East Bengal, took the same line, ignoring the true interests of East Bengal.

During 1952, the requirement of passport and visa was made compulsory for travel between the two Bengals. This further impelled large sections of the minority to migrate to India. It also affected scores of Muslims, especially in the border areas, who used to cross the border daily for their livelihood. It was rumoured that the East Bengal politicians, notably Fazlul Huq, were not in favour of it and that West Pakistan officials serving in East Bengal imposed it after steamrolling the opposition from the ministers.

Meanwhile, while still in jail, Mujibur Rahman was elected joint secretary of the Awami League which he had joined.

There was simmering discontent on the language issue for several years until it reached a crisis in early 1952. On 26 January 1952, the Basic Principles Committee of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan recommended, riding roughshod over popular Bengalee opinion, that Urdu should be the only state language. This was echoed on the same day by the then prime minister, Nazimuddin, in a public meeting at Paltan Maidan in Dhaka, announcing unambiguously that Urdu would be Pakistan's state language. On 28 January 1952, the students of Dhaka University held a protest meeting calling both Prime Minister Nazimuddin and the provincial minister 'stooges' of West Pakistan and asking them to resign. On 30 January 1952, an All-Party State Language Committee was set up at a meeting held in the Bar Library Hall, Dhaka, and there were strikes and demonstrations all over East Bengal. On the same day the Awami League of H.S. Suhrawardy held a secret meeting, which was attended by leftists and communists. The meeting expressed the opinion that the language agitation was no longer merely a students' movement and it was necessary to mobilize full public support. It was decided that Maulana Bhasani would assume leadership of the language movement. The next day, Maulana Bhasani presided over a party convention in Dhaka, which was attended by prominent leaders like Abul Hashim and also Hamidul Haq Chaudhury, who had resigned from the government and the Muslim League, along with his followers, on the language issue.

An All-Party Committee of Action (APCA) was constituted on 3 February 1952, to coincide with the commencement of the budget session of the East Bengal State Assembly with Maulana Bhasani as chairman and with two representatives each from the Awami League, Students League, Youth League, Khilafat Rabbani Party and the Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action. The government followed it up by proclaiming, on 20 February 1952, a prohibitory order under Section 144 of the CrPC prohibiting processions and meetings in Dhaka city. Meanwhile, Mujib began a hunger strike in jail on 14 February, and sent a call to the

State Language Action Committee to observe 21 February as Demand Day for making Bengali the state language and for release of political prisoners.

On 21 February 1952, the whole of East Bengal was in a state of defiance through complete general strike. At noon, at a meeting held at the Dhaka University campus, students decided to defy the official ban imposed by Nurul Amin's administration and to take out a procession in the direction of the provincial Assembly. Inevitably, there was teargas shelling by the police and retaliation through brickbats by the students. The riot spread to all the nearby campuses including the medical and engineering colleges. At 4 p.m., the police opened fire in front of the medical college hostel killing five students—Shafiur, Jabbar, Barkat, Rafique and Abdul Salam. Bangladesh has observed the day as Martyrs' Day ever since. After Bangladesh's independence the United Nations marks this day as the 'Universal Mother Language Day'. The news of this killing sparked off the gunpowder of discontent all around and there was complete lawlessness. Mujib condemned the police firing in a statement issued from jail and went on a hunger strike for thirteen more days. Inside the provincial Assembly, six Opposition members pressed for adjournment of the House and demanded a judicial inquiry into the incidents.

When Chief Minister Nurul Amin proposed to proceed with the planned agenda for the day, the Opposition members staged a walkout in protest. On 22 February 1952, Dhaka city was literally taken over by the people. Thousands of men and women roamed the streets offering prayers for the victims of the police firing. The police once again opened fire on an angry mob, killing four persons. The government had to call in the military to bring the situation under control. Eventually, Nurul Amin decided to bow down to public pressure and moved a motion recommending to the Constituent Assembly that Bengali should be one of the state languages of Pakistan. The motion was passed unanimously for the first time. Muslim League members broke their party rank to vote in favour of the amendments moved by the Opposition, till then consisting mostly of Hindu Congress members. The split in the Muslim League became formalized when some of its members demanded a separate block from the Speaker.

East Bengal had indeed been deeply hurt and on 23 February 1952, despite the provincial Assembly's resolution, the whole of East Bengal continued the general strike. The government's repressive measures further complicated the situation. The APCA gave another call for a general strike on 25 February 1952 to protest against the government's action. The students of the medical college erected a 'Shaheed Minar' (Martyrs' Column) overnight at the spot where one of their friends, Barkat, was shot dead. This monument was to become the rallying point for Bengalee nationalism. On 24 February 1952, the government gave full authority to the military to bring the situation in Dhaka to normal within forty-eight hours and arrested almost all the students and political leaders. The next day, Dhaka University was closed sine die. This only meant that although the movement had temporarily lost its momentum in Dhaka, it had spread to other districts. Apart from demanding the recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan, students now began to call for the resignation of the 'bloody Nurul Amin cabinet'. Nurul Amin claimed that his government had saved the province from disaster and chaos by its repressive measures. This was ridiculed by the students who claimed that they had already 'written with their blood the success story of the movement on the streets'.

A United Front was now formed with Suhrawardy's Awami League, Huq's Krishak Sramik Party, the Nizam-i-Islam and Ganatantra Dal. The United Front announced a twenty-one-point manifesto calling for full regional autonomy for East Bengal. There can be no doubt that the language movement played a leading role in weakening the Muslim League and in building up a secular/linguistic Bengalee nationalism in East Bengal. The Muslim League was swamped out of power in the 1954 elections by the United Front of Opposition political parties led by the trio of Fazlul Huq, H.S. Suhrawardy and Maulana Bhasani. Suhrawardy, who during the years 1943–46 had transformed the Muslim League in Bengal from a small, rich men's party to a mass-based party, now took the lead in demolishing brick by brick the edifice that he had created ten years ago. His main lieutenant in

this task was Sheikh Mujib, elected in July 1953 as general secretary of the Awami Muslim League.

Born in 1920 at Tungipara (now in Gopalganj district), a village in Faridpur district, and educated in Gopalganj Mission School and Islamia College, Calcutta, Mujib became general secretary of the college's Students Union and joined Muslim League. He participated in the Holwell monument removal agitation led by Subhas Bose and moved to Dhaka University after Partition. As a law student, he got involved with the language movement and also the agitation of the employees of the Dhaka University for better terms. Both these agitations soon got merged into the struggle against the exploitation and oppression of the reactionary Muslim League government. Mujib had to suffer imprisonment many times and was even expelled from Dhaka University. Now he plunged full-time into politics and joined the Awami League founded by H.S. Suhrawardy and Maulana Bhasani. Slowly, he outgrew his position as a Muslim leader and became a secular leader for both Muslims and Hindus, championing Bengalee nationalism.

In retrospect, whatever the merits of government and student actions, its immediate impact was to prepare the ground for the complete routing of the Muslim League in the 1954 elections, on a nationalistic plank of cultural, political and economic autonomy for East Bengal. The language movement in East Bengal brought about a sea change in politics in Pakistan. It left a deep impression on the minds of the younger generation of Bengalees and imbued them with the spirit of Bengalee nationalism. The fiery spirit of Bengalee nationalism, which was aroused by the language movement, has continued to kindle in the hearts of the Bengalees ever since. Perhaps very few people realized then that with the bloodshed in 1952 the newborn state of Pakistan had in fact started to bleed to death.⁶

The deep sense of economic exploitation, added with the emotive language issue, led to the sharp rise of a feeling of alienation which most Bengalees experienced, and this snowballed during the 1950s, leading to East Bengal's separatist postures. A straw in the wind was the resignation of

Hamidul Haq Chaudhury from the Muslim League, protesting against the stepmotherly treatment of East Bengal.

EMERGENCE OF THE UNITED FRONT

Meanwhile, on 17 April 1953, Governor General Ghulam Muhammad dismissed Nazimuddin and his cabinet and appointed Muhammad Ali of Bogra the new prime minister of Pakistan. On 29 July 1953, the Krishak Sramik Party (KSP), a revival of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) of Fazlul Huq, announced its twenty-one-point programme. Its major demands were full regional autonomy for East Bengal on the basis of the Lahore Resolution of 1940, recognition of Bengali as a state language, separation of the executive from the judiciary and release of all political prisoners. On 7 October 1953, Prime Minister Muhammad Ali moved the Constituent Assembly for consideration of the report of the BPC in an amended form. The new proposal was that the two Houses should be constituted on the basis of the equality of units in the Upper House and population in the Lower House. The report was debated for thirteen days. After the exit of Nazimuddin, all political parties other than the Muslim League became active in East Bengal in their demand for elections. A sense of common danger from the establishment had forged the United Front. It was supported by the leftists and the 'minority' parties. Its charter demanded rejection of the draft constitution, complete autonomy for East Bengal in all matters except defence, foreign policy and currency, complete freedom from the Centre with regard to export of jute, consultation between the Centre and East Bengal on the allocation of foreign exchange, abolition of Indo-Pakistan passport and visa system and all the existing restrictions on trade between East and West Bengal.

On 11 March 1954, in the provincial elections in East Bengal the United Front won a sweeping victory with 223 members in a House of 237. Of the 237 seats, the breakdown for different parties was as follows: United Front 223; Muslim League 10; Independents 3; Khilafati-Rabbani 1. Awami League alone won 143 seats. Huq, Suhrawardy and Maulana Bhasani were the three main architects of the United Front's overwhelming victory and

the Muslim League's decimation within six years of Pakistan coming into existence. A United Front government headed by Huq came to office on 3 April 1954. Mujib became agriculture and forest minister in this government. The abrupt dismissal of this popular government, as detailed in the next chapter, was to disenchant the Bengalees further. Henceforward, the political struggle of the Bengalees would be directed at four clear goals: (1) restoration of parliamentary democracy where Bengalees could share power at the Centre using their demographic majority through adult franchise; (2) full acceptance of the principle of autonomy for East Bengal; (3) preventing channelling of resources exclusively to West Pakistan and their diversion to East Bengal for the development of East Bengal; and (4) recognition of Bengali as the language for East Bengal, and as one of the two national languages of Pakistan.

These four objects in varying degrees were to guide the political struggle of the people of Bangladesh for the next two decades, from the language movement of 1952 to the movement against Ayub's dictatorship, and finally to the struggle against Yahya leading to the freedom movement of 1970–71.

The Power Struggle between East Bengal and West Pakistan

On 3 April 1954, A.K. Fazlul Huq, after forming the United Front government, affirmed cooperation to the Centre provided his demands on language, the constitution and provincial autonomy were fulfilled. On 8 April 1954, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the veteran Pakhtoon leader, stated in the Constituent Assembly that the 'official languages of the Republic should be Urdu and Bengali and such other provincial languages as may be declared to be such by the Head of the State on the recommendation of the provincial legislature concerned'. On 20 April 1954, the Muslim League, bowing to public opinion, decided in the Constituent Assembly that Urdu and Bengali should be the state languages of Pakistan and that English should continue as an official language for another twenty years. But there were clear signs of serious rift between the Centre and the new government in East Bengal.

The formation of the UF government coincided with some disturbances in the country, notably unrest and violence in Adamji Jute Mills, Dhaka, and Karnaphuli Paper Mill in Chittagong. Prime Minister Muhammad Ali saw in these the hand of the communists and subversive elements 'within and from outside the country'. On 17 May he denounced them as 'foul conspiracy' against the industrial progress of Pakistan. Fazlul Huq rejected these allegations as 'fantastic'. He, along with some cabinet colleagues, flew to Karachi to clear up the misunderstanding with the Central leadership.

On 29 May, failing in his talks with the leaders of the Central government in Karachi, Fazlul Huq and his cabinet colleagues issued a joint statement. It observed: 'There had been a great deal of misunderstanding

created against the United Front Ministry of East Bengal in the West Pakistan press and publications.’ The statement added, ‘We are for the autonomy of provinces and not for their independence or for separation. We stand for our election manifesto of leaving only defence, foreign affairs and currency to the Centre but nowhere in our election manifesto or speeches have we ever advocated the separation of eastern and western Pakistan.’ The Central government persisted in its strong criticism of Huq’s leadership and also took exception to Fazlul Huq’s emotional outburst at Calcutta airport, while in transit between Karachi and Dhaka, about the cultural unity of the two Bengals despite the political boundary between them. On the very next day (30 May 1954), following a succession of violence in East Bengal, Fazlul Huq’s ministry was dismissed and governor’s rule was proclaimed on the grounds of threat to the security of East Bengal. Major General Iskander Mirza was sworn in as governor. Prime Minister Muhammad Ali called Huq a ‘traitor’. And he said, ‘Huq’s pronouncements regarding the independence of East Bengal, viewed against his previous statements on this subject in Calcutta, convinced my colleagues and myself that in Fazlul Huq we are dealing with a Provincial Chief Minister whose government would not take the administrative measures that any responsible government would take and with a political leader who is not fundamentally loyal to Pakistan.’

On 31 May 1954, Huq was placed under ‘house arrest’ and Mujibur Rahman, minister in his government, was arrested as his plane landed at Dhaka airport. Maulana Bhasani, who happened to be on a visit to Calcutta, could not be arrested and continued to stay there till April 1955. On 24 September 1954, the Governor General dissolved the Constituent Assembly and proclaimed a state of Emergency. Mujib was kept in jail till 23 December 1954.

On 10 April the next year, a public meeting was held under the auspices of the KSP and Nizam-i-Islam. At the meeting, Fazlul Huq appealed to the people to express themselves against the unrepresentative government and launched a province-wide campaign against it. He demanded that Bhasani be allowed to return and declared that the country would not accept a

constitution promulgated by an ordinance framed by a body of nominated persons. On 15 April 1955, the Awami League organized a Protest Day. The party demanded withdrawal of restrictions on Bhasani's entry, release of political prisoners and restoration of parliamentary government. On 25 April 1955, Maulana Bhasani returned to Dhaka and was given a great ovation. On 29 May 1955, he called upon the people to observe the twenty-one-point-programme week from that day. On 30 May 1955, Fazlul Huq declared this day as the United Front Day and announced that there would be meetings held on that day appealing to the people to preserve the unity and solidarity of the United Front and resolutions would be adopted, emphasizing the necessity of implementing the twenty-one-point programme.

Meanwhile, in a significant move, on 21 October (1955) the Awami Muslim League dropped the word 'Muslim' from its name thereby allowing non-Muslims to join the party and making it a modern secular party. Mujib was re-elected general secretary of this party.

Unfortunately, there was simmering rivalry between the followers of H.S. Suhrawardy and of Fazlul Huq, and the West Pakistan leadership took full advantage of this, as it now turned to a new strategy to reduce the political importance of the majority province. All the provinces in West Pakistan were to be grouped into 'One Unit', viz., West Pakistan, which was to be given the same political weightage as East Bengal, thereby denying the latter its numerical advantage. In June 1955 elections were held for the new Constituent Assembly. Both the west wing and the east wing were given forty members each. The East Bengal contingent contained many new members including Sheikh Mujib. The concept of One Unit was envisaged in the west wing as an effective counterpoise to East Bengal. To East Bengal, it was a threat which sought to efface its standing as a majority province. Naturally, Bengalees resented this as also the attacks on their cultural identity such as discouragement of celebration of the Bengalee New Year's Day or Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary.

On 3 June 1955, Prime Minister Muhammad Ali, taking advantage of the absence of the Governor General and Suhrawardy from the country, started

his party's talks with Fazlul Huq and the United Front. It was designed to weaken Suhrawardy's position. On 5 June 1955, a proclamation revoked governor's rule and Abu Hussain Sarkar, an associate of Fazlul Huq, was declared head of a KSP–Nizam-i-Islam coalition. It was an Iskander Mirza–Muhammad Ali manoeuvre. On 14 June 1955, the United Front government took a decision to join the Constituent Assembly. On 5 August 1955, Major General Iskander Mirza took over as acting Governor General. On 7 August 1955, Mohammad Ali was elected leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party, dominated by the Punjabis. Muhammad Ali resigned on 16 September 1955. Awami League observed Constitution Day throughout the province. Mujibur Rahman, speaking at a public meeting, reiterated his party's adherence to the twenty-one-point programme and demanded the withdrawal of the One Unit Bill and substituting it by a Constitution Bill for East Bengal. He steadily opposed attempts by the West Pakistan clique to treat the use of the words 'Bengali' or 'Bangladesh' as seditious. On 25 August 1955, he said in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly in Karachi, 'They want to change the name of East Bengal into East Pakistan. We have always demanded that the name "Bengal" be used. There is a history behind Bengal. There is a tradition, a heritage. If this name is to be changed we have to go back to Bengal and ask the people of Bengal whether they are ready to have their identity changed.' He appealed for the people's verdict on this issue and on the issue of language in the form of a referendum or plebiscite.

On 19 October 1955, a convention of workers of the Awami League was held at Joypurhat in Bogra. The convention marked the re-emergence of Maulana Bhasani as the leader of the Awami League. The convention took four major decisions: (1) full realization of the twenty-one-point programme, (2) throwing open the Awami League to non-Muslims, (3) condemnation of Pak–USA Military Pact, and (4) stand for joint electorate. On 25 November 1955, the United Front Parliamentary Party had a three-day session presided over by Fazlul Huq. Most of the members present were reported to have expressed very strongly on the question of provincial

autonomy. They wanted East Bengal to have a very high degree of autonomy.

On 23 March 1956, the Constitution of Pakistan was promulgated. Article 214(1) of the Constitution provided as follows: 'The state language of Pakistan shall be Urdu and Bengali, provided that for the period of twenty years from the Constitution Day, English shall continue to be used for all official purposes for which it was used in Pakistan immediately before the Constitution Day.' The Pakistan Constitution also declared that East Bengal was to be now called 'East Pakistan'. Thus, while the people of East Bengal through hard struggle and a remarkable show of solidarity had won for the Bengali language its rightful status, this same heritage was sought to be undermined by removing the word 'Bengal' from the name of the province. And the story of neglect and exploitation of the province by West Pakistan continued. On 4 September 1956, Mujib led an anti-famine procession defying Section 144. The police opened fire in Chowk Bazaar in Dhaka, killing three.

Meanwhile, the Abu Hussain Sarkar ministry in East Pakistan had lost its majority. Suhrawardy's Awami League attracted the 'minority' parties. There was for a short while a musical chairs type of situation with the United Front's Abu Hussain Sarkar and Awami League's Aatur Rahman alternatively serving as chief minister several times. Governor's rule was again imposed in East Pakistan. On 1 June 1956, governor's rule was revoked and the Sarkar ministry was reinstated. But it lost legislative majority in a short while and on 3 September 1956, Aatur Rahman was sworn in as chief minister of an Awami League ministry. Mujib joined this ministry on 16 September but resigned on 30 May 1957 to devote all his time to party work. Meanwhile, at the Centre, Suhrawardy took over as prime minister from Muhammad Ali with the backing of the newly formed Republican Party of Dr Khan Saheb. On 8 October 1956 it was decided to hold the sitting of the National Assembly in Dhaka. On 11 October 1956 the National Assembly passed the Electorate Bill under which the principle of joint electorate was accepted for East Pakistan.

From 6 to 8 February 1957, the Awami League council met at Kagmari and adopted forty resolutions. The pandal was decorated with portraits of pre-Partition leaders, in particular Chittaranjan Das. Among the resolutions passed were the holding of general elections, both at the Centre and in the provinces early in 1958, full regional autonomy for East Pakistan on the basis of the twenty-one-point programme and implementation of the principles operative between East and West Pakistan in all spheres. At the council, Maulana Bhasani, speaking on regional autonomy, said somewhat ominously that if the demand was not considered, a time may come when East Pakistan may have to split from the country. There was some opposition to Maulana and a chorus of protests. There was also difference of views regarding foreign policy between Suhrawardy and Maulana Bhasani.

On 5 March 1957, President Mirza, addressing the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, sternly warned that he would not tolerate any attempt to break the unity of Pakistan. He said, 'I shall not hesitate to take extreme measures to put down any effort to subvert the unity and integrity of Pakistan.' Maulana Bhasani's reaction was quick and he immediately came out with the statement that 'the demand of regional autonomy is no longer the demand of any particular party. On the other hand it has to take the united demand of inhabitants of East Pakistan [seriously] and no political party can exist in East Pakistan which ignores this demand'. On 21 March 1957, following serious differences with the group led by Suhrawardy, Maulana Bhasani announced that he had resigned from the presidency of the Awami League. On 3 April 1957, the provincial Assembly adopted the resolution on regional autonomy and it was passed with acclaim with only two negative votes. The resolution recommended regional autonomy for East Pakistan giving three subjects to the Centre, viz., defence, foreign affairs and currency. The resolution was proposed and seconded by members of the pro-Bhasani group within the Awami League. Mujibur Rahman spoke strongly in favour of the motion but laid more emphasis on the economic need of the province. On 5 April 1957, Maulana Bhasani was angry at the reported statement made by Prime Minister

Suhrawardy that the regional autonomy resolution was a 'stunt' and the people need not attach too much importance to it. Maulana said, 'I could not even dream that Mr Suhrawardy would so blatantly fall back [from] his own stand on the question of regional autonomy as enumerated in 21-point.'

Evidently, the two leaders were drifting apart. Following Mujibur Rahman's resignation from office to work for party organization, the Awami League council met at Dhaka for two days. In the council, it was evident that the group led by Suhrawardy was numerically superior to that led by Maulana Bhasani. The council passed a vote of confidence on Suhrawardy's foreign policy with very little opposition. One of his resolutions debarred the Youth League, a leftist, pro-Bhasani organization, from membership of the Awami League. Thus the Awami League moved towards a formal split between the followers of Suhrawardy and those of Bhasani. On 30 June 1957, Muzaffar Ahmed, a lieutenant of Maulana Bhasani's, gave a call to the pro-Bhasani elements to rally round the Maulana. The Democratic Convention called by Maulana Bhasani met at Dhaka from 5 to 26 July 1957. As a result, a new political party with the name National Awami Party came into being consisting of the pro-Bhasani dissidents from Awami League. The party adopted its constitution, its aims and objectives with an emphasis on an independent foreign policy, provincial autonomy and agrarian reform very similar to the twenty-one-point programme of the Awami League. Meanwhile on 11 October 1957, Suhrawardy was forced to resign as prime minister of Pakistan as he lost majority through manipulative power politics in Pakistan National Assembly. On 18 October 1957, I.I. Chundrigar became prime minister of Pakistan, but his was a short-lived government since in a few days he quit on the electoral issue. Muslim League reopened the issue and insisted on separate electorates. Mujibur Rahman threatened to undo the parity (One-Unit) formula. The proposals and counter-proposals wrecked the 1956 Constitution. On 16 December 1957, Chundrigar was succeeded by Firoz Khan Noon, a Republican, who headed a six-party coalition including the Republicans, the

Awami League, the Scheduled Castes Federation, the Pakistan National Congress and the Hamidul Haq Chaudhury group of the KSP.

On 3 January 1958, Awami League leaders broke the party discipline in the coalition government by not supporting a government bill. On 31 March 1958, pandemonium broke out in the East Pakistan Assembly and the Finance Bill could not be introduced. The House adjourned. The musical chairs type of situation continued when Aatur Rahman and Abu Hussain Sarkar alternated as chief minister. On 1 April 1958, Chief Minister Aatur Rahman advised the governor, Fazlul Huq, to prorogue the Assembly, but the governor asked him to resign. On his refusal, he was dismissed. Abu Hussain Sarkar was called by the governor to take up chief ministership. Now, President Mirza dismissed Governor Fazlul Huq for acting unconstitutionally. Aatur Rahman was reinstated. On 19 June 1958, the Aatur Rahman ministry fell on a cut motion. Nine Awami League members had crossed the floor and ten members of the Pakistan National Congress voted against Aatur Rahman's ministry. Abu Hussain Sarkar returned as chief minister. On 20 June 1958, this ministry lost on a motion of no-confidence and governor's rule was yet again imposed for two months.

On 24 August 1958, Aatur Rahman's ministry came back to office. On 20 September 1958, East Pakistan Provincial Assembly met. The Opposition protested against the presence of six government supporters, who had been disqualified by the Election Commission, for holding an office of profit. There was a physical fight between Awami League and the Treasury benches. Clearly, the political situation was becoming near-anarchical. But all this was swamped in a few days by the declaration of martial law in the country on 7 October by the President Mirza and General Ayub Khan combine. The proclamation of martial law in 1958 was the culmination of a long process of attempted usurpation of power at the expense of the legislature by a coterie of bureaucrats entirely from West Pakistan and closely related to the feudal elements there. The Ayub coup came at a time when there was a strong possibility, almost certainty, that political parties such as the Awami League and the National Awami Party, which swore by full autonomy for the region, would dominate the legislature in the

forthcoming elections. The Iskander Mirza–Ayub Khan coup of 1958 was a pre-emptive strike to forestall this development and to retain power for the vested interests of feudal Pakistan.¹ Twice in the past (1953 and 1954) Governor General Ghulam Muhammad had conspired with a coterie of civil and military officers to dismiss the elected prime minister. Now the military–civil service coterie of West Pakistan seized the state apparatus to perpetuate West Pakistan’s dominance and subjugate East Pakistan in perpetuity. The Bengalees were slowly realizing that their demographic majority, asserting itself through a democratically elected government, would remain a pipe dream with the advent of the martial law regime and the consequent assumption of power by the non-Bengalee ruling elite from West Pakistan.

The tables below, obtained from a research study,² indicate the gulf of difference in economic development between East and West Pakistan, the visible shift of resources from the eastern to the western wing of what was claimed to be one country and the continuing exploitation of the Bengalees. These figures convincingly illustrate how East Pakistan was being held to ransom by West Pakistan and how the disparity between the two wings in per capita income steadily rose.

Table 36.1: Disparities in per capita income between East and West Pakistan

<i>(in Rupees)</i>					
Sl No.	Year	East Pakistan	West Pakistan	Disparity (4)–(3)	Disparity Ratio (5) ÷ (3) × 100
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1	1949–50	288	351	63	21.9
2	1954–55	294	365	71	24.1
3	1959–60	277	367	90	32.5
4	1964–65	303	440	137	45.2
5	1969–70	331	533	202	61.0

Table 36.2: Trends in regional disparity in basic consumption items and consumption expenditure

Commodity	Unit of Measurement Per capita	1951-52		1959-60		1963-64	
		WP	EP	WP	EP	WP	EP
1 Cereals	Per oz.	14.9	15.7	16.5	15.2	16.8	17.4
	p.d.						
2 Sugar	Per oz.	24.5	43.5	21.2	75.7	10.2	38.4
	p.m.						
3 Tea	Per oz.	0.13	0.6	0.13	1.3	0.16	1.12
	p.m.						
4 Matches	No. p.y.	7.0	10.0	13.0	16.0		
5 Cigarettes	No. p.a.	5.0	76.09	33.0	183.0		
6 Cloth	Yds p.a.	1.7	1.4				
7 Kerosene	Gallon p.a.	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.9		
8 Paper	lbs p.a.	0.2	0.5	0.3	1.4		
1961							
9 Milk and butter	lbs p.m.			3.7	9.7	2.1	8.6
10 Mutton, beef and fish	lbs p.m.			3.1	0.7	0.4	1.7
		1960		1963-64		1965-66	
11 Household in Rs Monthly Consumption Expenditure		121.9	143.8	123.2	170.2	151.5	211.4
12 Disparity per cent Index [(WP-EP) ÷ EP] x 100		26.6		30.8		40.0	

Table 36.3: Regional distribution of aid flows into Pakistan from 1948-49 to 1958-59

		East Pakistan	West Pakistan	Total
A	Aid disbursement converted to Rs at \$ scarcity value (in Rs billion)			
1.	1948/49-1960/61	4.84	10.77	15.61
	Per cent	31.0	69.0	100.0
2.	1961/62-1968/69	14.49	31.48	45.97
	Per cent	31.5	68.5	100.0
3.	Total	19.33	42.25	61.58
	Per cent	31.4	68.6	100.0

		East Pakistan	West Pakistan	Total
B	Aid disbursements in \$ (in \$million)	1941	4106	6439 including 392 for the Centre
	Per cent	30.1	69.9	100.0
C	Aid commitments in \$ (in \$million)			
	1. 1947–60	542	1516	2058
	Per cent	26.3	73.7	100.0
	2. 1960–70	1482	4100	5582
	Per cent	26.5	73.5	100.0
	3. Total	2024	5616	7640
	Per cent	26.4	73.6	100.0
D	Composition of Disbursed Aid in US\$ (in \$million)			
	1. Project Aid including technical assistance	825 (25.2)	2127	3271
	Per cent	42.5	51.8	50.8
	2. Non-project and Commodity Aid	671 (34.8)	1248	1927
	Per cent	34.6	30.4	29.9
	3. Food Aid	445 (35.9)	791	1241
	Per cent	22.9	19.3	19.3
	4. Total	1941	4106	6439
	Per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 36.4: Balance of payments of East and West Pakistan from 1948–49 to 1968–69

		<i>(Rs million)</i>	
		East	West
1948–49 to 1960–61	Nominal price	+592	–8116
	Scarcity price	+5368	–20989
1961–62 to 1968–69	Nominal price	–6526	–18180
	Scarcity price	–9386	–34075
Total		–5934	–26296
1948–49 to 1968–69	Nominal price		
	Scarcity price	–4018	–55064

Table 36.5: Transfer of resources from East to West Pakistan from 1948–49 to 1968–69

	<i>(Rs million)</i>		
	1948/49– 1960/61	1961/62– 1968/69	1948/49– 1968/69
1. Aid actually utilized in East Pakistan	4840	14490	19330
2. East Pakistan's due share of aid in proportion to population	8430	26710	35140
3. Transfer from East to West on Aid account (2–1)	+3590	+12220	+15810
4. East Pakistan's balance of payments	+5370	–9390	–4020
5. Transfer of resources from East to West (3+4)	+8960	+2830	+11790

Crystallization of the Bangladesh Concept

With the parliamentary system virtually coming to a standstill, on 7 October 1958, President Iskander Mirza abrogated the Constitution and declared martial law. General Ayub Khan was made the chief martial law administrator. All political activities were banned. Slowly but surely, power was gravitating to the armed forces. In a few days, on 25 October, in his last bid to remain in power, President Mirza constituted a twelve-man cabinet to replace the advisory council set up under the martial law administration. The East Pakistan contingent comprised inconsequential puppets and could not stop the inevitable march towards armed dictatorship. On 27 October 1958, President Mirza was eased out by General Ayub who now assumed presidency. The next day President Ayub proclaimed an American-type cabinet with no prime minister. East Pakistan was ominously silent on the changeover. Mujib was arrested on 11 October and released after fourteen months, only to be rearrested at the jail gate. He was continuously harassed by the martial law regime on one false charge after another.

In the year that followed, a series of authoritarian measures were promulgated by Ayub, for instance, the Public Conduct Scrutiny Ordinance, 1959; the Public Offices (Disqualification) Order, 1959; the Elective Bodies (Disqualification) Ordinance, 1959; an order amending Legislative Powers Order, 1959, which had the effect of giving the Centre and the provinces concurrent powers of legislation in all fields outside those specifically reserved for the Centre under the Constitution of 1956; and finally the Basic Democracy Order of 27 October 1959. These ordinances also aimed at decimation of the political classes. For the next ten years there was military dictatorship and neither a civilian government nor a parliamentary system based on free elections. Ayub invented Basic Democracy with a handful of

Basic Democrats electing the President. Despite the military blow suffered in the short war with India in 1965, Ayub was able to effectively stay in power for ten long years.

Ayub visited East Pakistan during 21–28 January 1960. Speaking at Dhaka University convocation, he talked of oneness and ‘common ideology’. On 14 February 1960, in the first elections to the presidency held under the new Basic Democracy Order, President Ayub received a near-unanimous vote of confidence from 80,000 electors, 96.62 per cent of them voting confidence in the President. Three days later, Ayub took over as the first elected President under the new dispensation. He appointed an eleven-man commission to frame a new constitution. Representation was given to both the wings. A questionnaire was circulated fairly widely seeking representative views.

Two months later, Lt Gen. Azam Khan was sworn in as governor of East Pakistan. By 25 July, President Ayub warned the people of East Pakistan of the dangers emanating from the communists with their political stronghold in Calcutta. On 6 August, the same apprehensions were echoed by the governor of East Pakistan, who said that he was concerned about communism attacking the country on a very vulnerable front—the economic front. He was referring to the food shortage in the country. A repressive regime was unleashed in the country. After his release from jail on the strength of a high court order, Mujib started his underground work against the martial law regime. He helped his mentor Suhrawardy to form a National Democratic Front with other Opposition parties. He also set up the underground Swadhin Bangla Biplobi Parishad with students and youth leaders in order to work for the independence of Bangladesh.

On 6 May 1961, the Constitution Commission submitted its report to the President. But contrary to Ayub’s wishes, it did not recommend a presidential system as hinted by the President. The President now appointed a subcommittee to study the issue further. In October 1961 the subcommittee concluded its work. In compliance with Ayub’s wishes, it favoured the presidential system of government. The law minister (belonging to East Pakistan) supported the proposed parliamentary reforms.

On 20 January 1962, President Ayub said he would use American arms supplied under the US Mutual Security Act in the event of any threat to Pakistan. Ten days later, H.S. Suhrawardy was arrested under the Security Act for acting ‘in a manner prejudicial to the security and safety of Pakistan’. On 6 February 1962, more than 200 university students rioted in Dhaka and called for an end to martial law in Pakistan. The next day, a large number of members of Awami League were arrested in Dhaka. Ayub, who left for Karachi, had warned the people against ‘irresponsible action’. Officials in Dhaka said the students had been ‘unruly’ since 1 February 1962, when President Ayub called a ‘high level’ conference in Dhaka to ‘review conditions in the country’. On 8 February, 128 persons were arrested in Dhaka for ‘having defied a ban on public meetings, processions and demonstrations and for having attacked policemen’. Those arrested included Mujibur Rahman. On 1 March that year, President Ayub announced the new Constitution of Pakistan. It envisaged a presidential form of government, an independent judiciary, indirect election of the President and members of the Central and provincial legislatures. East Pakistan kept up a mood of ‘sullen silence’.

Pakistan’s Constitution for Basic Democracy also accorded recognition to Bengali as the state language of Pakistan at par with Urdu. Article 215 of this Constitution was a faithful replica of Article 214 of the 1956 Constitution. On 28 April 1962, elections for the National Assembly were held. Only the Basic Democrats participated and the results indicated ‘an overwhelming endorsement of Ayub’s government’. On 8 June 1962, martial law formally ended in Pakistan. The new Constitution came into effect and the new National Assembly was sworn in. On 14 July 1962, the National Assembly approved a government bill to allow the revival of political parties. Opposition members failed to bring about the deletion of the clause that excluded from party membership all those politicians (officially estimated at 100) who had been disqualified from public office under the Electoral Bodies Disqualification Order. As expected, East Pakistan protested. On 22 September 1962, the police opened fire on students who were observing Protest Day—a nationwide expression of

disapproval of electoral reforms. On 25 September 1962, leaders of the defunct United Front, the National Awami Party, Jamat, Nizam-i-Islam and a faction of the Muslim League met in Lahore to announce the formation of the National Democratic Front, under the leadership of Suhrawardy, to fight Ayub's dictatorship. Mujib visited Lahore on this occasion. On 29 September 1962, President Ayub denounced politicians who proclaimed the organization of the National Democratic Front. He called them 'opponents of the Constitution' who were 'trying to exploit the ignorance of the people for their own personal ends as they have always done in the past'. He also bitterly criticized Suhrawardy calling him 'an enemy of Pakistan'. But Suhrawardy was undeterred. He toured East Pakistan extensively in October 1962, accompanied by Sheikh Mujib, to canvas support for the National Front against Ayub's dictatorial regime.

On 7 October, in Dhaka, Suhrawardy called for a grass-roots campaign to bring pressure on Ayub to permit a 'democratic Constitution'. He was exiled from the country shortly thereafter in a show of savage dictatorship. Mujib went to London for consultation with Suhrawardy who was ill. Suhrawardy breathed his last on 5 December 1963 as an exile in Beirut, Lebanon—a sad end for a politician who had contributed enormously to the birth of Pakistan and was also a strong proponent of a united, sovereign Bengal. On 18 October 1962, President Ayub summoned the National Assembly to meet in Dhaka on 10 December that year. On 25 October, Abdul Monaim Khan, President Ayub's stooge and a known opponent of Bengal's autonomy, was appointed governor of East Pakistan in place of Ghulam Faruq, who had shown his openness to Bengal's demands and had earned the people's goodwill. This sent out a wrong message.

On 3 September 1963, the Government of East Pakistan issued an ordinance similar to the one issued in West Pakistan restricting the press 'to ensure correct reporting of proceedings in the National Assembly, Provincial Assembly and different courts of justice'. Five days later, newspapers threatened to strike in protest against the order requiring them to publish complete text of all government news releases. On 25 November 1963, the National Assembly began its session in Dhaka. It was reported

that both the government party, the Muslim League (Conventionalist), and the Opposition party, the Muslim League (Councillors), were expected to advocate issues of adult franchise and fundamental rights. On 25 December 1963, the National Assembly approved the Fundamental Rights Bill, which amended the 1962 Constitution making civil rights enforceable in the courts.

Meanwhile, East Pakistan continued to resent its economic backwardness. The economic disparity between the two wings of Pakistan at the end of the first five years of Ayub's presidency (1958–63) can be seen clearly from Tables 37.1, 37.2 and 37.3.¹

This disparity became a key issue in the minds of the people of East Pakistan together with the suppression of democratic rights. Successive five-year plans of Pakistan failed to arrest the trend of concentration of wealth in West Pakistan and deprivation in East Pakistan. In his well-researched book, *Milestones to Bangladesh*, Sobhan has illustrated how the Bengalee economists consistently differed with their west-wing colleagues on how the gap could be bridged. On one occasion they refused to work under the chairmanship of the chief economist of the Planning Commission, Dr Mehbub-ul-Huq, on the grounds that he was party to the discriminatory policies. 'It is a tribute to the legacy of divisiveness generated by the regional question that even in 1970, with Pakistan rapidly falling apart under the pressure of the regional question, the economists from West Pakistan on the panel could not join with their East wing colleagues in making a commitment to correct the history of imbalances. They both submitted separate reports.'²

Table 37.1: Trade between East and West Pakistan

Period	<i>(in Rs crore)</i>	
	Imports into East Wing from West Wing	Imports into West Wing from East Wing
1958–59	660.7	277.6
1959–60	542.6	361.0
1960–61	798.7	361.0
1961–62	829.7	392.5
1962–63	917.6	446.0

Table 37.2: Regional distribution of investment by semi-public institutions

Institution	Share of Investment in East Pakistan	Share of Investment in West Pakistan
Industrial Development Bank	20	80
House-building Corporation	12	88
Pakistan Industrial Credit Investment Corporation	24	76
Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation	45	35

Table 37.3: Monetary aid given to various regions of Pakistan

Monetary Aid	<i>(in Rs million)</i>	
	East Pakistan	West Pakistan
Financial Assistance	1,260	10,000
Defence Expenditure	100	4,650
Capital Expenditure	620	2,100
Educational Grants	240	1,530
Share from Foreign Aid	150	720

There were very strong disparities in private sector development expenditure. Between 1950 and 1970, West Pakistan accounted for 77 per cent of private sector development expenditure. There was complete domination of non-Bengalees in the private sector of East Pakistan.³

Meanwhile, the Pakistan authorities, through their intelligence agencies, sought to foment communal discord in East Pakistan to weaken the democratic movement. They found a pretext in protesting against the alleged theft of Prophet Muhammad's sacred hair from the Hazratbal shrine in Kashmir. Communal riots broke out in many places in East Pakistan in

1964, engineered by non-Bengalee government functionaries and their local agents. Under Sheikh Mujib's leadership an all-party Action Council was formed on 11 March 1964 to resist communal riots and consolidate the democratic unity of Hindus and Muslims of the province.⁴ Mujib was arrested once again under the charge of sedition and sentenced to one year imprisonment. He was released by the high court. On 19 March 1964, at a demonstration held in Dhaka, people demanded direct elections for the country's presidency and legislative assemblies. On 18 September, police in Dhaka fired on students parading in memory of two of their friends killed on 17 September 1960.

Interest was now centred on the presidential election under Ayub's Constitution which was due. Ayub had already announced his candidature. On 20 September 1964, the supporters of Miss Fatima Jinnah, who was emerging as the Opposition's candidate for presidentship, held a nationwide 'day of protest' against the government, disrupted traffic and closed shops in Dhaka. On 30 September, inaugurating her election campaign, Fatima Jinnah charged that the government had created 'an atmosphere laden with fear and reeking with corruption' and the issues were essentially moral and political. On 21 October 1964, the president of the East Pakistan Federation of Labour charged that nearly 400 jute workers had been killed since the province-wide strike on 12 October. He attributed the killings to 'hooligans' hired by employers and asked for governmental inquiry. Fatima Jinnah supported the demand. On 7 November, Mujibur Rahman, leader of the combined Opposition parties, was arrested in Dhaka on 'unspecified charges of sedition', but was released on bail. On 9 November, balloting among 40,000 indirectly elected electors began in Dhaka. On 2 January 1965, Ayub defeated Miss Jinnah in the presidential election. In March, he was sworn in for a second term. He appointed an 'inner cabinet' composed of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Mohammad Shoaib, Khan A. Sabur Khan and Khwaja Shehabuddin. On 8 June 1965, the second National Assembly was sworn in. Next month, the government announced a twelve-month moratorium on press laws, leaving the press free for self-regulation through a code of ethics.

In September 1965, a six-day undeclared war broke out between Pakistan and India on the issue of boundary disputes over the Rann of Kutch. It was fought entirely along West Pakistan–India border. East Pakistan was scrupulously left free from any military action by India. The fact that the Pakistan army virtually left East Pakistan undefended, leaving it entirely to India's generosity, was noticed by public opinion in East Pakistan, including even the so-called pro-Pakistan elements. Thus this war brought home East Pakistan's distance from political power and the full consequences of its neglect and its vulnerability. This hardened Bengalee nationalist elements against West Pakistan.

MUJIB'S SIX-POINT PROGRAMME

On 10 January 1966, India and Pakistan signed the Tashkent Declaration. Whereas West Pakistan's reaction to the Tashkent Declaration was violently hostile, the political scene in East Pakistan was placid. By February 1966, while the West Pakistan Opposition still tried to hammer out a common line against the Tashkent Declaration, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came out with his own far more 'practical' six-point programme (see [Annexure B](#)). He placed it before a conference of the Opposition parties on 5 February at Lahore. The essence of his six demands was a federal constitution that would give the federal government control over only foreign affairs, defence and currency. The six-point demand was a charter of freedom for the Bengalee nation. On 1 March 1966, Mujib was elected president of the Awami League. On 16 March 1966, speaking at Rajshahi, President Ayub warned the nation that the six-point programme of the Opposition was aimed at achieving their dream of 'greater sovereign Bengal' and added that the 'fulfilment of this horrid dream would spell disaster for the country and turn the people of East Pakistan into slaves'. On 20 March 1966, at the closing session of the pro-Ayub Muslim League Council, President Ayub said, 'They should be prepared to face a civil war, if forced upon them to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the country ... If the nation faced disruption, it [the civil war] had to be accepted.' On 31 March 1966, in

reply, Mujib said, 'Stability cannot be ensured by calling in question the patriotism of a large section of our people belonging to a particular region.'

On 18 April 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was again arrested. He was released on 9 May 1966, but immediately rearrested under the Emergency regulations. On 7 June 1966, a countrywide hartal with violent mass demonstrations took place in East Pakistan, in support of regional autonomy and demanding Mujib's release. There were clashes between the demonstrators and the police in Dhaka and Narayanganj leading to some deaths. 'Mujib was repeatedly arrested, released and rearrested. During the 23 years of Pakistani rule, he spent 12 years in prison, and 10 years under close surveillance. Pakistan proved to Mujib more a prison than a free homeland.'⁵

AGARTALA CONSPIRACY CASE

The Pakistan government now took official note of secessionist trends in East Pakistan by instituting the notorious Agartala Conspiracy Case. On 6 January 1968, thirty-five persons, headed by Sheikh Mujib, were arrested on charges of conspiracy to bring about the secession of East Pakistan. Those arrested included a number of non-commissioned army officers, senior civil servants and seamen. It was alleged that some of the conspirators were in touch with the first secretary of the Indian Deputy High Commission in Dhaka to discuss their plans with him. On 19 June 1968, the trial of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman opened in Dhaka. Sheikh Mujib and others accused were kept detained in Dhaka cantonment. They were accused of 'plotting to deprive Pakistan of her sovereignty over a part of its territory by an armed revolt with weapons, ammunition and funds provided by India'. This led to spontaneous mass demonstrations. On 7 December 1968, these demonstrations took an anti-Ayub colour and spread. The National Awami Party called for a general strike in Dhaka. On 13 December 1968, the Opposition parties called a general strike throughout East Pakistan. Police opened fire at Chittagong on unruly crowds. In many

respects the Agartala Conspiracy Case was a forerunner to East Pakistan's secessionist movement against Pakistan.

On 3 January 1969, the Central Students Action Council was formed. It straightaway launched a countrywide agitation for withdrawal of the Agartala case and release of Mujib. On 8 January 1969, the leaders of eight Opposition parties formed a Democratic Action Committee. The demands of the committee included; (i) restoration of democracy and direct elections on the basis of universal adult franchise; (ii) full autonomy for East Pakistan, transfer of all the powers of the Central government except defence, foreign affairs and foreign exchange to the provinces, introduction of a separate currency for East Pakistan, introduction of separate armed forces or paramilitary forces and ordnance factory and naval headquarters in East Pakistan; (iii) establishment of sub-federal units in West Pakistan giving full autonomy to Baluchistan, NWFP and Sind (that had been co-opted into One-Unit West Pakistan); (iv) release of all political prisoners; and (v) abandonment of the Agartala Conspiracy Case. On 17 January 1969, the Democratic Action Committee observed a Protest Day and demonstrations were held throughout the country. Serious disturbances occurred in Dhaka where many students were injured in clashes with the police. On 24 January 1969, a general strike paralysed the whole province. In Dhaka, 10,000 students and workers stormed the government secretariat. There were also clashes in Chittagong, Mymensingh, Narayanganj and Khulna. On 30 January 1969, Maulana Bhasani, leader of the National Awami Party and over a thousand members of the party were arrested. On 1 February 1969, President Ayub announced in a broadcast that he was prepared to call a round table conference to discuss changes in the Constitution with representatives of 'responsible Opposition parties'. On 5 February 1969, he abandoned the stipulation that talks must be confined to the responsible parties and expressed his willingness to invite anyone who would be prepared to attend the discussion. On 7 February 1969, Awami League stated that it would not take part in the talks unless it was represented by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. On 16 February 1969, President Ayub conceded that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman should be allowed to attend

the talks. Mujib was now invited to attend the talks on being released on parole. But Mujib turned down the offer of release on parole. Ayub had to yield. The Agartala Conspiracy Case was not withdrawn, but the Sheikh, along with others, was released unconditionally. The students now accorded him a public reception on 23 February at Dhaka Race Course (now Suhrawardy Udyan), where he was acclaimed by a crowd of one million as 'Bangabandhu' (Friend of Bengal). Meanwhile, one of the accused in the Agartala Conspiracy Case was shot dead while allegedly trying to escape. His funeral led to serious disorder in East Pakistan. Maulana Bhasani told a huge crowd that 'time has come to achieve democracy through violence. The days of constitutional struggle are over'. On 21 February 1969, during disturbances in Khulna, eight people were shot dead by the police. The same day, the crowd surrounded the home of the chairman of the local council of Basic Democrats in Kushtia demanding his resignation. He opened fire wounding two students and was himself subsequently beaten to death.

President Ayub now realized, in the face of the unprecedented mass upsurge against him, that his time was over and announced his decision not to seek re-election for presidency. In a speech he said, 'I am fully conscious of the dissatisfaction that exists in the country with the present system of elections. People want direct elections on the basis of adult franchise. I realise also that the intelligentsia feels left out and wants a greater say in the affairs of the State. People in East Pakistan feel that in the present system they are not equal partners and also that they do not have full control over the affairs of their Province.'

Meanwhile, on 22 February 1969, a rally of 1,00,000 students called for the National Assembly members and the Basic Democrats to resign by 3 March or 'face the consequences'. The government withdrew all charges against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the thirty-three others accused in the Agartala Conspiracy Case, who were released on the same date. Four days later (on 26 February) the conference between President Ayub and the Opposition leaders opened at Rawalpindi, Pakistan's new capital. The eight parties constituting the Democratic Action Committee agreed on two points

—a federal parliamentary system of government with regional autonomy and election of the national and provincial assemblies by direct adult franchise. They were, however, divided in their other demands.

Now Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, president of the Awami League, put before the conference his famous six-point programme for general autonomy for East Pakistan, which he had sponsored in 1966, as also the eleven-point demand of the students. He also suggested that the federal capital should be transferred from Islamabad, in West Pakistan, to Dhaka, and that representation in the National Assembly should be based on population rather than on parity between East and West Pakistan, giving East Pakistan 56 per cent of the seats. Mujib's advocacy of the six-point programme met with point-blank refusal. He also stressed the rising disparity in real per capita income between the two wings to the detriment of East Pakistan. He said, 'Underlying such disparity, is the disparity in general economic structure and infrastructure of the two regions, in the rates of employment, in facilities for education, in medical and welfare services.' He cited many figures. During 1961–66, power generation in West Pakistan became five to six times higher than in East Pakistan. As against 36,200 hospital beds for West Pakistan there were only 6,900 in East Pakistan. Whereas there were forty-eight polytechnics in West Pakistan there were only eighteen in the eastern wing. 'More than 80 per cent of all foreign aid has been utilised in West Pakistan in addition to the transfer of East Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings to West Pakistan. This made it possible for West Pakistan over 20 years to import Rs 3,109 crore worth of goods against the total export earnings of Rs 1,337 crore, while during the same period East Pakistan imported Rs 1,210 crore worth of goods as against its total export earnings of Rs 1,650 crores. This was "gross economic injustice" to East Pakistan.' This line of political propaganda made a deep impact on the psyche of the people of East Pakistan, and slowly but surely the concept of an independent country, free from Pakistani control, was getting crystallized. On the rejection of his demand he walked out of the roundtable conference on 13 March and returned to Dhaka on 14 March. This also marked the failure of Mujib's last-minute

efforts to preserve the façade of Pakistan with complete autonomy for East Pakistan. Hereafter, an independent country was the only available goal.

AYUB QUIT

The simmering discontent in East Pakistan was slowly reaching a crisis point. On 10 March 1969, President Ayub Khan stated that rifles and other weapons were being smuggled into East Pakistan from an unknown source and distributed to villages. This was denied by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who questioned the value of the intelligence reports quoted by the President. By 25 March, faced with an uncontrollable agitation in East Pakistan, President Ayub Khan resigned, leaving the country to yet another spell of martial law. Surely, the main credit for the end of Ayub Khan's dictatorship should go to East Pakistan's sustained opposition under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's leadership. On the same day martial law was proclaimed once again as General Yahya Khan (commander-in-chief) seized power as chief martial law administrator. The Constitution was abrogated yet again and national and provincial assemblies were dissolved.

Pakistan's Second Martial Law

Between the Agartala Conspiracy Case (1968) and East Pakistan's freedom struggle (1971), the country passed through what a scholar has rightly described as the 'Mujib phenomenon'.¹ During this period, the entire nation of seventy-five million people stood behind Mujib's charismatic leadership almost to a man and followed him spellbound to Independence, rejecting Pakistan and its feudalistic and militaristic leadership. Nowhere in history can anyone recall anything comparable to Bangabandhu Mujib's mesmeric hold over the entire population of East Pakistan between 1969 and 1971. British journalist Cyril Dunn had said of Mujib: 'In the thousand-year history of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib is the only leader who is by blood, race, language, culture and birth a true Bengali. His voice was like thunder. His charisma worked as magic on people. The courage and charm that streamed from him made him a superhuman in those times.' He was, to quote *Newsweek*, 'the poet of politics' and was like the Himalayas in the opinion of Fidel Castro.²

General Yahya Khan, the new military dictator, announced that he had no political ambitions other than 'the creation of conditions conducive to the establishment of a constitutional government'. The military government cracked down on 'violators' of the martial law administration. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman now announced plans for a true federal set-up on the basis of his six-point formula. On 30 March 1969, Maulana Bhasani demanded a national government. The very next day, the Government of Pakistan banned all political activities and in a rapid series of developments, Gen. Yahya Khan assumed the presidency and a Council of Administration consisting of three people was appointed. Maulana Bhasani was interned in

his village home at Kagmari. Thus it would appear that Yahya was alternatively using the carrot and the stick. Perhaps he was sincere to start with. But as and when Bhutto, the leader of West Pakistan, appeared to be a major power player, Yahya took advantage of this piquant situation to try and retain the levers of power with West Pakistan. His conspiracy with Bhutto, cemented in a meeting at Larkana (Sind) in February 1971, led to a series of steps with the object of forcibly subjugating East Pakistan.

On 10 April 1969, at a press conference, Yahya Khan said that 'after a sound, clean and honest administration' had been established, a Constituent Assembly would be elected on the basis of adult franchise. When asked for his views on regional autonomy for East Pakistan, he replied, 'My personal views are of no consequence. It is entirely for the elected representatives of the people to decide what they want.' On 24 April, continuing his series of talks with political leaders, Yahya Khan flew to Dhaka for a four-day visit. He met Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hamidul Haq Chaudhury and Sheikh Mashiur Rahman representing Maulana Bhasani, who then was ill. Yahya seemed to take cognizance of the sentiments expressed during these meetings. On 6 May, Shafiul Azam, a Bengalee, was appointed the chief secretary, Government of East Pakistan. In a further bid to satisfy Bengalee aspirations, five other Bengalees were appointed as secretaries to the Central ministries of home affairs, agriculture, information and commerce, labour and health. Prior to this, only one Central ministry was headed by a Bengalee and only on one occasion had a Bengalee served as chief secretary of the province. But these gestures proved too inadequate and too late to stem the rising tide of separatism.

In July 1969 the Government of Pakistan came out with a proposal to replace English by Bengali and Urdu as the official languages. In a broadcast, General Yahya Khan announced appointment of a chief election commissioner to prepare for elections to be held within twelve to eighteen months. In his broadcast, he said, 'One of the reasons for dissatisfaction on the part of the people belonging to East Pakistan was a feeling that they were not being allowed to play their full part in the decision-making process at the national level, and in certain important spheres of national

activity. In my view they are fully justified in being dissatisfied with this state of affairs. My administration has taken certain steps to correct this situation in certain spheres including civil administration.’ On 11 August 1969, seven civilians were sworn in as ministers and three more were added during August and October. Five of the ministers were from East Pakistan. Gen. Yahya Khan kept the portfolios of foreign affairs, defence and planning with himself.

On 1 September 1969, Vice Admiral S.M. Ahsan was appointed governor of East Pakistan. On his arrival in Dhaka, Vice Admiral Ahsan said that he was ‘pretty sure’ that by 1971 a new government of elected representatives would replace the present interim government. In November, in a broadcast, Yahya Khan outlined the legal framework for the restoration of a federal parliamentary system and promised the holding of elections on 5 October 1970 on the basis of ‘one man one vote’. He also announced conferment of maximum authority on the province consistent with the maintenance of a strong federation; and permission for the resumption of unrestricted political activity from 1 January 1970: ‘Maximum autonomy to the two wings of Pakistan as long as this does not impair the national integrity and solidarity of the country ... People of both East and West Pakistan are almost unanimous in demanding the break-up of One Unit. My decision is, therefore, based on a popular wish. People of the two regions of Pakistan should have control over their economic resources and development as long as it does not adversely affect the working of a national government at the Centre.’

An interesting straw in the wind was Mujib’s declaration on 5 December 1969 at a meeting to observe the death anniversary of Suhrawardy: ‘On behalf of the people of Bengal, I am announcing today that henceforth the eastern province of Pakistan will, instead of being called East Pakistan be called Bangladesh. There was a time when all efforts were made to erase the word “Bangla” from the land and its map. The word “Bangla” was found nowhere except in the term Bay of Bengal. I announced today that this land will be called Bangladesh instead of East Pakistan.’ This was surely a foretaste of things to come.

On 1 January 1970, the ban imposed on political parties was lifted. On 29 March, Yahya Khan announced the Legal Framework Order, 1970. When it came as promised, the Legal Framework Order laid down the fundamental principles to be incorporated into the new constitution. Pakistan would be a Federal Islamic Republic. The National Assembly would consist of 313 members of whom 300 would be elected to fill general seats and 13 seats would be reserved for women. East Pakistan was allotted 162 general seats and 7 seats were reserved for women. West Pakistan was to be divided into four provinces and Centrally Administered Tribal Areas that would have the rest of the seats. In the provincial assemblies, East Pakistan had 300 general and 10 reserved seats (for women). On 1 April 1970, Gen. Yahya Khan ordered the dissolution of One-Unit West Pakistan. This was in response to East Pakistan's longstanding demand for restoring its status as the province with more than half of Pakistan's population, instead of being equated as East Pakistan with One-Unit West Pakistan.

The Awami League re-elected Bangabandhu as its president on 6 January 1970 and decided to take part in the election on 1 April 1970. On 15 July 1970, published electoral rolls came out which showed the number of registered voters as a little over 5,64,00,000 of whom 3,12,00,000 were in East Pakistan and 2,52,00,000 in West Pakistan. On 15 August 1970, on the pretext of floods in East Pakistan, election to the National Assembly was postponed to 7 December 1970. The decision was criticized by both Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In October 1970 nomination of provincial and National Assembly seats was finalized. On 17 October Mujib selected the boat as his party's election symbol. In a broadcast on 28 October, he advocated equality of all citizens and particularly equal rights for the minority community. While rejecting the thesis of Islam being in danger due to the six-point formula, he reiterated that 'nothing which promotes prejudice between region and region and man and man can be opposed to Islam'. He urged Gen. Yahya Khan once again to repeal the restrictive provisions of the Legal Framework Order to allow the elected representatives of the people to function as a sovereign Assembly in the task of formulating the constitution. In the field of foreign policy he stated

that normalization of relations with neighbours would be to the best advantage of Pakistan. He stated that there should be 'a just settlement of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions' and also of the Farakka problem which threatened to do 'grave and permanent damage to the economy of Bengal'. During these ten months when he hit the campaign trail, he addressed on an average about twenty-two meetings a day, appealing to the people to vote for the boat symbol, and speaking to mammoth hysterical audiences eager to see him and hear his voice. In that process he transformed this campaign into a one-horse race and turned his party into virtually the only political party. 'The fact is that he has become a symbol in his own lifetime. He has come to personify Bengalee nationalism just as Nasser personified Arab nationalism. History has singled him out to lead Bengal's struggle to fulfilment.'³

While a number of historic figures, such as Fazlul Huq, H.S. Suhrawardy and Maulana Bhasani, played very important roles in the political struggle of the people of Bangladesh, the catalytic act of political entrepreneurship needed to forge a sense of nationhood for the Bengalees was provided by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. From 1966, when Mujib launched the six-point programme demanding a loose federation for Pakistan, and near-complete autonomy for Bangladesh, on to the stormy two-year period from March 1969 to March 1971, Bangabandhu played a crucial, all-pervasive role in the struggle for emancipation of the Bengalees. He brought under his banner not only the Awami League but all other secular political forces and fused them in a massive movement against the autocratic and colonial Pakistan government. The more Pakistan's military authorities refused to accept the demand for incorporating the six-point programme into the Pakistan Constitution, the more determined Bangabandhu became. His agitation had led to the fall of the dictator Ayub Khan. But his replacement, Yahya Khan was no better, although he conceded the national election. It was the election campaign of 1969–70 which came to play a critical role in forging a sense of national identity for the Bengalees. 'Over that two-year period Bangabandhu emerged as the unchallenged leader and the embodiment of the national will of the people

of Bangladesh. In this period he graduated from being the leader of one political party into a national icon for the Bengalis of Bangladesh.' Truly has Rehman Sobhan described the process as the 'Mujib phenomenon'. 'He criss-crossed the entire province, penetrating into remote villages from Patuakhali to the Sylhet haor area, exposing an estimated 20 million East Pakistanis to his presence.'⁴

Meanwhile there was an unforeseen natural calamity. In November 1970 a severe cyclone devastated the coastal areas in East Bengal. About one million people were reportedly killed. Bitter general criticism was voiced in East Pakistan about West Pakistan's delayed response and apathy. Maulana Bhasani and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were the first to make an extensive tour and criticized the Central government for its slow response and ineptitude. Gen. Yahya Khan paid a belated visit to the affected areas to supervise relief measures. He said he could not be blamed for the past omissions towards East Pakistan and that, unlike the leaders of the past, he had recognized the realities of the situation and felt that East Pakistan should have maximum political autonomy within the overall framework of Pakistan. Following the cyclone disaster, there was a demand from several prominent East Pakistan leaders like Maulana Bhasani, Nurul Amin and Ataur Rahman that elections be postponed. But Awami League stood firm on holding the elections on schedule. The Election Commission stated that elections would be held on schedule except in the eight or nine constituencies directly affected by the cyclone. The natural calamity heightened the political disaffection in the eastern wing, adding weight to the popular demand for autonomy. In his election campaign Bangabandhu, who had temporarily suspended his campaign, condemned the Pakistan government's indifference to the misery of the cyclone victims and appealed to the international community for assistance.

Significantly, in his election-eve speeches, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto abstained from commenting on the burning topics between East and West Pakistan. He said nothing about the six-point programme of the Awami League. On 4 December 1970, General Yahya Khan warned political parties that martial law would remain supreme until after power was transferred to elected

representatives in the wake of the framing of a constitution. General elections to the National Assembly were held on 7 December 1970. The Awami League, standing on its famous six-point formula, obtained a decisive victory for the National Assembly from East Pakistan. It won 167 seats (out of 169 seats for East Pakistan) in a House of 313, which gave the party an absolute majority. Bhutto's People's Party got 83 seats which gave it a majority from West Pakistan, but much less than the Awami League's tally. On 9 December 1970, Maulana Bhasani said he would launch a movement for the separation of East Pakistan. He described the success of the Awami League as a positive proof of the Bengalees wanting a free, independent and sovereign state. On 10 December 1970, Mujibur Rahman said that there could be no constitution except on the basis of the six-point programme.

On 17 December 1970, elections to the provincial assemblies were held. Once again, in East Pakistan the Awami League secured an absolute majority (305 seats out of the 310), while in West Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's People's Party secured a clear majority in Punjab and Sind.

Initially, Yahya Khan appeared to welcome the success of Awami League. On 14 January he referred to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the future prime minister of Pakistan. But Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the most important actor from West Pakistan, had different ideas. Bhutto was determined to keep the levers of power with West Pakistan and not to let the Awami League, with its majority, call the shots. Soon Yahya Khan and Bhutto became partners. Clearly, neither of them was willing to accept Mujib, the originator of the six-point programme who had won a sensational and overwhelming victory, to be the dominant leader of the government that was to come. While Yahya convened the National Assembly in Dhaka, he also complicated matters by laying down a condition that the Assembly must write the constitution within 120 days. For a while Bhutto adopted a somewhat reasonable posture and even went to Dhaka to have talks with Mujibur Rahman. After three days of talks, out of the six points, Bhutto announced that he agreed on two, but he could not agree on when to convene the session of the Assembly. Mujibur Rahman wanted the

Assembly to be convened early, preferably before 15 February, and hoped to have some support from the delegates of NWFP and Baluchistan. Bhutto agreed to the Assembly meeting at an early date, but not as early as 15 February. While Yahya Khan made a dramatic announcement of meeting of the Assembly at Dhaka on 3 March, he was at the same time conducting an exercise by the Pakistan Army near Multan.

Incidentally, many sane voices in Pakistan had advised Yahya Khan to accept Mujib's four demands and invite him forthwith to take over as the country's prime minister, particularly, at a Karachi meeting of thirty-two members of the National Assembly from West Pakistan held on 13 March. Even Air Marshal (retd) Asghar Khan, a prominent member of the Pakistan military establishment, advised Yahya to take the first flight to Dhaka and transfer power to Mujib if he wished to prevent the breaking away of East Pakistan which was already mentally separated. All this failed to move the Yahya-Bhutto entente.

In the light of the subsequent events it can be conjectured that Yahya's motive was sinister and diabolical. Clearly, he was following, to quote Tajuddin, 'a strategy of defection'. Outwardly, he went through a façade of talks with Mujib. But in his heart of hearts he was preparing, in league with Bhutto, for a showdown with the Bengalees. In pursuance of this hidden agenda he was airlifting army units to the eastern wing on a massive scale. In the span of three weeks Pakistan army's strength in East Pakistan rose from 40,000 to 70,000.

On 20 December, Z.A. Bhutto, referring to Mujibur Rahman's majority in the National Assembly, made an uncharitable remark that 'majority alone did not count in national politics'. He had fired the first shot in his Machiavellian battle. In yet another affront to Bengalee sentiment he added that the People's Party had won a majority in Punjab and Sind where 'lay the real centre of power' and no government could run at the Centre without the cooperation of this party. That the dominant political group in West Pakistan was not willing to hand over political power at the national level to the Bengalees became clear from Bhutto's statement. The next day, Tajuddin Ahmed, general secretary, East Pakistan Awami League, said that

the Awami League with the clear mandate of the electorate was quite competent to frame a constitution and form the Central government. He added that Punjab and Sind could no longer aspire to be 'bastions of power'. Now Bhutto made a somewhat conciliatory statement that there were good chances for the establishment of a coalition government of the Awami League and the People's Party. He ruled out the possibility of Mujibur Rahman going it alone as that would ignore the geographical peculiarity of Pakistan where both the wings must share power. Meanwhile, the Awami League had already drafted a constitution based on the six-point programme, and was ready for the National Assembly where it was hoping to get it passed with its decisive majority. But Bhutto declared that he would not 'sign a dictated constitution'. On 27 December 1970, he said that his party was the only party which supported the cause of the people of East Pakistan and hoped that he would be able to reach some understanding with East Pakistan on the creation of the constitution. He felt that the constitution should reflect the consensus of all provinces of Pakistan. If a majority party insisted on making a constitution of its own liking, he would step aside 'and his party would not be responsible for the consequences'. On 29 December, Gen. Yahya Khan conceded Mujibur Rahman's demand for holding the National Assembly session in Dhaka.

As the year 1971 started, the relationship took a turn for the worse. On 3 January, Mujibur Rahman reiterated at a public rally at the Race Course ground that the constitution would have to be on the six-point programme, for which he would seek the cooperation of the western wing. He warned the people that they should not be complacent and be prepared for any sacrifice, which might be needed to achieve their rights. He also conducted the oath-taking of the elected MNAs (members of National Assembly) at the rally. The next day, Mujib said that the six-point programme would provide equal quantum of autonomy to the people of the west wing as well. He was unanimously elected the leader of his party in Parliament. On 8 January 1971, he announced at a press conference that an attempt had been made on his life. He warned that conspiracies were being hatched to

frustrate the verdict of the people and that he would start a mass movement if the anti-people elements persisted in such activities.

On 9 January 1971, newspapers reported that Maulana Bhasani, Mashiur Rahman, general secretary of the East Pakistan National Awami Party, Ataur Rahman Khan and Commander Moazzam Hussain, a leader of the Lahore Resolution Implementation Committee, had met at Santosh in Tangail district to discuss implementation of a five-point programme. The programme envisaged: (1) the establishment of a sovereign East Pakistan on the basis of the 1940 Lahore Resolution; (2) boycotting of imported goods including those from the western wing; (3) a gradual socialization of the means of production; (4) adherence to the principles of anti-imperialism and anti-Fascism; and (5) launching of a mass movement for pressing a referendum on these issues. Clearly, they were going beyond Mujib, who was till then trying desperately to retain the façade of one Pakistan based on two independent units.

Three days later, Gen. Yahya Khan had talks with Mujibur Rahman and five other Awami League leaders at Dhaka. He described the talks as satisfactory. He referred to Mujibur Rahman as the future prime minister of Pakistan and expressed the hope that the conditions in the country would improve after the new government was installed. On 13 January 1971, Z.A. Bhutto said that he favoured the idea of a genuine federation in Pakistan with all provinces having equal powers. On 17 January 1971, President Yahya Khan met Z.A. Bhutto. He said that the two parties should come to an understanding and, if it became necessary, a meeting between himself, Z.A. Bhutto and Mujibur Rahman could be held. On 27 January, Bhutto arrived in Dhaka for talks with Mujibur Rahman. After the talks took place for three days, Bhutto said at a press conference that the talks had neither failed, nor had reached a deadlock. He said he had agreed to two points of the Awami League pertaining to the question of federation and the right of the provinces to maintain paramilitary forces and that, for the remaining points, he would have to consult his colleagues.

At this crucial moment, an unexpected incident took place, indirectly influencing the course of events. On 30 January 1971, an Indian Airline

plane was hijacked by some pro-Pakistan Kashmiri militants to Lahore and blown up after two days. In retaliation, India banned overflights by Pakistan planes over Indian airspace. This created great difficulty in communication between the eastern and western wings of Pakistan, as overnight air traffic between Dhaka and Rawalpindi had to be conducted by the long route via Colombo. Bhutto had exhibited his immaturity by flying to Lahore to applaud the hijackers. On 3 February, Mujibur Rahman condemned the blowing up of the Indian plane and called for a thorough probe. While the whole world condemned the hijacking, Bhutto said Pakistan was not responsible for the act since the hijackers were Kashmiris. This incident hardened India's attitude.

On 13 February, Gen. Yahya Khan fixed 3 March for the National Assembly session. Mujibur Rahman, addressing a meeting of the members of the Awami League elected to the national and provincial assemblies and the Working Committee of the party, reiterated that the constitution should be based on the six-point programme. On 16 February, Bhutto, at a press conference, expressed his party's decision to boycott the National Assembly unless it was given an understanding that there was scope for adjustment and compromise on the six-point programme. He also made a strange impractical demand that power be handed over to the majority parties in East Pakistan and West Pakistan.

On 17 February, Mujibur Rahman snubbed Bhutto and stated that the people of 'Bangla Desh' could no longer be suppressed. 'Power has to be handed over to the only majority party, the Awami League. The people of East Bengal are now the masters of power.' Simultaneously, he started referring to the region as 'Bangla Desh' vis-à-vis 'Pakistan' in his public statements. On 21 February, Mujib told newsmen that his party was firmly committed to framing a constitution on the basis of its six-point programme. On 26 February, he warned the governor, Vice Admiral S.M. Ahsan, that the postponement of the National Assembly session would create a tragic and dangerous situation. On 28 February 1971, Z.A. Bhutto announced that his party would attend the Assembly session if it were postponed to allow his party time to hold talks with the Awami League, or

if the time limit of 120 days for framing the constitution was lifted. He threatened a mass movement 'from Khyber to Karachi' if the National Assembly was held without the participation of the Pakistan People's Party. A sad Mujib even expressed his willingness at one stage to have 'two Prime Ministers, one for each wing, if this is what Bhutto wants'.

On 1 March, General Yahya Khan, surely under the influence of Bhutto, once again postponed the National Assembly session sine die, only two days before it was to meet. The President said that the Pakistan People's Party, the majority party of West Pakistan, and certain other political parties had declared their intention to not attend the Assembly session on 3 March. He said that the general situation of tension created by India had further complicated the situation. This decision of Yahya was viewed by all Bengalees as a conspiracy to deny them their democratic mandate won so convincingly in the December 1970 elections. The same day the President reintroduced full martial law, removed the more liberal Vice Admiral Ahsan as governor of East Pakistan and appointed the hawkish Lieutenant General Tikka Khan in his place. This was yet another disappointment for East Pakistan, and showed which way the Yahya-Bhutto duo was going to move. On 3 March, Bangabandhu called the whole thing a conspiracy and launched a civil disobedience campaign. He called upon the people to stop all communication systems and directed that nobody should pay any rent/taxes or cooperate with the anti-people government. He asked the people to resort to non-cooperation. He called upon the troops to return to their barracks and asked the martial law administrator to hand over power to the elected representatives of the people before 7 March when he would indicate the steps ahead. 'If the conspirators still think they can perpetuate their colonial rule, they are living in a fool's paradise.' Between 1 and 15 March, East Pakistan, under Bangabandhu Mujib's leadership, 'assumed all the correlates of an independent State'. Never in history had such a phenomenon been noticed, with not just the common people, but the administration, the judicial machinery, the police officials, the Bengal contingents of the army, and even the business community joining the non-cooperation movement and formally shifting loyalty from Pakistan to the

authority of Bangabandhu in obedience to the people's electoral verdict of December 1970.⁵

On 6 March 1971, President Yahya Khan announced that the National Assembly would meet on 25 March. He warned the politicians that he and the armed forces would ensure at all costs the solidarity, integrity and security of Pakistan. But this did not deter Sheikh Mujib from going ahead with his action plan. On 7 March, Mujibur Rahman, for all practical purposes, declared East Pakistan's virtual secession from Pakistan at a public meeting, although he did not formally announce a unilateral declaration of independence (see [Annexure C](#)). He also announced that he would not attend the National Assembly unless (1) the martial law was lifted, (2) the troops had returned to their barracks, (3) an inquiry was held into the current firings (by the army against protestors), and (4) power was handed over to the civil authorities. He announced that the hartal would continue till 25 March. In a clarion call to the nation he announced, 'The struggle now is for our emancipation. The struggle now is the struggle for our independence. Jai Bangla ... Since we have given blood, we will give more blood. God willing, the people of this country will be liberated ... Turn every house into a fort. Face the enemy with whatever you have.'

Yahya Khan now called yet another meeting of the political leaders. But Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman refused to attend saying 'we do not want to sit with perpetrators of mass murder. When dead bodies are still lying scattered and gun shots are reverberating in people's ears, the call for a conference is a cruel joke'. Already, a few days of violence had taken a toll with 300 being killed and over 2,000 being injured. With frequent sniping by Pakistani forces on Bengalees everywhere, there was on the streets an open confrontation between the East Pakistanis, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the Pakistan authorities. To make East Pakistan's civil disobedience complete, Dhaka radio station, along with Chittagong, Sylhet and Rajshahi stations, gave up broadcasting government news and started broadcasting only Mujib's speeches and Bengali patriotic songs. Also, an all-pervading hartal had cut off East Pakistan from the outside

world. Mujib's battle cry of 'Jai Bangla' reverberated through the whole of East Pakistan.

Under the civil disobedience movement, the region refused to comply with orders from Yahya Khan's government and decided to accept directives only from Bangabandhu. In a remarkable gesture of solidarity, judges in East Pakistan High Court refused to swear in Lt General Tikka Khan as governor. This illustrated how the Bengalees were determined to rebel against West Pakistan's domineering attitude. On 14 March, the Pakistan government issued an ultimatum asking workers to return to work by 15 March. On the same day, Bangabandhu issued thirty-five directives to the people of East Pakistan asking them, among other things, not to obey orders from Pakistan officials, nor to pay taxes to the government but to deposit them in a designated bank. He also ordered closure of all schools and colleges. He laid down a ten-point programme for the people to observe. The points were:

1. No-tax campaign to continue;
2. All government offices, including the secretariat, the high court and other courts throughout East Pakistan to observe hartal indefinitely with appropriate exemption to be announced from time to time;
3. Railways and ports to function, but railway workers not to cooperate if the railways or the ports were used for mobilization of military forces for carrying out repression against the people;
4. Radio, television and newspapers to give complete version of Awami League's statements, and not to suppress news about the people's movement, failing which Bengalee workers not to cooperate;
5. Only local and inter-district front telecommunications to function;
6. All national institutions to remain closed;
7. Banks not to effect remittances to West Pakistan either through the State Bank of Pakistan or otherwise;
8. Black flags to be hoisted on all buildings every day;
9. Hartal to be withdrawn, but complete or partial hartal may be declared at any moment, depending upon the situation;
10. A Sangram Parishad (Council of Action) to be organized in each union, mohalla, thana, subdivision and district under the leadership of local Awami League leaders.

These virtually made East Pakistan fully autonomous without formally declaring independence. From this time onwards it was Mujib's writ rather

than Yahya's, that ran East Pakistan. Mujib announced that he was taking over the administration on the basis of Awami League's absolute majority in the provincial and the National Assembly. For all practical purposes, this was a unilateral declaration of independence.

Between 1 and 15 March 1971 Mujib played an unchallenged role in East Pakistan, controlling the entire machinery of administration. There is no other example in history where such a shift of loyalty emerged even before recognition of national independence. The total mandate that the people of East Pakistan gave Mujib in March 1971 had not been given to Gandhi, Nehru, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Nkrumah or Julius Nyerere, or even Nelson Mandela, all of whom obtained electoral legitimacy only after independence. It was only in East Pakistan that government servants repudiated the authority of the Pakistan government and supported a rebel authority because they felt that their leader had already acquired such a legitimate authority, through a process of election, to speak for all the people of 'Bangladesh'. Pakistan's administration virtually collapsed and all officials of the East Pakistan government started taking orders from Sheikh Mujib. He had now to turn to creating an ad hoc, rudimentary administrative set-up in order to maintain law and order and restore economic activity. A small cell was established where a number of Bengalee professionals met every day with bankers and bureaucrats to discuss a variety of operational issues such as the steps needed to revive banking operations and exports, pay salaries to government employees, collect public revenue, resume public distribution of fertilizers, operate tube wells and keep the transport system within East Pakistan functional. In this task he was assisted by Tajuddin and Dr Kamal Hussain. Bangabandhu's private home at Road 32, Dhanmandi, in Dhaka, now became the real seat of authority, and even foreign diplomats accredited to Pakistan started visiting this place. The general law and order situation was remarkably stable and even non-Bengalees were accorded protection. Many foreign governments also started dealing directly with Bangabandhu and his associates. It was as if the world press had already recognized the new state. Mujib became one of the most globally visible personalities. The whole

world, except the USA and China, seemed to accept the fact that when Yahya Khan launched genocide on the people of Bangladesh on the night of 25 March 1971, it was he who was the usurper of authority from the democratically established sovereign state of Bangladesh.

Mujib's declaration of 15 March brought Yahya Khan to Dhaka. But by that time a week of confrontation between the Bengalee people and the Pakistan army had burnt all the bridges to Rawalpindi. The cry of 'Swadhin Bangla' was rending the skies of East Pakistan and Mujib's directives had made East Pakistan de facto autonomous. There was no room left for a compromise. With Mujib's open challenge and with large army units stationed at Dhaka and at other important points, the Yahya regime made bold to take anti-people action. On 19 March, following an exchange of fire between the local people and the army, curfew was imposed at Joydebpur about 22 miles from Dhaka. This was by far the first instance of direct hostility between the Bengalee people and the Pakistan Army. On 24 March, Tajuddin Ahmed announced reports of military action at Rangpur, Chittagong and several other places. By 25 March, a full division, newly arrived from Pakistan, had reinforced the existing forces in East Pakistan. A merchant navy ship named *MV Swat*, laden with heavy weapons and military arsenal, reached Chittagong, but the workers at the Chittagong port refused to unload the ship. Dhaka Betar Kendra (Dhaka Wireless Station) in its commentary said: 'It appears that the Yahya-Mujib parleys have been deadlocked because Bhutto, with the backing of the militarist-bureaucratic-industrialist complex of West Pakistan, is objecting to the restoration of democracy.' The ten days from 15 to 25 March saw some hectic developments. Mujib countermanded an order from the military regime to all defence employees to report for duty by Monday, 25 March, by asserting, 'I want my people to get their rights. My demands must be accepted first. I cannot take the responsibility for controlling the passions of the Bengalees should a meeting with Yahya Khan result in a rejection of my demands. Let me hope for the best and also be prepared for the worst. The people will not be intimidated.' He was later reported to have told the AFP correspondent, Brian May, 'If I give in, if I make too many concessions, I

will also lose the leadership.’ He further told Brian May that he alone could save East Pakistan from communism and if the West Pakistanis fought the autonomy demand, he would lose his leadership to Naxalites in a few years.

On 22 March, Yahya, Mujib and Bhutto met. Afterwards Mujib told the press that the situation was serious in East Pakistan and the movement was passive and non-violent, but it would go on relentlessly until the goal of emancipation was reached. The Awami League termed 23 March, Pakistan’s National Day, as the Resistance Day and Mujib reminded the people that the Lahore Resolution of 1940 had envisaged an autonomous sovereign state in the east. The next day Mujib declared that he would sacrifice his life rather than give up on the cause of Bangladesh. ‘Even when I am taken to the gallows I shall proclaim I am Bengalee, Bangladesh is my land, Bengali is my language.’ On 25 March he called for a general strike in the Dhaka region and told the shouting demonstrators, ‘I am shocked to hear of heavy firing on unarmed civilians. This has happened when Yahya Khan has declared his resolve to settle the constitutional problem. I urge him to immediately order cessation of military operations.’

The final hour of Yahya Khan’s duplicity had now arrived. Since the last round of Yahya–Mujib talks had begun on 16 March, Yahya’s clear objective was to mislead Mujib about his true intention. As they talked, cheering crowds outside shouted ‘Jai Bangla’. On 21 March Bhutto conferred with President Yahya Khan. Yahya’s unscheduled meeting with Mujib was clearly a diversionary tactic. On 22 March Yahya again postponed inauguration of the National Assembly indefinitely. Replying to this, on 25 March the Awami League announced that constitutional talks were deadlocked. Mujib also rejected Tikka Khan’s offer for an inquiry into the army killings. Then all of a sudden Yahya Khan, no longer needing to keep his mask, removed it, broke the talks abruptly and left for Karachi on the evening of 25 March, giving the army a free hand to eradicate the Awami League and the recalcitrant Bengalees and restore the authority of his government fully. Simultaneously, Bhutto, his partner in crime, also left Dhaka for West Pakistan. There was no declaration that the talks were over. On the same evening the Pakistan Army launched a full-scale attack on East

Pakistan police barracks at Rajarbagh and East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) base at Pilkhana and Dhaka University. This was a signal for the army to virtually declare a war on the entire population of East Pakistan and selectively kill a number of community leaders and intellectuals. Now came Bangabandhu's declaration of independence on the midnight of 25 March (00.30 a.m. on 26 March). He read out the following wireless message: 'This may be my last message. From today Bangladesh is independent. I call upon the people of Bangladesh, wherever you might be and with whatever you have to resist the army of occupation to the last, your fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh. Final victory is ours.' He further appealed to the freedom fighters 'in the name of the almighty Allah to liberate our motherland and fight till the last drop of blood. God bless you. Jai Bangla'. His message was transmitted over wireless to the new nation. Shortly thereafter Mujibur Rahman was arrested by the army at 1.10 a.m. on the same night and moved to an unknown destination in West Pakistan. There was no official announcement about this. Only a picture of him in police custody was released by the Pakistan government.

A clandestine radio station identified as Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Independent Bengal Wireless Station), also carried Mujib's message of independence and further announced: 'The Sheikh has declared the seventy-five million people of East Pakistan as citizens of sovereign, independent Bangladesh.' On the next night, i.e., on 27 March, Major Zia of the East Bengal Rifles (the future President General Ziaur Rahman), who had already revolted and resigned from the Pakistan Army, went to Chittagong radio station along with Awami League leader M.A. Hannan and announced that he had formed an independent government in the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and asked Pakistani forces to surrender to the Bangladesh Army. These radio voices had an electrifying effect on the people of Bangladesh and there was mass exodus of Bengalees from the Pakistan Army in Jessore, Comilla and Chittagong cantonments to join the liberation war. They were joined by students, workers and the youth in general.

There has been an unfortunate and largely irrelevant debate as to who declared Bangladesh's independence first. Clearly, it was Mujib and Mujib alone who had the authority — given to him by an overwhelming mandate from the people — to declare Bangladesh's independence. This was also recognized by the global community where Bangabandhu Mujib alone commanded the visibility as the unchallenged leader of seventy-five million people to proclaim their sovereignty to the world. Zia's declaration of independence was thus only a surrogate act on behalf of Bangabandhu and announcement by him. Zia himself maintained that he read his statement in the name of Bangabandhu. 'The current controversy,' as Shehabuddin states in his memoirs, 'surrounding that declaration had not developed at that time, and indeed would not even surface during Zia's lifetime; this whole hullabaloo has simply been an attempt by some overzealous members of his party to distort historical facts in the hope of getting some political dividends.'⁶ Yahya Khan in a broadcast charged Mujib with treason and with insulting Pakistan's national flag and called him and his followers 'enemies of Pakistan'.

The Awami League was banned as a political party. Large-scale arrests of Awami League leaders and workers followed. Many of them went underground or crossed over to India. Simultaneously, the West Pakistan media launched a vitriolic campaign against the Bengalees. The Pakistani soldiers started en masse murder of Bengalee nationals, dishonouring of Bengalee women and destruction of property. On 10 April the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra announced the formation of the Government of Bangladesh with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the President, Syed Nazrul Islam as the vice-president and Tajuddin as the prime minister. The nine-month-long freedom struggle for Bangladesh had begun.

Bangladesh's War of Independence

On 25 March 1971, the nine-month-long war of independence for Bangladesh began with Bangabandhu's declaration of independence before his incarceration and with the Pakistani forces attacking Dhaka University, the EPR and the police headquarters, and launching a general attack on the Bengalee people everywhere. Initially, the sudden disappearance of Bangabandhu's voice after 26 March caused some amount of confusion to the people of Bangladesh, who had been used to hearing this inspiring voice daily since 1969. Some people felt that he was providing leadership from some underground location. The release of a picture of Bangabandhu in detention flanked by Pakistani soldiers in some undisclosed location (perhaps Karachi airport) provided the first clue that he had been taken prisoner and whisked away, presumably, to Pakistan. Now the freedom fighters proceeded to make their own fighting plans in the name of Bangabandhu. People felt that an armed struggle for independence of Bangladesh was the only way to get rid of the hateful Pakistani rule. Leadership came from officials of East Bengal Regiment and the EPR and also from the leaders of the Awami League and other political parties and the students. Many leaders of the movement simply crossed the border and took shelter in India as they thought they could coordinate the freedom movement better from there than from any place inside East Pakistan.

In the first week of April four leaders of the Awami youth organization, Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni, Shirazul Alam Khan, Tofael Ahmed and Abdur Razzak arrived in Calcutta. They were known as very close and trusted associates of Bangabandhu. They were influential among the young workers of Awami League. At the time of the non-cooperation movement their authority had increased enormously. After entering India they

organized an armed outfit named 'Mukti Bahini' (Army of Freedom)—initially trained at Dehradun and then operating in the border areas of Bangladesh adjacent to West Bengal.

Their initiative soon became the mainstream of the liberation struggle. Virtually the entire leadership of Awami League took shelter in India for a few days to save themselves from Pakistani attack. Pakistani aggression was extremely cruel and ruthless. The supreme leader was absent, there was uncertainty about the next programme and leadership, yet the Awami League took the initiative to take control of that unique revolutionary situation. Many leaders and countless workers contributed in this initiative. There were differences among them, but the party could successfully take control of the helm and lead the liberation war. In Bangabandhu's absence, the helmsman of this movement was undoubtedly Tajuddin Ahmed, the general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami League and close comrade of Sheikh Mujib for more than two decades. After the rise of Awami League in 1964 he was one of the main architects of all policies and programmes of the party. His position was next to Bangabandhu at the time of the non-cooperation movement in March 1971. He left Dhaka on 27 March with young party leader Barrister Amirul Islam. At that time he got no opportunity to discuss the situation with any other senior leader of the party. But he took two decisions: first, the only way to save the people of Bangladesh in the new situation created by total Pakistani onslaught was armed resistance; and second, immediate action was needed to get help and support from India and other sympathetic quarters to organize a liberation war. On the evening of 30 March he reached the West Bengal border. He immediately established contact with Indian officials, visited Calcutta and also met Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and then went back to the Indo-Bangladesh border.

On 4 April, an important meeting of the Bengalee officers of the East Bengal Regiment was held at Telipara tea garden of Sylhet. The meeting was attended by Col. (retd) Mohammed Ataul Gani Osmani, Lt Col. Abdur Rob, Major Ziaur Rahman, Major Khaled Mosharraf, Major Shafiulla, Major Kazi Nuruzzaman, Major Nurul Islam, Major Momin Chowdhury

and some others. This was the first meeting of its kind. The military rebels established contact with Tajuddin.

On 6 April 1971 a diplomat in the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, K.M. Shehabuddin, along with one Amjadul Huq, formally defected from Pakistan and announced their loyalty to the independent Government of Bangladesh, headed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib. In a statement before the international media, they denounced the brutal onslaught by Pakistan on the civilian population of Bangladesh and announced their resignation from the Pakistan Foreign Service to work for independent Bangladesh. They also appealed to the nations of the world to recognize the sovereign state of Bangladesh. Shehabuddin's brave action, even before a government for Bangladesh was formally constituted, was a unique event and provided a flashpoint that inspired the suppressed people of Bangladesh.¹ Shehabuddin's bold step was to be followed by similar action on 18 April by Hussain Ali, Pakistan's deputy high commissioner in Calcutta, and all his officers and staff. In the first week of April, the Government of India took two important decisions: first, to open the border along Bangladesh to freedom fighters; and, second, to allow Bangladesh government to supplement the freedom struggle inside Bangladesh with political activities on Indian soil. The formation of a government in exile was urgently needed to coordinate the liberation struggle and to represent Bangladesh in a meaningful way. After hectic discussions among the top leaders of Awami League who were available, it was decided that Tajuddin Ahmed will be the prime minister of the Government of Bangladesh in exile. On 11 April 1971, as prime minister of Bangladesh, Tajuddin Ahmed made his first broadcast through the clandestine Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. It is worth reproducing the translation of his inspiring speech in full:²

Heroic and brave brothers and sisters of independent Bangladesh!

In the name of your President, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, we salute you and pay homage to the departed souls of the martyrs who have sacrificed their lives in the defence of their motherland. They will shine in our memory as long as Bangladesh exists, as long as a single citizen of Bangladesh lives. Since the proclamation of independence by your

leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, after General Yahya had on the midnight of 25 March, ordered his Army to commit genocide on the peace-loving people of Bangladesh, your epic resistance against the colonial army of occupation from West Pakistan is an inspiration to the freedom-loving peoples of the world. Each day of struggle adds a new and glorious page in the saga of our liberation struggle. Each martyr wins us a thousand friends in the world who cannot but salute your heroism.

By your determination and ability to withstand the murderous onslaught of Yahya's gang of professional killers you have shown that a new Bengalee nation has been born amidst the ruins of the battlefield. To the world we are peace-loving people, friendly, human, fond of music and dance, imbued with an awareness of culture and beauty. War and violence are thought to be foreign to our nature. But today, whilst we remain true to our heritage, Bengalees have shown that they are also a warrior people, with an unconquerable will and courage to face an aggressor who enjoys overwhelming superiority in the use of weapons.

Today a mighty army is being formed around the nucleus of professional soldiers from the [East] Bengal Regiment and EPR who have rallied to the cause of the liberation struggle. These have been joined by the police, Ansars and Mujahids and now thousands of Awami League and other volunteers and are being trained into a fighting force ready to use the captured weapons from the defeated West Pakistani mercenaries and fresh arms are being purchased from funds collected by our Bengalee brothers overseas.

The brilliant success of our fighting forces and the daily additions to their strength in manpower and captured weapons have enabled the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, first announced through Major Ziaur Rahman, to set up a full-fledged operational base from which it is administering the liberated areas. Whilst the interim capital is located in the liberated areas of the western zone, we have set up a regional seat of government located in the liberated area of the Sylhet-Comilla zone, which is delegated to exercise full administrative authority over all areas in the eastern regions.

Whilst humanitarian aid is welcome from all sources, it must be remembered that what we need above all is arms to repel the aggressor from the sacred soil of Bangladesh. Today our civilian population is under-equipped and outgunned by the modern mechanized army of occupation, which has been equipped with the latest weapons from the arsenal of the big powers. We appeal to these big powers to suspend all further arms deliveries to this army of murderers. These weapons were given for defence against external aggression and not to commit wanton murder on innocent women and children in Bangladesh. Much of these weapons have been paid for by the blood and sweat of the toiling masses of Bangladesh who are now being butchered in their thousands by these same weapons. We appeal to these powers to not only suspend all arms deliveries but to insist that these weapons of death are turned away from the task of suppressing the aspirations of seventy-five million Bengalees.

For those who as yet are unequipped with modern weapons or may not be so equipped for some time, we ask you to arm yourselves with all variety of indigenous weapons at hand. You too have a role to play in combating enemy paratroopers, commandos and agents who operate secretly in the liberated areas. You have a role to play in cutting roads, preparing ambushes and booby traps, guarding the waterways and even in direct combat with the enemy if they ever come at close quarters. To equip yourselves for the

task, group yourselves for training and instructions under the Sangram Parishads whose field commanders should report for briefing to their Military Area Commanders. Our irregular warfare units must operate as a disciplined fighting force in close coordination with the professional vanguard of the Bangladesh Liberation Army who will deploy them according to plan.

The military part of the struggle is however only one aspect. The war for survival must also go on within Bangladesh. We therefore invite all administrators, technicians and intellectuals and any other person anxious to join in the liberation struggle to come to the liberated areas and put their services at the disposal of the Government of Bangladesh. Our struggle today rises above conventional political boundaries and must be seen as the struggle of the seventy-five million people of Bangladesh for protecting their freedom.

There can now be no doubt about the outcome of the final struggle. Victory is ours, earned by our own courage and sacrifice. This is now being gradually realized by the enemy. They thought it would be an easy victory and that Bengalees would be quickly intimidated by the sight of modern weapons. That we could withstand their murderous attack and now fight back has upset their well-laid plans. Cut them off from all sources of foodstuffs. With all communications with their headquarters in Dhaka cut off by the people, their sole source for supplies and reinforcements is through airdrops. These are facing exhaustion due to lack of aviation fuel and the coming of the nor'wester season which makes flying dangerous. They face gradual isolation in a hostile sea which threatens to overrun them any day.

The world community is also beginning to sit up and take notice of this major conflagration raging in the world's eighth largest country, the People's Republic of Bangladesh. No longer do the Islamabad government's lies about enforcing law and order in Dhaka and the attainment of normalcy carry any conviction. As journalists and private citizens escape from the horrors of war-ravaged Bangladesh, they bring tales of war, atrocity, massacre, loot and terror inflicted by Yahya's murderous hordes. As journalists travel freely in the liberated regions they bear witness to the slaughter and destruction and confirm the heroic resistance of the people of Bangladesh.

Already the USSR and India have taken notice of the genocide and the USSR has urged Pakistan to desist from its acts of repression. Even Britain has taken cognizance of the conflagration. Ceylon [Sri Lanka] and Burma [Myanmar] have responded to world opinion by refusing refuelling rights to Pakistani planes carrying their cargo of death to Dhaka.

We must in this task never forget that this has been a people's war in the truest sense of the word and that without the courage, patriotism and faith of the common man in the cause of a free Bangladesh we would never be able to enjoy the fruits of independence. We must therefore build a new world for the toiling masses of Bangladesh, free from exploitation of man by man.

JAI BANGLA.

JAI INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH.

The next important landmark was on 17 April 1971, when there was a public function in a mango grove at Baidyanathtala of Meherpur

subdivision in Kushtia district, renamed Mujibnagar, to formally proclaim Bangladesh as a sovereign democratic republic. The red-and-green flag with the map of Bangladesh inscribed on it in golden colours fluttered. A National Assembly member, Professor Yusuf Ali, read out the proclamation in Bengali which stated: 'We ratify the Declaration of Independence by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman [on 26 March].' The function began with the singing of Rabindranath Tagore's *Amar Sonar Bangla ami tomay bhalobhasi* (Oh my Golden Bengal, I adore thee), which became the national anthem of Bangladesh. Those who were sworn in were: Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam; Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed; and three other ministers, viz., Khondakar Mushtaq Ahmed, Captain Mansur Ali and M. Kamaruzzaman. Col. Osmani (promoted general) was appointed chief commander of the Mukti Bahini.

The programme was arranged very secretly and all the MNAs and MPs available in India were taken there by road transport. A big contingent of journalists was also taken there. There were tight security arrangements by Mukti Bahini and the Border Security Force (BSF) of India. After Professor Yusuf Ali had read the proclamation of independence on behalf of the people's representatives of Bangladesh, the cabinet took oath.

A proclamation of independence order, signed by 167 members of the Pakistan National Assembly out of 169 elected from East Pakistan, issued on 10 April and now reiterated, stated as follows:

[W]e the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh, as honour-bound by the mandate given to us by the people of Bangladesh whose will is supreme, duly constituted ourselves into a Constituent Assembly, and having held mutual consultations, and in order to ensure for the people of Bangladesh equality, human dignity and social justice, declare and constitute Bangladesh to be a sovereign people's republic and thereby confirm the declaration of independence already made by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; and

We further resolve that to give effect to this our resolution, we authorize and appoint Prof. M. Yusuf Ali, our duly constituted plenipotentiary to give the President and vice-president oaths of office.

Speaking before the first meeting of the provisional cabinet, the acting President, Nazrul Islam recalled that Bangladesh's independent government

was being established in a mango grove 214 years after Bengal lost its freedom in a mango grove at Plassey in the same district.

After formation of the government in exile all activities of Bangladesh were coordinated by this cabinet. Mujibnagar was declared the temporary capital of Bangladesh, but actually Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed also had a camp office at 8, Theatre Road, Calcutta, made available by the Government of India. The new government appealed to foreign countries for recognition. On 18 April 1971, the Pakistan deputy high commissioner in Calcutta, Hussain Ali, declaring his allegiance to Bangladesh, took charge of the office and hoisted the flag of Bangladesh. The next day the Bangladesh Mission, formerly the Pakistan Deputy High Commission in Calcutta, started functioning.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Army's atrocities drove lakhs of refugees from Bangladesh to India. Refugee camps came up in the states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The figure of refugees reached around ten million in a few months, imposing severe strain on the resources of the Indian government. As India's repeated appeals to Pakistan to create conditions favourable for the refugees to return to their hearth and home met with no response, India got a ready excuse to help the freedom fighters. Slowly but surely, India's moral support to Bangladesh was turning into material support.

On 30 April, the Indian Army was authorized to help the liberation war. On 9 May they started to give training to Bangladesh youths. At that time Pakistan Army was creating havoc throughout Bangladesh in collaboration with the Bihari Muslims and Rajakars. A re-equipped and trained Mukti Bahini started carrying out guerrilla warfare all over Bangladesh from April–May 1971. On 9 August 1971, India signed the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty in order to gain a strategic advantage vis-à-vis the China–US–Pakistan axis. This made India more free to act vis-à-vis Bangladesh.

On 1 May 1971, the Bangladesh government appointed Justice Abu Syed Choudhury, vice chancellor of Dhaka University, as its representative to the United Nations. On 3 May 1971, the former Pakistani diplomat,

Shehabuddin, who had defected from Pakistan, was appointed chief of the Bangladesh Information Bureau in Delhi.

On 2 June, five Regional Administrative Councils were formed consisting of elected people's representatives. These councils were active in border areas. Bangladesh Mukti Fauj was formed in May and since July it was commonly known as 'regular force'. The liberation forces operated in these sectors and were commanded by the following sector commanders respectively: Major Ziaur Rahman in charge of the Z force operating in Chittagong–Tippera sector; Major Khaled Mosharraf in charge of the K force operating in Sylhet–Comilla sector; Major Safiullah commanding Sector 3; Major C.R. Dutt commanding Sector 4; Major Mir Shaukat Ali for Sector 5; Wing Commander Basher commanding Sector 6; Captain Nazrul Huq for Sector 7; Captain Abu Osman for Sector 8; Major Jalil for Sector 9; Major Rafiqul Islam for Sector 10; and Major Tahir for Sector 11.

There were also several irregular forces like the one commanded by Kader 'Tiger' Siddiqui in Tangail–Mymensingh area; Latif Mirza Bahini of Sirajganj; Hemayat Bahini of Faridpur; Gafur Bahini of Barisal; and Aftab Bahini of Mymensingh. Taken together, these forces constituted the Mukti Fauj under the overall command of Colonel Osmani. They were later renamed 'Mukti Bahini'. The outline of the freedom struggle gradually became clear. The Pakistan military entrenched in Dhaka, Chittagong and some other major towns did everything possible to crush civilian resistance, while the people in rural areas more or less declared their freedom and engaged in systematic harassment of the occupation army, removing all signs of Pakistan's rule.

Meanwhile, the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, through regular transmission, created a light of hope in the minds of people in occupied Bangladesh. Commando-type attack by the Mukti Bahini started in the border areas and gradually spread all over.

Slowly, the Pakistan Army, with no support from the people and facing constant harassment from the freedom fighters, started to lose their confidence about their occupation of former East Pakistan. Newly trained students and youths destabilized Pakistani positions in the border areas of

Bangladesh. Pakistanis were compelled to readjust their army formations in such a way that they could only control towns. The freedom fighters took control of nearly all border outposts. On several occasions, when Pakistani rulers invited foreign journalists to show that everything was 'normal' in occupied Bangladesh, in their presence Mukti Bahini made heroic attacks on the Pakistan Army units, thus showing the world media that the claim of normality was a myth. In the face of Pakistani genocide the people of Bangladesh had crossed over to India in thousands. The overwhelming refugee problem and guerrilla warfare of Bangladesh freedom fighters got prominence in world media.

Tajuddin Ahmed convened a meeting of elected representatives on 5 and 6 July 1971, and a meeting of the sector commanders was held in the camp office of the prime minister in Calcutta with very positive results for the liberation struggle. Since July, border conflicts between the BSF and the Pakistan Army were a regular phenomenon; the BSF needed active participation of Bangladesh sector units in these conflicts. By August–September the Z force, the K force and the S force won control of their respective border regions.

On 15 August, Bangladesh Navy was established with two ships and forty-five navy personnel. Since then naval commandos of Mukti Bahini made their appearance felt with unbelievable courage. They included 300 students and youths and destroyed Pakistani ships of 50,800 tonnage, damaged ships of 66,040 tonnage and captured many Pakistani marine vessels. As arms and ammunitions supply increased and training facilities broadened, the liberation struggle picked momentum in September. At that time the Mukti Bahini gained sufficient strength to hit Pakistanii establishment in urban areas, even in the outskirts of Dhaka. The morale of the Pakistan Army and their collaborators declined sharply. They ceased to move out of secured areas. Bangladesh Air Force, led by Air Commodore A.K. Khondakar and comprising two planes, one helicopter, seventeen officers and fifty technicians, also started operating from Dimapur in Nagaland, India, from 28 September.

A national advisory committee of Bangladesh government was formed on 8 September with representatives from Awami League, Communist Party of Bangladesh, National Awami Party (Muzaffar)—NAP (M), National Awami Party (Bhashani)—NAP (B), and Bangladesh National Congress. Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed was the convenor of this committee. By November, most of the border outposts of the Pakistan Army were destroyed by attack of BSF and Mukti Bahini. So, the Pakistani junta in occupied Bangladesh adopted the ‘fortress’ concept of defence which meant converting important towns into fortresses and defending them to the last. Meanwhile, an important meeting was held at Mujibnagar in October between high officials of India and the Bangladesh government regarding the future course of the struggle and the quantum of direct military support from India needed by Bangladesh forces to liberate Bangladesh quickly. Both Prime Minister Tajuddin and Army Chief M.A.G. Osmani told the Indians bluntly that a speedy end of Pakistan’s brutal military occupation of Bangladesh could be possible only if the Indian Army fought the Pakistan Army directly, alongside the Bangladesh Army. The Mujibnagar meeting also made specific proposals for (i) India’s formal recognition of Bangladesh and (ii) the establishment of a joint command of the Bangladesh and Indian armies to carry on the fight against Pakistan for Bangladesh’s complete liberation.³ After detailed negotiations in November, a joint command structure was established in which Lt General Jagjit Singh Aurora, chief of India’s Eastern Command, would be the supreme commander of the joint forces and Col. Osmani would be his Bangladeshi counterpart.

Meanwhile, as already noted, there was a tidal wave of refugee movement across the border into India, the number of refugees reaching the figure of over ten million. This gave India a good reason, both to assist the freedom fighters and also to appeal to the international community to put pressure on the military government of Pakistan to stop repression in Bangladesh and to hand over power to the elected representatives of the people. From the beginning, Bangladesh and India drew the world’s attention to this gigantic refugee problem and Pakistan government’s

inability to create conditions where masses of people did not feel compelled to leave their homes and cross the border to seek safety and shelter. India complained of the tremendous economic burden the country had to bear in providing food and shelter to this vast multitude of refugees spread over the states of West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. The Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, travelled to leading Western countries requesting them to put pressure on the military rulers of Pakistan to accept the democratic right of the people of their eastern wing, to take the refugees back and to rehabilitate them. The West's apathy was in fact one of the main reasons for India's subsequent military intervention. Bangladesh also sent several delegations to various parts of the world to influence opinion in its favour.

From April to November 1971, civil war conditions prevailed in Bangladesh with the Mukti Bahini, backed by the Indian Army from across the border, carrying on a relentless guerrilla war against the Pakistan Army units. For the people of Bangladesh it was nine months of protracted misery. The people assisted Mukti Bahini everywhere and opposed the Pakistan Army. The Mukti Bahini also received logistic support from the Indian Army. Also, the people of West Bengal and Tripura and the city of Calcutta stood by their Bengalee brethren in every possible way.

The exact state of affairs in Bangladesh under Pakistan military operations is picturesquely described in the following lines by a very unlikely source, viz., General Niazi in his book *Betrayal of East Pakistan* (1999):

I found that the provincial government machinery was not functioning. The Pakistan army and administration were completely isolated from the local population and the Bengali officials. The Bengalis were determined to give no help to the hated West Pakistanis. We had become unwanted foreigners in our own country. Markets and bazaars were more or less closed and life was paralysed. So far as Urdu-speaking people were concerned, they were stopped and mobbed at the airport. There was no regular supply system for the troops. The whole province was in revolt. The Pakistan army was fighting in and around cantonments and camps and these became fortresses of power. Their only link with Dhaka and with each other was by air. All other communications were cut, blocked and out of commission. The rest of the country was under the control of Mukti Bahini, whose morale was sky high and had the initiative with them. Most of the ferries and ferry sites were in siege position. Soldiers could move about in big groups only. Individuals and small parties faced threats and ambush. If anybody dared to sneak out

individually, he was murdered. In a nutshell disorganization was prevalent in the military, social, political and economic spheres and confusion prevailed.

By the end of November, Pakistani rulers came to realize that it was not possible for them to continue their occupation of Bangladesh much longer. Their military and administrative strategy did not work at all in the face of waves of attacks by Mukti Bahini. They thought the only way remaining for them to save face was to start a total war with India. Then perhaps Pakistan's international friends would get an opportunity to intervene and settle matters in their favour. With this thinking they started air attacks deep into Indian air bases on 3 December 1971. Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, was in Calcutta that day. This blatant air attack gave India the excuse it was seeking to intervene directly in Bangladesh.

Thus Pakistan's total war with India facilitated the success of Mukti Bahini in the eastern front, i.e., in Bangladesh and also facilitated the Indian Army's direct involvement.

On 6 December 1971 Indira Gandhi made a statement in the Indian parliament recognizing Gana Prajatantri Bangladesh. The following is an extract from her speech:

The valiant struggle of the people of Bangladesh in the face of tremendous odds has opened a new chapter of heroism in the history of freedom movements.

Earlier, they had recorded a great democratic victory in their elections and even the President of Pakistan had conceded the right of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to become Prime Minister of Pakistan. We shall never know what intervened to transform this benevolent mood and realistic approach, if it really was that, to deception and the posture of open hatred ...

These events on our doorstep and the resulting flood of refugees into our territory could not but have far-reaching repercussions on our country. It was natural that our sympathy should be with the people of Bangladesh in their just struggle. But we did not act precipitately in the matter of recognition. Our decisions were not guided merely by emotion but by an assessment of prevailing and future realities.

With the unanimous revolt of the entire people of Bangladesh and the success of their struggle it has become increasingly apparent that the so-called State of Pakistan is totally incapable of bringing the people of Bangladesh back under its control. As for the legitimacy of the Government of Bangladesh the whole world is now aware that it reflects the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, which not many Governments can claim to represent. In Jefferson's famous words to Governor Morris, the Government of Bangladesh is supported by the 'will of the nation, substantially expressed'. Applying this

criterion, the military regime of Pakistan, whom some States are so anxious to buttress, is hardly representative of its people even in West Pakistan.

Now that Pakistan is waging war against India, the normal hesitation on our part not to do anything which could come in the way of a peaceful solution, or which might be construed as intervention, has lost significance. The people of Bangladesh battling for their very existence and the people of India fighting to defeat aggression now find themselves partisans in the same cause.

I am glad to inform the House that in the light of the existing situation and in response to the repeated requests of the Government of Bangladesh, the Government of India has, after the most careful consideration, decided to grant recognition to the Gana Projatantri Bangladesh.

On the same day the Indian Army, provoked by Pakistan's air attacks, crossed the border in aid of the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini on three fronts. Mukti Bahini and Indian Army were advancing like a typhoon along these three fronts, viz., Jessore–Khulna, Sylhet–Mymensingh and Dinajpur–Rangpur, shattering the Pakistani defence in Bangladesh. Towns and districts, one by one, were liberated. Meanwhile, the Indian Air Force eliminated the Pakistan Air Force in Bangladesh in twenty-four hours, and the Indian Navy made the ports of Chittagong and Chalna non-operational through its blockade.

The Indian Army and the Bangladesh freedom fighters overpowered the Pakistan forces in three to four days. They also received overwhelming popular support and were welcomed as the liberators. They liberated Jessore, Khulna, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Rangpur, Dinajpur and all major towns in a three-pronged attack, encircled Dhaka and asked the Pakistan forces to surrender.

The Bangladesh war of independence had its international repercussions. Both the US and China supported Pakistan in the UN Security Council, while the Soviet Union stood solidly behind India and Bangladesh in their efforts to secure Bangladesh's independence. Despite President Nixon's strong support for Pakistan, many US leaders like Senator Kennedy supported Bangladesh. The situation reached a critical point when the US Seventh Fleet advanced to the Bay of Bengal in a clear gesture of support to Pakistan forces in Bangladesh. This coincided with General Niazi, the commander of the Pakistan forces in Bangladesh, appealing for ceasefire

through the UN. Had the Indo-Bangladesh joint military command agreed to the ceasefire, Bangladesh's independence would have been delayed considerably, as Pakistan's forces would still have been in possession of Dhaka. The world might have had to live with the prospect of yet another divided country (Bangladesh) for some time and the deadlock would have continued in the UN Security Council, with the Western friends of Pakistan pushing a resolution for immediate ceasefire and the Soviet Union vetoing it.

But the united command of Bangladesh and India simply ignored this development and redoubled the efforts to capture Dhaka. It also appealed to the Pakistani forces in Bangladesh to surrender. As it was difficult for the army to cross the Meghna River in full strength quickly, a brigade was paradropped in the Tangail area. With support from Mukti Bahini contingents, led by Tiger Kader Siddiqui, these Indian forces reached Tongi on 14 December, Savar on 15 December, and called upon the Pakistan forces to surrender.

On 15 December 1971, the Pakistan-appointed governor, Dr A.M. Malik, resigned somewhat dramatically, creating a vacuum, as the Indian forces and the Mukti Bahini reached the outskirts of Dhaka from three sides. On 16 December 1971, Dhaka was liberated. In the morning Major General Jamshed, Commander of Pakistan's 14 Division, surrendered to the Indian General Nagra near Mirpur bridge in Dhaka. At 10.40 a.m. the Indian forces, accompanied by Kader Siddiqui and his men, entered Dhaka city. On that day at 5 p.m., General Niazi, the commander of the 93,000-strong Pakistan forces, surrendered to Lt General Jagjit Singh Aurora, the commander-in-chief of the joint forces of the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini, which was represented at the ceremony by Group Captain A.K. Khondakar on behalf of Gen. Osmani, who was unable to reach Dhaka. The instrument of surrender (see [Annexure D](#)) was signed at the Ramna Race Course (present-day Suhrawardy Udyan). Dhaka was now firmly established as the capital of the independent People's Republic of Bangladesh.

But even in the hour of their defeat, the pro-Pakistan Razakars and Ansars, backed by the Pakistan Army, committed a dastardly crime against humanity by slaughtering hundreds of intellectuals and professionals after arresting them at several locations around Dhaka. The clear intention was to deprive Bangladesh of the services of a large number of people who could provide professional and intellectual leadership to the new nation. On 20 December, Premier Tajuddin, along with his colleagues, returned to Dhaka. All attention now centred on Bangabandhu who had been tried secretly in August–September in Lyalpur Jail in Pakistan and sentenced to death. There was great pressure on Pakistan from countries like the Soviet Union, India and many international organizations for Mujib's release. They felt that Pakistan had no right to detain one who was now President of an independent Bangladesh recognized by many countries. In response to international pressure Bhutto, who had replaced Yahya Khan as President of Pakistan, released Mujib from detention on 8 January 1972 and had him flown to London.

On 11 January 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to Dhaka from London, to an unforgettable hero's welcome, after a stopover in Delhi airport where President V.V. Giri and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi greeted him. On 12 January, he formally took over as prime minister. A new dawn came after a nine-month-long war of liberation when an independent Bangladesh, named People's Republic of Bangladesh, started its existence as a free member of the comity of nations. The oddity called East Pakistan, left by the British on the subcontinent, was gone. This was also a great victory for Bengalee nationalism that had smarted for a quarter of a century, since the withdrawal of British rule in 1947, under conditions of exploitation, oppression and discrimination by Pakistan's ruling class. It was a long struggle, the last nine months of which from March to December 1971 were marked by frontal warfare.

WEST BENGAL

The West Bengal Story

West Bengal celebrated Independence Day with Mahatma Gandhi staying in Calcutta amidst unprecedented scenes of Hindu–Muslim accord after a year of nightmares. The Congress government led by Dr P.C. Ghosh was sworn in. Also, C. Rajagopalachari, a veteran Congress leader, replaced Sir Frederick Burrows as governor. Mahatma Gandhi, at the request of H.S. Suhrawardy—who had returned from Karachi on hearing of the relapse of communal violence in Calcutta—stayed on in Calcutta to work for communal peace and harmony. Gandhi stayed at a dilapidated house at Beliaghata called Hyder Manzil and travelled to various trouble spots of the city accompanied by H.S. Suhrawardy. There was a spectacular show of communal harmony on 15 August.

But the euphoria was short-lived as communalism, largely triggered by antisocial elements, once again raised its ugly head by 31 August. This led to Gandhi's fast unto death, which he said he would break only when all parties responsible for the violence openly repudiated it. This produced a magical effect once again, and on 4 September 1947 peace returned and Gandhi broke his fast. He announced that he would now travel through trouble-torn Punjab. He left for Delhi on 9 October 1947 and stayed there until his assassination on 30 January 1948 by a fanatic Hindu who wanted to punish him for his 'appeasement' of the Muslims.

Meanwhile, the Radcliffe Boundary Award had been announced on 17 August creating a strange situation where certain districts that had imagined themselves to be part of one country, were given to another. Inevitably, there was tension in all these districts. But Dr Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, the West Bengal CM, and Khwaja Nazimuddin, his East Bengal counterpart issued a joint appeal to the people of the two Bengals asking them to accept the Radcliffe Award peacefully.

The Congress government, led by Dr Prafulla Chandra Ghosh as chief minister, was short-lived. It was in power for only five months. In January 1948, Congress MLAs chose Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy as their leader. Dr Ghosh, essentially without experience in either legislative work or party structure had an uneasy time from the beginning. With the vast Congress organizational network left behind in East Bengal, and with the West Bengal Congress coming under the solid control of the close-knit Hooghly–Midnapore group, Dr Ghosh found himself without any support base. His uncompromising nature and acid tongue put many against him including the powerful business interests. His handling of the West Bengal Security Bill and the resultant agitation, including police firing killing one student, led to further troubles and he had to make way in less than six months. Dr Roy formed his government on 23 January 1948. Kiran Shankar Roy, the Congress veteran, who had willingly stayed on in East Bengal, became home minister of West Bengal at Dr Roy's request. His departure from East Bengal left the Hindus there leaderless. Another veteran, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, became finance minister. One of the first acts of the new administration was to ban the Communist Party of India in West Bengal, defying Central leadership, on the grounds that this party was seeking to overthrow the government by armed rebellion. This party stayed banned till 1950 when, taking advantage of the newly proclaimed Constitution, it moved the Calcutta High Court invoking the fundamental rights and got the ban rescinded.

Also, Dr B.C. Roy had to face a grave threat within his own party when a large number of Congress dissidents, including some ministers, tried to unseat him. He showed great determination in taking up this challenge. He

dismissed the dissident ministers and re-established his hold over the party by calling an emergent meeting of the Congress MLAs who reaffirmed his leadership by an overwhelming majority.

Bidhan Chandra Roy was destined to dominate West Bengal politics and also play a leading role in national politics for nearly two decades. Meanwhile, a drastic change came about in the West Bengal Congress party with the so-called Hooghly–Midnapore group led by Atulya Ghosh assuming a dominant position, by and large replacing the leaders based in East Bengal. Atulya Ghosh became the president of the provincial Congress party and gave solid support to Dr B.C. Roy during his entire regime. Very soon the Gandhian group in the Congress, under the leadership of Dr Ghosh, left the Congress to found the Krishak Praja Party which was to merge with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party of J.B. Kripalani at the all-India level. Dr B.C. Roy could now turn his attention to restoring law and order and also start the process of rebuilding the shattered economy of West Bengal. The years 1948–52 were the years of reconstruction, rehabilitation and stabilization. He had to spend much time and energy in undoing the adverse effects of Partition, for instance, by emphasizing on cultivation of jute in West Bengal and in selected stretches of Orissa and Bihar to feed the Calcutta jute mills, traditionally dependent on jute crop from East Bengal; providing relief and rehabilitation benefits to refugees from East Bengal; restoring vital communication links; and taking steps towards West Bengal's industrial recovery.

In 1949 the princely state of Koch Bihar acceded to the Indian Union and was temporarily put under a chief commissioner. It was thereafter merged in West Bengal as one of its districts. Also, the French possession of Chandernagore (present-day Chandannagar) became part of West Bengal as a subdivision in Hooghly district after the merger of the French territories with the Indian Union through negotiations between France and India.

The Constitution of India came into effect on 26 January 1950 and West Bengal became a state of the Union of India. Serious communal riots in East Bengal triggered off a large-scale movement of Hindu refugees into West Bengal and Assam. Retaliatory communal riots broke out in some

parts of West Bengal. The refugee problem seriously affected West Bengal's economy. The government had also to contend with the problem of communist insurgency and the persisting economic problems due to Partition.

The Nehru–Liaquat Pact, signed between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan, concerned the borders and the Hindu minority in East Bengal. It reiterated that the minority population in the two Bengals should generally stay on in their respective homes instead of migrating to the other country as had happened in the case of the two Punjabs. Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and K.C. Neogy resigned from the Union cabinet in protest against the pact, which in their opinion failed to address the problem of insecurity and discrimination faced by the minority in East Bengal. Shyama Prasad formed a new political party, Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Shortly thereafter, Jogendra Nath Mandal, law and labour minister of Pakistan since 1947, resigned and sought political asylum in India after his arrival in Calcutta, announcing that Pakistan was no place for Hindus to live in with safety and dignity. West Bengal now faced an unprecedented refugee problem. Refugee colonies sprang up all along the border districts and all around Calcutta. In many instances refugees simply squatted on the sprawling estates of rich people around Calcutta or on government land with the authorities looking away; shanty towns with inadequate housing and unsanitary conditions sprouted up. Often families were separated. Giving displaced persons title to the land they squatted upon and providing them other rehabilitation benefits took many years. Unlike the refugees from West Punjab, Bengalee refugees never got any evacuee property as very few houses or plots of land left by migrating Muslims were available in West Bengal. There had been no exchange of population as between the two Punjabs. West Bengal always had to face migration from the east, sometimes in trickles, sometimes like tidal waves.

Shortly thereafter came India's first general elections. In 1952 it returned the Congress to power in West Bengal Assembly with the Communist Party of India—whose legality had been restored by the high court—as the main Opposition, led by Jyoti Basu, leader of the Party. Shyama Prasad was

elected to the Lok Sabha from south Calcutta and made a great mark as an Opposition leader in the Indian parliament. However, he died an untimely death in 1953, while in detention in Kashmir for entering that state without permission and courting arrest in protest against the requirement of Indian nationals to secure a special permit to enter Jammu and Kashmir. West Bengal was grief-stricken.

The question of incorporating the Bengali-speaking areas from Bihar and Assam into West Bengal drew the authorities' attention for a while. In 1956 the Government of India set up a States Reorganization Commission. West Bengal had demanded inclusion of Manbhum and Singhbhum districts and a portion of Purnea district from Bihar, which were Bengali-speaking. West Bengal also wanted the district of Goalpara from Assam. There was opposition from both Bihar and Assam. In the meantime, Dr B.C. Roy, along with the Bihar chief minister, Dr Srikrishna Sinha, pressed for a merger between West Bengal and Bihar in the interest of economic and administrative stability. However, public opinion in West Bengal did not approve of this suggestion. Following a by-election to the north Calcutta parliamentary constituency, when the Congress candidate was defeated by the Opposition with a merger being the main issue, Dr B.C. Roy withdrew that proposal. Finally, as a result of the reorganization of the states, Purulia subdivision of Manbhum district and Islampur subdivision of Purnea district in Bihar were added to West Bengal. Islampur's addition provided a connecting link to Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar districts with the rest of West Bengal, thereby ending the enclave status of these three districts.

West Bengal's First Five-Year Plan (1951–56) started under Dr B.C. Roy's leadership. West Bengal's economy, after undoing the damages of Partition, grew at a fast pace. It once again became India's leading industrial state.

During the years 1952–59 there was a steady ascent of West Bengal's economy to the high noon of prosperity. With his great vision and penchant for innovative ideas, Dr B.C. Roy initiated and implemented a large number of schemes like Damodar Valley Corporation, Chittaranjan Locomotives,

Durgapur Steel Project, Digha Sea Beach Project, Kalyani Township, Salt Lake Reclamation Project in Calcutta, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling, Indian Institute of Technology at Kharagpur, and Indian Institute of Social Welfare and Business Management and Indian Institute of Management, both at Calcutta. He also initiated actions on abolition of zamindari system, the new land reform measures in West Bengal, construction of Bandel Thermal Plant, setting up of a subsidiary port at Haldia, several new universities like Burdwan, Kalyani, North Bengal and Rabindra Bharati and countless other schemes. His aim, to use his very words, was 'a prosperous Bengal in a prosperous India'. As West Bengal did not have enough land surface he tried to settle successive waves of migrants from East Bengal in Andaman Islands, in Uttar Pradesh Terai and lastly in the Dandakaranya forest region covering portions of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Unfortunately, these schemes were opposed by the leftists who, due to their own political compulsions, wanted rehabilitation only in West Bengal.

On 1 July 1962, Dr B.C. Roy's long rule ended when he died on his eighty-first birthday. Indeed, West Bengal's history from 1948 to 1962 can truly be called the Bidhan Roy era. He was succeeded by Prafulla Chandra Sen as chief minister. In October and November 1962, following border disputes along the north-eastern Himalayas, a militarily unprepared India was humbled by the Chinese in several border skirmishes. Due to these military clashes in the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) areas and India's military unpreparedness, its defence spending increased manifold with adverse effects on the economy.

The three northern districts, viz., Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar became the centres of military concentration for defence preparedness in relation to Chinese threats to the northern border. Vigorous construction activities in these districts to strengthen road and rail links with Assam and the north-east were started.

In 1964 serious communal riots broke out in several parts of East Bengal as a reprisal to the reported theft of a sacred relic of Prophet Muhammad from a mosque in Srinagar (Kashmir). There were also retaliatory

communal incidents in some parts of West Bengal. This led to large-scale migration of Hindu refugees to West Bengal who were mostly taken to distant Dandakaranya covering Orissa and Madhya Pradesh or the UP foothills (now Uttarakhand). Communal disturbances were put down in both Bengals in a short time. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru died in May 1964. He was succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri.

From March to May 1965 some border skirmishes took place between India and Pakistan over the Koch Bihar enclaves. In September 1965 there was a short war between these two countries along Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab borders. A ceasefire was followed by the Tashkent peace agreement brokered by the Soviet Union. But the East Pakistan–West Bengal border was free from any military clashes, thanks to the decision of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri not to extend military activities to East Pakistan. This was to pay a rich dividend in a few years.

The year 1966 saw a series of intense political unrest. The leftist parties led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which had broken away from the undivided CPI, launched a succession of civil disobedience movements against the government on issues like non-availability of foodgrains and general price rise. These movements would at times lead to serious law and order problems. As the general elections drew nearer political rivalry sharpened. There was a partial split in the West Bengal Congress with two top leaders, Ajoy Mukherjee and Humayun Kabir, quitting the party and establishing the Bangla Congress. But the Opposition failed to unite. Two political formations fought the Congress in the 1967 elections: the People's United Left Front (PULF) consisting of the Bangla Congress, CPI, Forward Block and the Bolshevik Party; and the United Left Front (ULF) consisting of the CPI(M), Revolutionary Socialist Party, Forward Block (Marxist) and others.

But in spite of the division of the Opposition ranks, the Congress failed to secure a majority in the Assembly. Thus the long rule of the Congress party in West Bengal ended. Both P.C. Sen and Atulya Ghosh, the president of the West Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, lost in their respective Assembly and parliamentary constituencies. Internal squabbles leading to a

split in the party and the formation of a breakaway new party, the Bangla Congress, were mainly responsible for the debacle. The Congress, though the largest party, refused to stake the claim for forming the government. Now faced with the prospect of securing power, the PULF and the ULF agreed to combine.

A United Front government consisting of Bangla Congress, CPI, CPI(M), Forward Block and other smaller parties, in a way a combination of the PULF and ULF, took over power under Ajoy Mukherjee as the chief minister and Jyoti Basu as finance minister. Soon it was to face its biggest challenge, not from the Congress, but from a section of its own extremist followers, viz., the Naxalites.

The Naxalbari agitation of sharecroppers started in Naxalbari police station of Darjeeling district led by CPI(M) extremists, who broke away from their party. It spread to a few other pockets, but its violent activities forced the United Front government to suppress this movement by police action. In November 1967 the United Front broke up and a breakaway group, the People's Democratic Front (PDF), with the support of the Congress, was sworn in with Dr Prafulla Ghosh as the head. This was the second time that Dr Ghosh became the chief minister. But soon the coalition government was under strain on account of internal bickering. Dr Ghosh's refusal to accept certain demands from a powerful Congress party manager led to the wavering of support from a large section of the Congress party. An abortive attempt was made by those sections under the leadership of a Congress leader, Sankardas Banerjee, to stake claim to power. Besides, a strange situation was created by the Speaker of the Assembly, Bijoy Banerjee, who refused to recognize the governor's action in dismissing Ajoy Mukherjee's government and installing Dr P.C. Ghosh's government and he adjourned the Assembly indefinitely. As the Assembly could not meet there was a constitutional crisis.

By February 1968, the PDF government, reduced to a minority as a result of Congress's withdrawal of support, was dismissed by the President under Article 356 of the Indian Constitution and Governor Dharma Vira took over administration. The Assembly was now dissolved.

Elections were held and a second United Front government came to power with Ajoy Mukherjee as the chief minister and Jyoti Basu as the deputy chief minister and home minister. Once again Naxalite violence continued unabated, this time joined by some idealist but misguided students who left their studies to join the Naxalite ranks. Also, the gherao movement unleashed by the leftist parties—under which industrial workers were given the freedom to physically surround industrialists and managers in industrial disputes without the intervention of the police—seriously disturbed industrial relations. Flight of capital started and continued for a long time. West Bengal started losing her industrial supremacy. This was the beginning of the long process of West Bengal's industrial downslide caused by Naxalite violence, chronic labour troubles, flight of capital and investment, strikes and sharp deterioration of work culture and productivity. West Bengal lost her industrial primacy to other states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Orissa.

In 1969 the Congress also got split between the Indira Gandhi-led Congress in power at the Centre and the Congress (Organization) led by the old-guard leadership. The 1971 mid-term elections to Parliament returned Indira Gandhi to power at the Centre on her *Garibi Hatao* (Remove Poverty) slogan. The Congress (O) was seriously decimated.

Meanwhile, serious disagreement between Ajoy Mukherjee and the communists led to the dismissal of the second United Front government and proclamation of President's rule again (1970). In the general elections to the West Bengal Assembly, a new combination with Ajoy Mukherjee as chief minister, Bejoy Singh Nahar as deputy chief minister and the Congress as a constituent party came to power (popularly called the Ajoy–Bejoy Coalition) with a precarious majority. But events were moving very fast across the border. In March 1971 Pakistan's military crackdown on East Pakistan was followed by the declaration of independence by Bangladesh led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. India expressed total support for East Pakistan's freedom. West Bengal faced a massive refugee problem with around ten million refugees pouring in. The fragile coalition government was inadequate to cope with the vastly growing problems of the state and

resigned, leading to yet another phase of President's rule. There were also military movements along the borders. A short war between India and Pakistan took place from 6 to 16 December 1971 when Indian forces intervened on the side of Bangladesh freedom fighters (Mukti Bahini). On 16 December, Dhaka fell to the joint Indo-Bangladesh forces signalling Pakistan's total military defeat. The surrender of the Pakistan Army in Dhaka on 16 December 1971 led to the emergence of Bangladesh as a free country—no longer East Pakistan, as East Bengal was officially known between 1956 and 1971. From now on, in terms of international law, West Bengal could no longer lay claim to the title 'Bangladesh' in the political sense.

In the elections to the state Assembly held in 1972, the Congress, led by Siddhartha Shankar Ray, returned to power winning the election amidst vociferous complaints, by the leftists, of widespread rigging. This led to the return of industrial confidence to some degree. However, large-scale factionalism prevailed in the Congress during the entire five-year Congress rule.

On 11 June 1975, a judgment of Allahabad High Court declared Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's election to Parliament in 1971 as invalid on grounds of electoral malpractices. Political uncertainty set in thereafter. On 25 June, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of Emergency with S.S. Ray as one of her principal advisers. The government clamped down on the press and censorship was increased. This was followed by arrest of political opponents and dissident journalists. The Congress party steadily lost its popularity during the two years of the Emergency.

On 12 January 1977, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared an end to the state of Emergency and announced dates for new general elections. In March 1977, the Indira Congress was defeated and the Janata Party government, a combine of anti-Emergency right and left forces, came to power in Delhi with Morarji Desai as the prime minister. Congress candidates were defeated in all but two of the Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal indicating that the public had not approved the Emergency. On 30 April 1977, the Central government dismissed the Siddhartha Shankar Ray

government in West Bengal, on the grounds that the recent Lok Sabha elections had demonstrated that the Congress had lost the people's confidence, and brought West Bengal under President's rule. Elections were held within two months' time, that is, by June 1977. The Janata Party, led by P.C. Sen and the CPI(M)-led Left Front, failed to arrive at an electoral understanding and fought separately. The Left Front, backed by its grass-roots organization, gained an absolute majority and formed the first Left Front government with Jyoti Basu as chief minister. The combine has ruled West Bengal ever since. Jyoti Basu was to rule as chief minister for twenty-three years, that is, till the year 2000 when he stepped down on grounds of old age. He was succeeded by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Under Bhattacharjee's leadership the Left Front won two more elections in 2001 and 2006. Despite the Trinamool Congress—a break-away group from the Congress under the leadership of the maverick Mamata Banerjee posing a challenge—the Opposition on the whole continued to be hopelessly divided and this facilitated the CPI(M)-led Left Front's victory. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee gave primary attention to industrial development and tried to introduce new thrusts such as special economic zones (SEZs) and promotion of foreign direct investment. This attracted a considerable section of industrialists, but has alienated sections of farmers who are opposed to the takeover of farmland for setting up industrial units. Meanwhile, the dominant trade unions are also looking askance at the new pro-capitalist policies. After over thirty years of rule in West Bengal the CPI(M) has reached its crossroads.

BENGALEES IN INDIA OUTSIDE WEST BENGAL

As noted earlier, there is a substantial number of Bengalees in India outside West Bengal. The two principal regions are: (i) the Barak Valley in Assam consisting of the predominantly Bengali-speaking districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj, and (ii) the predominantly Bengali-speaking districts formerly in Bihar and now in Jharkhand.

The Bengalees of Barak Valley had to wage a long struggle to get their linguistic rights accepted in Assam. In 1971, when the Assam government

proceeded to declare Assamese as the only official language in the whole of Assam, including the predominantly Bengali-speaking districts of Barak Valley and other districts in the Brahmaputra Valley, the Bengalees of Barak Valley launched a do-or-die non-cooperation agitation, resulting in firing by the police forces at Silchar railway station that led to the martyrdom of twelve Bengalee students on 19 May 1972. The resultant agitation forced the Assam government to confer on Bengali the status of the official language for the districts of Barak Valley in Assam. The date 19 May, therefore, stands on the same footing in Assam as 21 February in Bangladesh.

Ten years later, there was once more an attempt to make Assamese the only acceptable language for the Gauhati University. This led to another agitation in the Barak Valley, leading once again to the martyrdom of two students in 1985. Hence the authorities were forced to accept Bengali as a language for university purposes in the Barak Valley. There is still a simmering tension in Assam.

In Bihar too there was a systematic attempt by the authorities to squeeze out the Bengali language from schools and colleges all over Bihar. There was thus a simmering tension all along. With the creation of the state of Jharkhand in 2002, Bengali became the mother tongue of 42 per cent of the population of this state, resulting in a clamour for recognition of Bengali as the second language of the state. This has been unofficially conceded, but is still to be implemented officially.

Outside these predominantly Bengali-speaking areas, there are areas in Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh, where substantial number of Bengalee refugees have been settled, but no linguistic rights have been granted. So Bengalees outside Bengal and Assam are facing, in general, an acute problem of identity.

Epilogue

The state of Bangladesh has had a chequered history during its first four decades. Unfortunately, the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was tragically short-lived. His initial period was spent in reconstruction of his country ravaged by nine months of war, and before that a deadly cyclone. Among his achievements were reorganization of the administrative structure, framing of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and its adoption on the first anniversary of liberation, rehabilitation of ten million refugees fleeing from Pakistan Army's onslaught, restoration of communications system, achieving recognition from almost all the countries within a short time and becoming a member of the UN, securing departure of the friendly Indian Army by 12 March 1971, nationalization of banks, insurance companies and 580 industrial units vacated by the Pakistanis, reorganization and extension of the education system, and establishing new industrial units. In the first general election held under the new Constitution, the Awami League won 293 out of 300 seats in the Jatiya Sansad. On 24 September 1974 Mujib addressed the UN General Assembly in Bengali.

Early in 1975, precisely during 24–25 February, Bangabandhu launched a new political party, Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) as a single national party and called upon all political parties (including the Awami League) and leaders to join. In his opinion, one-party rule and a presidential system were essential for achieving a self-reliant and economically strong nation. He called it the second revolution.

Perhaps he misjudged the situation as history showed.

In the predawn hours of 15 August 1975, the creator of independent Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, called the 'tallest Bengalee in thousand years', along with his wife, children and all his family members (sixteen in number), except two daughters who were abroad at the time, was

assassinated by a coterie of middle-level army officers due to personal vendetta. The precise motive of the assassins remained unclear.

There had been severe deterioration of the food situation in 1974–75 on account of serious failure of harvest that year and this no doubt accounted for growing unpopularity of the regime. Further, Mujib's experiment in winding up the Awami League and starting a new political party, leaving out old faithfuls like Tajuddin Ahmed, and turning the country into a one-party rule, also added to his isolation. This facilitated the conspiracy against him. The conspiracy, quite apparently backed by pro-Pakistan elements in the army, led to Khondakar Mushtaq Ahmed, a minister in Sheikh's government, who had turned a quisling, becoming President. The indecent haste with which the Pakistan government recognized the new regime on its first day, was prima facie evidence that the conspirators received support from that country.

Khondakar imposed martial law on the country and also forbade trial of the assassins of Bangabandhu, most of whom were allowed to go abroad. For a few days, civil war conditions prevailed, with various army groups fighting one another. A tragic episode of that period was the brutal killing, inside a prison, of the Awami League leadership, including Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed, by unknown assailants. This meant the virtual elimination of the top rung of the leadership of the freedom movement. Precisely who triggered off these heinous killings has never been revealed. Surely, Pakistan's secret services and anti-freedom religious forces had a role to play in it. K. Mushtaq Ahmed cannot escape responsibility. Eventually, troops loyal to Major General Ziaur Rahman released him from house detention on 6 November and proclaimed him as the chief martial law administrator. Ziaur Rahman's military dictatorship lasted till December 1980. He consolidated power and gradually transformed military rule to a democracy, starting his own political party, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), which had a substantial number of freedom fighters. Zia was also assassinated in 1981 by a group of fellow army officers whose motives were not clear. History repeated itself when the army chief, General Ershad, seized power and imposed martial law. After a short spell of army

rule, parliamentary democracy was restored in some measure, with Ershad leading his own Jatiya Dal. Thus both Zia and Ershad ensured a wider political role for the military. Ershad ruled as President till 1990. An important event during Ershad's presidency was declaring Islam as Bangladesh's state religion, although the country's name was not changed. This meant abandonment of secularism, a principle held dear by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, although Bangladesh was not declared an Islamic state. Ershad had soon to contend with united opposition from two confederate groups, one led by Mujib's daughter Hasina, who had rebuilt the Awami League, and the other led by Ziaur Rahman's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia, both wanting free elections and restoration of parliamentary democracy. Faced with this strong opposition, Ershad gave in and ordered elections to be held. But the tactical unity between Hasina Wajed and Khaleda Zia ended and a bitter confrontation ensued. Now two of the three parties which dominated politics in Bangladesh had strong military links, namely, the BNP and the Jatiya Dal.

Since then, Bangladesh has been ruled alternately by two coalitions led by Hasina Wajed and Khaleda Zia respectively. Khaleda Zia was prime minister till 1996 and was succeeded by Hasina when Awami League defeated the BNP in the elections. In 2001 Hasina's five-year rule ended when a BNP-led coalition defeated the Awami League-led coalition in the elections. This coalition included a small component of fundamentalist Muslim parties which also found their place in the coalition government. This became somewhat controversial. There is a view that, thanks to their overt and covert role, Muslim fundamentalism was strengthened in Bangladesh and became a threat to the nationalist forces. Declaration of Islam as state religion of Bangladesh by Ershad in 1988 enhanced the role of Islamic fundamentalist forces.

Bangladesh has made considerable progress in economic development during the last two decades through agricultural growth, remittances by non-resident Bangladeshis and export earnings through ready-to-wear garments. In the chequered history of Bangladesh after independence, it has been under army rule for fifteen years (1975–90), under parliamentary

democracy for the next fifteen years (1991–2006) and under a military-backed caretaker regime for two years.

After the end of Khaleda Zia's second term in October 2006, Bangladesh was once again thrown into a prolonged interregnum. Khaleda's relinquishment of power according to the Constitution, Hasina's strong demand for a new voters' list and the replacement of a partisan Election Commission before Awami League could take part in the elections, drove the President to declare an Emergency, set up an interim administration with advisers nominated by him and postpone the elections indefinitely. The army's declared backing of the interim government threw the country into a difficult situation.¹ The army, led by Gen. Moeen U. Ahmed, held the real power, although the announcement of martial law was scrupulously avoided. Thus between January 2007 and January 2009 Bangladesh was ruled by a carefully selected civilian government of which the armed forces were the backbone. In January 2007, the army chief could have deposed the President and taken over power. But he chose to resist the temptation and opted to allow the nominated civilian government headed by Fakhruddin Ahmed, an economist, to function effectively in bringing much-needed political and administrative reforms and restoring order, while remaining the power behind the caretaker government and letting it be known to the people. 'From the material currently available in public domain there is one plausible explanation—the army recognized the unpopularity of military rule and refrained from repeating past mistakes.'² Also, there were two other factors, viz., international pressure from the UN and other major powers with a veiled threat that any imposition of martial law might result in returning the sizeable Bangladesh military contingent on various peacekeeping missions; and pressure from a vocal civil society expressing its disgust for martial law. The interim government's decision to send both Hasina and Khaleda to jail on corruption charges; the earlier efforts to prevent Hasina from returning from abroad; and to send Khaleda (the so-called 'minus two' formula) into exile caused some alarm. Politicians of all parties were sent to prison en masse on corruption charges.

But the interim government took strong steps against the fundamentalist forces, bolstered the confidence of the religious minority, took strong measures to improve administration and revived Bangladesh's relationship with India, which had sunk to an all-time low under the previous Jote (Front) regime. The interim government repeatedly announced its intention to hold the elections by 2008 and hand over power to the elected representatives. The rising pressure from Bangladesh's civil society played a noticeable part in discouraging the military from taking an overt part in governance during those two years. Eventually, the interim administration did publish a computerized voters' list with photo identity cards and held a successful year-end election, which was remarkably free and fair as certified by international observers and the international media. A coalition of fourteen parties, led by the Awami League leader Hasina Wajed, including Ershad's followers, trounced the other coalition led by Khaleda Zia, winning an overwhelming—over two-thirds—majority. It was a clear rebuff to the anti-liberation and fundamentalist forces. Bangladesh returned to parliamentary democracy with a bang.

In spite of many political changes and recurrence of violence, democracy in a broad sense appears to have been established in Bangladesh. Efforts to establish military rule from time to time have not been successful in the face of strong popular feeling in favour of electoral politics and parliamentary democracy. As a veteran observer of the Bangladesh scenario rightly observes, 'Over the past century the Bengali Muslim has been conscious of the power of numbers and has demonstrated a healthy disdain for feudal or autocratic power. Though there have been military coups, the armed forces are not integral to the political structure as in Pakistan.'³ Also, despite the presence of a small but relatively strong Islamic fundamentalist force, the nation on the whole has upheld the interests of the minority communities consisting of Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. The main issues now facing the nation are: (i) whether the mainstream political parties, which have a nationalist past, can keep the fundamentalist forces under control; (ii) whether Bangladesh can evolve into a Muslim-majority

but non-theocratic nationalist state like Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey; and (iii) whether there can be true economic revival.

Turning to West Bengal, during the long period of the Left Front rule, despite the government's achievements on land reforms, cultural development and Panchayati Raj leading to the empowerment of the lower classes and the have-nots in the villages, West Bengal's general economy has steadily declined. West Bengal's position has slipped from among the top states as has Calcutta's position as the foremost industrial city. The Left Front government has now completed more than three decades of being in power, winning yet another general election in 2006. There have been some winds of change in recent years when Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, apparently influenced by the examples of Chinese and the Vietnamese communists, took some initiatives to break away from dogmatism and encourage private-sector initiatives, foreign direct investment and market economy. But the militant trade unions are still not reconciled to it. History will decide whether these initiatives will succeed. After three decades in power the CPI(M)-led Left Front received a big setback in 2006–07 on account of agrarian unrest following the government's attempt to industrialize Singur and Nandigram. The state government's efforts to set up a Tata Motors factory on the land forcefully acquired from the farmers at Singur and a chemical hub at Nandigram (East Midnapore) infuriated the rural peasantry, which was backed by the Trinamool Congress. This seriously eroded the Left Front's rural support base. There was already a strong anti-incumbency wave, as illustrated by the reverses suffered by the Left Front in the panchayat elections held in 2008. The anti-left forces achieved a clear victory in the elections to the Lok Sabha held in March–April 2009. The Trinamool Congress and the Congress entered into an alliance and trounced the Left Front in the elections securing 26 out of 42 seats, leaving only 15 seats for the Left Front candidates. Clearly, this marked the beginning of the end of the long left rule in West Bengal.

There is no doubt that people from both the Bengals cherish their common history, the commonality of cultural outlook and shared attitudes over other factors. In the case of Bangladesh, while they are proud of their

language and cultural identity, they have to steer a middle course between two powerful ‘pulls’: the first, a pan-Islamic Wahabi fundamentalism and jehadi fanaticism, and the second, the powerful Bengali cultural and social system. Naturally, they have to strike a balance in the face of these strong pulls. They are proud of their Bengali cultural identity as well as of their Islamic heritage, but would not like to see their Bengali identity being swamped by overmuch reliance on the latter. Similarly, Bengalees in India have to balance their transnational Bengali cultural identity with the very powerful force of pan-Indian identity of which they are also part. The fact is that, in a world where Bengali-speaking people today constitute the fifth largest language group, Bangladesh willy-nilly has assumed the driver’s seat of championing Bengali cultural identity and values and West Bengal has necessarily to play the second fiddle. But this is an unavoidable cultural situation which all Bengalees, whether belonging to India or to Bangladesh, will have to contend with.

Considering that there are several leading examples in history like the union of Poland after three partitions, the union of the two Germanys and the two Vietnams, one can envisage that the two Bengals, even though politically separate, can have much commonality in terms of their common culture, their shared history and geography and economic complementarity. In a larger context one can also envisage a loose confederation between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, which can create by far the strongest entity in the comity of nations. After all, history always moves on and there can always be hope for the best.



Syed Amir Ali (1849–1928), a barrister and honorary magistrate, was one of the early Bengalee Muslim reformers, who believed in reforming education for Muslims on Western lines.



Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), a Renaissance man par excellence, was a distinguished litterateur, poet, musician and painter. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 and has the unique honour of providing the national anthem for two countries of the subcontinent—India and Bangladesh.



Chittaranjan Das (1870–1925) was a luminary among Bengalee leaders. He pioneered the Bengal Pact in 1923, aimed at cementing the ties between Hindus and Muslims. He acquired the title Deshbandhu, or Friend of the Country.



A.K. Fazlul Huq (1873–1962) was a key figure in Bengalee nationalist politics for around four decades and formed the peasant-based Krishak Praja Party. Huq was premier of undivided Bengal and chief minister and governor of East Bengal. He was popularly known as Shere-Bengal, or Lion of Bengal.



Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy (1882–1962) was eminent in Bengal Congress politics and was opposed to the Partition. He was the second chief minister of West Bengal from 1948 till his death.



Sarat Chandra Bose (1889–1950) was an important leader in the Congress, but due to being the brother of the controversial freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose, he was excluded by the Congress from the negotiations with the British regarding Independence.



Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976) was a radical rebel poet who edited the evening daily, Nabayug. He is most famous for his poem ‘Bidrohi’ and for leading a protest against the visit of Prince of Wales in 1921.



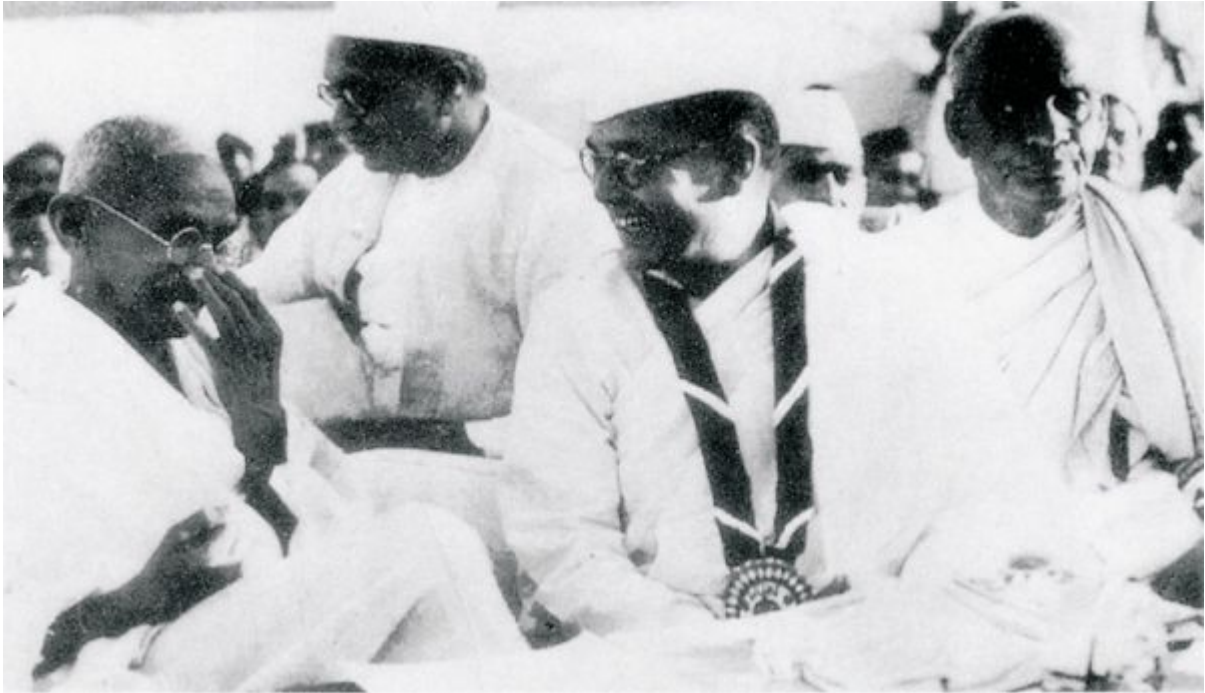
Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (1901–53), vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, was a keen participant in nationalist politics. He was finance minister in the Fazlul Huq cabinet as Hindu Mahasabha member, which he joined in 1939, and he became minister in Nehru's first cabinet in independent India.



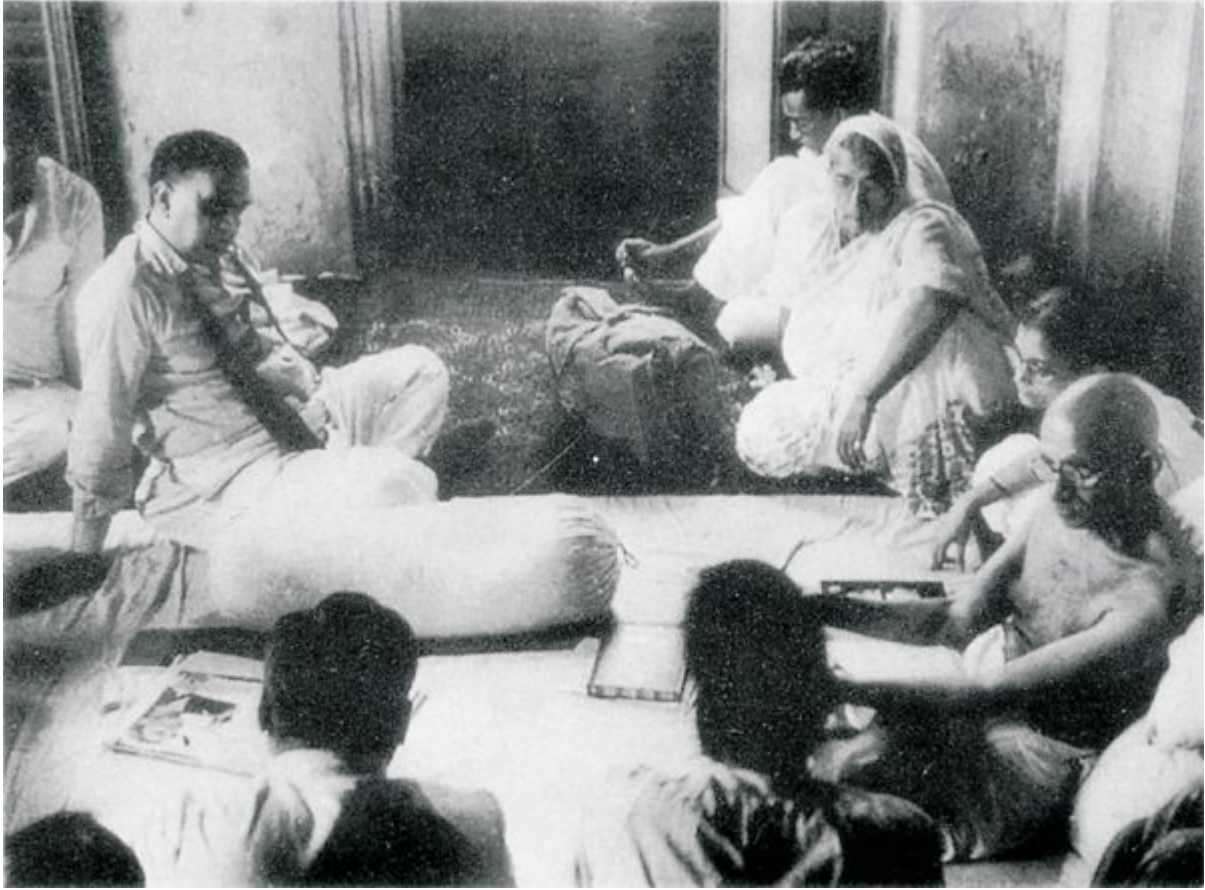
Jogendra Nath Mandal (1904–68) was the leader of the Scheduled Castes Federation and was the first law and labour minister of Pakistan. He eventually resigned from his post in 1950 and sought asylum in Calcutta after witnessing the atrocities on the minorities in East Bengal under the Pakistan administration.



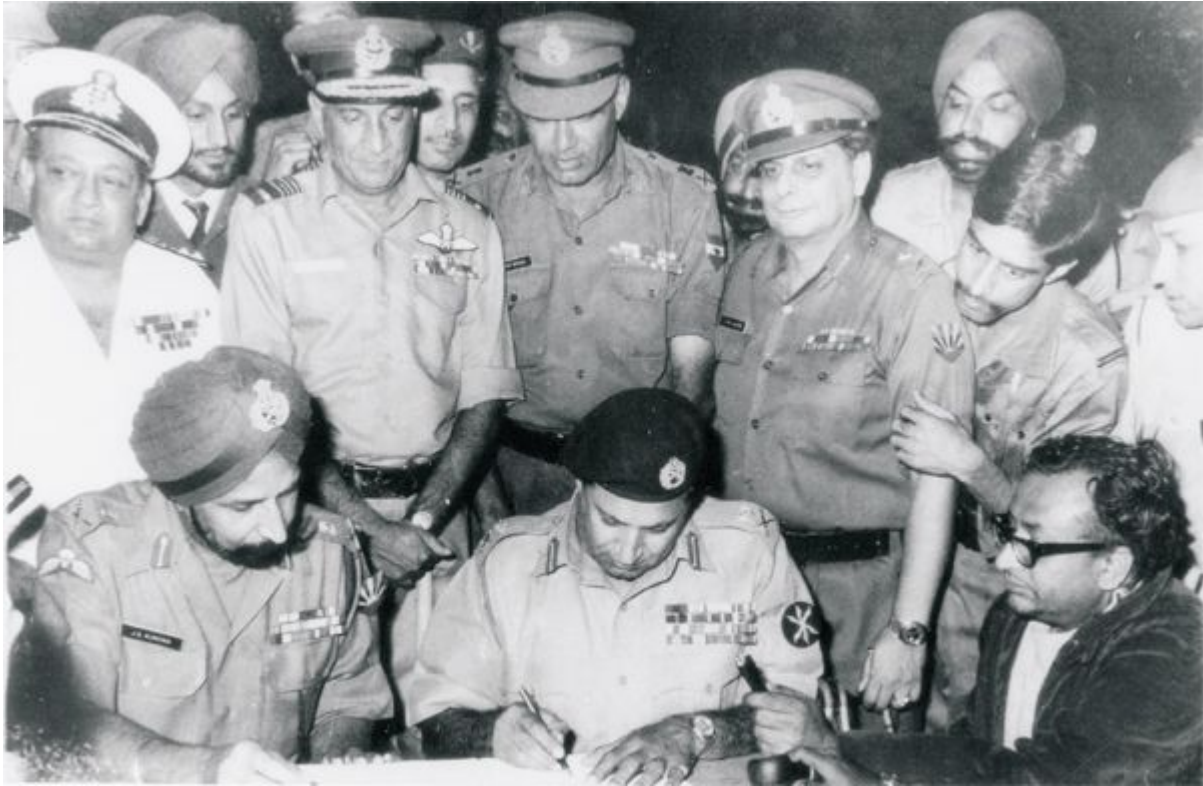
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920–75), called the ‘tallest Bengalee in a thousand years’, formed the Awami League in East Bengal and transformed a youth movement into a powerful movement for freedom from Pakistani rule. Known as Bangabandhu, or Friend of Bengal, he was independent Bangladesh’s first prime minister.



M.K. Gandhi (1869–1948), on the left, and Subhas Chandra Bose (1897–1945), at the centre, at the Haripura Congress session in 1938, when Bose was chosen as Congress president.



H.S. Suhrawardy (1892–1963), on the left, with Gandhi in 1947, when the former became a strong activist against communal violence in Bengal in the wake of Partition.



Lieutenant General A.K. Niazi (centre) of Pakistan signs the document of surrender at Dhaka on 16 December 1971 —the day Bangladesh was liberated. Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, on the left, was the supreme commander of the joint forces of the Mukti Bahini and the Indian Army.

Annexure A

Excerpt of J.N. Mandal's Resignation Letter

There is hardly anything called civil liberty in Pakistan. Witness for example the fact of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, than whom a more devout Muslim had not walked this earth for many years, and of his gallant, patriotic brother Dr Khan Sahib. A large number of erstwhile League leaders of the north-west and also of the eastern belt of Pakistan are in detention without trial. Mr Suhrawardy, to whom is due, in a large measure, the League's triumph in Bengal, is for all practical purposes a Pakistani prisoner who had to move under permit and open his lips under orders. Mr Fazlul Huq, that dearly loved Grand Old Man of Bengal, who was the author of the now famous Lahore Resolution, is ploughing his lonely furrow in the precincts of the Dacca High Court of Judicature, and the so-called Islamic planning is as ruthless as it is complete. About the East Bengal Muslims generally the less said the better. They were promised at Lahore an independent state. They were promised autonomous and sovereign units of the independent state. What have they got instead? East Bengal has been transformed to a colony of the western belt of Pakistan, although it contains a population which is larger than that of all the units of Pakistan put together. It is a pale ineffective adjunct of Karachi doing the latter's bidding and carrying out its orders. East Bengal Muslims, in their enthusiasm, wanted bread and they have, by the mysterious working of the Islamic state and the Shariat, got stone instead from the arid deserts of Sind and Punjab. I can no longer afford to carry this load of false pretensions and untruth on my conscience and I have decided to offer my resignation as your minister, which I am hereby placing in your hands and which, I hope, you will accept without delay.

Annexure B

The Awami League's Six-point Programme, 1966

POINT 1

The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense on the basis of the Lahore Resolution and Parliamentary form of Government with Supremacy of Legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.

POINT 2

Federal Government shall deal with only two subjects, viz., Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residuary subjects shall vest in the federating states.

POINT 3

- A. Two separate but freely convertible currencies for two wings may be introduced, or
- B. One currency for the whole country may be maintained. In this case effective constitutional provisions are to be made to stop flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Separate Banking Reserve is to be made and separate fiscal and monetary policy to be adopted for East Pakistan.

POINT 4

The power of taxation and revenue collection shall vest in the federating units and that the Federal Centre will have no such power. The Federation will have a share in the state taxes for meeting their required expenditure. The Consolidated Federal Fund shall come out of a levy of a certain percentage of all state taxes.

POINT 5

1. There shall be two separate accounts for foreign exchange earnings of the two wings.
2. Earnings of East Pakistan shall be under the control of East Pakistan Government and that of West Pakistan under the control of West Pakistan Government.
3. Foreign exchange requirement of the Federal Government shall be met by the two wings either equally or in a ratio to be fixed.
4. Indigenous products shall move free of duty between two wings.
5. The Constitution shall empower the unit Governments to establish trade and commercial relations with, set up trade missions in and enter into agreements with foreign countries.

POINT 6

Setting up of a militia of paramilitary force for East Pakistan.¹

Annexure C

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's 7 March 1971 Address

The Struggle This Time Is For Our Emancipation!
The Struggle This Time Is for Independence!

My dear brothers,

I have come before you today with a heavy heart.

All of you know how hard we have tried. But it is a matter of sadness that the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rangpur and Rajshahi are today being spattered with the blood of my brothers, and the cry we hear from the Bengali people is a cry for freedom, a cry for survival, a cry for our rights.

You are the ones who brought about an Awami League victory so you could see a constitutional government restored. The hope was that the elected representatives of the people, sitting in the National Assembly, would formulate a constitution that would assure the people of their economic, political and cultural emancipation.

But now, with great sadness in my heart, I look back on the past 23 years of our history and see nothing but a history of the shedding of the blood of the Bengali people. Ours has been a history of continual lamentation, repeated bloodshed and incessant tears.

We gave blood in 1952, we won a mandate in 1954. But we were still not allowed to take up the reins of this country. In 1958, Ayub Khan clamped Martial Law on our people and enslaved us for the next 10 years. In 1966, during the Six-Point Movement of the masses many were the young men and women whose lives were stilled by government bullets.

After the downfall of Ayub, Yahya Khan took over with the promise that he would restore constitutional rule, that he would restore democracy and return power to the people.

We agreed. But you all know of the events that took place after that ...

I ask you, are we the ones to blame?

As you know, I have been in contact with President Yahya Khan. As leader of the majority party in the National Assembly, I asked him to set February 15 as the day for its opening session. He did not accede to the request I made as leader of the majority party. Instead, he went along with the delay requested by the minority leader Mr Bhutto and announced that the Assembly would be convened on the 3rd of March.

We accepted that, agreed to join the deliberations. I even went to the extent of saying that we, despite our majority, would still listen to any sound ideas of the minority, even if it was a lone voice. I committed myself to the support of anything to bolster the restoration of a constitutional government.

When Mr Bhutto came to Dhaka, we met. We talked. He left saying that the doors to negotiations were still open. Maulana Noorani and Maulana Mufti were among those West Pakistan parliamentarians who visited Dhaka and talked with me about an agreement on a constitutional framework.

I made it clear that I could not agree to any deviation from the Six Points. The right rested with the people. Come, I said, let us sit down and resolve matters.

But Bhutto's retort was that he would not allow himself to become hostage on two fronts. He predicated that if any West Pakistani members of Parliament were to come to Dhaka, the Assembly would be turned into a slaughterhouse. He added that if anyone were to participate in such a session, a countrywide agitation would be launched from Peshawar to Karachi and that every business would be shut down in protest.

I assured him that the Assembly would be conveyed and, despite the dire threats, West Pakistan leaders did come down to Dhaka.

But suddenly, on March 1, the session was cancelled.

There was an immediate outcry against this move by the people. I called for a hartal as a peaceful form of protest and the masses readily took to the streets in response.

And what did we get as a response?

He [Yahya Khan] turned his guns on my helpless people, a people with no arms to defend themselves. These were the same arms that had been purchased with our own money to protect us from external enemies. But it is my own people who are being fired upon today.

In the past, too, each time we—the numerically larger segment of Pakistan's population—tried to assert our rights and control our destiny, they conspired against us and pounced upon us.

I have asked them this before: How can you make your own brothers the target of your bullets?

Now Yahya Khan says that I had agreed to a Round Table Conference on the 10th. Let me point out that it is not true.

I had said, Mr Yahya Khan, you are the President of the country. Come to Dhaka, come and see how our poor Bengali people have been mowed down by your bullets, how the laps of our mothers and sisters have been robbed and left empty and bereft, how my helpless people have been slaughtered. Come, I said, come and see for yourself and then be the judge and decide. That is what I told him.

Earlier, I had told him there would be no Round Table Conference. What Round Table Conference, whose Round Table Conference? You expect me to sit at a Round Table Conference with the very same people who have emptied the laps of my mothers and my sisters?

On the 3rd, at the Paltan, I called for a non-cooperation movement and the shutdown of offices, courts and revenue collection. You gave me full support.

Then suddenly, without consulting me or even informing, he met with one individual for five hours and then made a speech in which he turned all the blame on me, laid all the fault at the door of the Bengali people!

The deadlock was created by Bhutto, yet the Bengalis are the ones facing the bullets! We face their guns, yet it's our fault. We are the ones being hit by their bullets, and it's still our fault.

So, the struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation, the struggle this time is a struggle for independence!

Brothers, they have now called the Assembly to a session on March 25, with the streets not yet dry of the blood of my brothers. You have called the Assembly, but you must first agree to meet my demands. Martial Law must be withdrawn; the soldiers must return to their barracks; the murders of my people must be redressed. And ... power must be handed over to the elected representatives of the people.

Only then will we consider if we can take part in the National Assembly or not!

Before these demands are met, there can be no question of our participating in this session of the Assembly. That is one right not given to me as part of my mandate from the masses.

As I told them earlier, Mujibur Rahman refuses to walk to the Assembly treading upon the fresh stains of his brothers' blood!

Do you, my brothers, have complete faith in me ... ? ...

Let me then tell you that the Prime Ministership is not what I seek. What I want is justice, the rights of the people of this land. They tempted me with the Prime Ministership but they failed to buy me over. Nor did they succeed in hanging me on the gallows for you rescued me with your blood from the so-called conspiracy case.

That day, right here at this race course, I had pledged to you that I would pay for this blood debt with my own blood. Do you remember? I am ready today to fulfil that promise!

I now declare the closure of all the courts, offices, and educational institutions for an indefinite period of time. No one will report to their offices—that is my instruction to you.

So that the poor are not inconvenienced, rickshaws, trains and other transport will ply normally—except serving any needs of the armed forces. If the army does not respect this, I shall not be responsible for the consequences.

The Secretariat, Supreme Court, High Court, Judges' courts, and government and semi-government offices shall remain shut. Only banks may be open for two hours daily for business transactions. But no money shall be transmitted from East to West Pakistan. The Bengali people must

stay calm during these times. Telegraph and telephone communications will be confined within Bangladesh.

The people of this land are facing elimination, so be on guard. If need be, we will bring everything to a total standstill ...

Collect your salaries on time. If the salaries are held up, if a single bullet is fired upon us henceforth, if the murder of my people does not cease, I call upon you to turn every home into a fortress against their onslaught. Use whatever you can put your hands on to confront this enemy. Every last road must be blocked.

We will deprive them of food, we will deprive them of water. Even if I am not around to give you the orders, and if any associates are also not to be found, I ask you to continue your movement unabated.

I say to them again, you are my brothers, return now to the barracks where you belong and no one will bear any hostility towards you. Only do not attempt to aim any more bullets at our hearts: It will not do any good!

...

And the seven million people of this land will not be cowed down by you or accept suppression any more. The Bengali people have learned how to die for a cause and you will not be able to bring them under your yoke of suppression!

To assist the families of the martyred and the injured, the Awami League has set up committees that will do all they can. Please donate whatever you can. Also, employers must give full pay to the workers who participated in the seven days of hartal or were not able to work because of curfews.

To all government employees, I say that my directives must be followed. I had better not see any of you attending your offices. From today, until this land has been freed, no taxes will be paid to the government any more. As of now, they stop. Leave everything to me. I know how to organize a movement.

But be careful. Keep in mind that the enemy has infiltrated our ranks to engage in the work of provocateurs. Whether Bengali or non-Bengali, Hindu or Muslim, all are our brothers and it is our responsibility to ensure their safety.

I also ask you to stop listening to radio, television and the press if these media do not report news of our movement.

To them, I say, 'You are our brothers. I beseech you not to turn this country into a living hell. Will you not have to show your faces and confront your conscience some day?

'If we can peaceably settle our differences there is still hope that we can co-exist as brothers. Otherwise there is no hope. If you choose the other path, we may never come face to face with one another again.

'For now, I have just one thing to ask of you: Give up any thoughts of enslaving this country under military rule again!'

I ask my people to immediately set up committees under the leadership of the Awami League to carry on our struggle in every neighbourhood, village, union and subdivision of this land.

You must prepare yourselves now with what little you have for the struggle ahead.

Since we have given blood, we will give more of it. But, Insha Allah, we will free the people of this land!

The struggle this time is for emancipation! The struggle this time is for independence!

Be ready. We cannot afford to lose our momentum. Keep the movement and the struggle alive because if we fall back they will come down hard upon us.

Be disciplined. No nation's movement can be victorious without discipline.

Jai Bangla!²

Annexure D

Instrument of Surrender

The PAKISTAN Eastern Command agree to surrender all PAKISTAN Armed Forces in BANGLA DESH to Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA, General Officer Commanding in Chief of the Indian and BANGLA DESH forces in the Eastern Theatre. This surrender includes all PAKISTAN land, air and naval forces as also all para-military forces and civil armed forces. These forces will lay down their arms and surrender at the places where they are currently located to the nearest regular troops under the command of Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA.

The PAKISTAN Eastern Command shall come under orders of Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA as soon as this instrument has been signed. Disobedience of orders will be regarded as a breach of the surrender terms and will be dealt with in accordance with the accepted laws and usages of war. The decision of Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA will be final, should any doubt arise as to the meaning or interpretation of the surrender terms.

Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA gives a solemn assurance that personnel who surrender shall be treated with dignity and respect that soldiers are entitled to in accordance with provisions of the Geneva Convention and guarantees the safety and well-being of all PAKISTAN military and para-military forces who surrender. Protection will be provided to foreign nationals, ethnic minorities and personnel of WEST PAKISTAN origin by the forces under the command of Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA.

Sd/-

(JAGJIT

Sd/

(AMIR ABDULLAH KHAN NIAZI)

SINGH
AURORA)

Lieutenant-
General

Lieutenant-General

General
Officer

Martial Law

Commanding-
in-chief

Administrator Zone B and India and BANGLA DESH
FORCES in the Commander Eastern Command (Pakistan)
Eastern Theatre

16 December
1971

16 December 1971

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Endnotes

CHAPTER 1

1. Reference in Buddhist *Charyapada* (No. 49); see R.C. Majumdar, *Bangladesher Itihas* [in Bengali] (1971).
2. Several centuries ago, the Brahmaputra River had a different route around Garo Hills, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj and Madhupur jungle on to Langalbandh, a place of pilgrimage for East Bengal Hindus, to the north-west of the old capital of Bengal, Sonargaon. It had a branch called Lakshmya, running almost parallel, which flowed past Narainganj and later on met the Dhaleshwari.
3. David William Martin, *The Changing Face of Calcutta* (1998).
4. Quoted in R.C. Majumdar, ed., *History of Bengal*, Vol. 1 (1944), chapter 1. This work is invaluable for studying Bengal's ancient history.
5. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* [JASB], NS XXIII, pp. 301–33.
6. Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (1915; reprint 1969). See also his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891).
7. R.P. Chanda, *Indo-Aryan Races* (1916).
8. R.C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal* (1971). A revised version of his *History of Bengal*, Vol. 1, with some additions and explanations.

CHAPTER 2

1. Valentine Ball, *The Jungle Life in India* (1880). Also, his 'Stone Implements Found in Bengal', in *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1865, pp. 127–28.
2. See *Pratna Samiksha*, Directorate of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, p. 485 onwards.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. K.N. Dikshit, *Excavations at Paharpur, Bengal*, Archaeological Survey of India [ASI] Bulletin No. 55, 1938.
6. Charles Duroiselle, *The Ananda Temple of Pagan*, ASI Bulletin No. 56, 1937.
7. Pratapaditya Pal and Enamul Haque, *Bengal Sites and Sights* (2003), p. 63.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid. See also, *Pratna Samiksha*, pp. 57–58.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. P.C. Dasgupta, *Exploring Bengal's Past* (1966) and *The Excavations of Pandu Rajar Dhibi*, Directorate of Archaeology Bulletin No. 2, 1964.
14. An article presented by S.S. Dey in the anthropological section of the Indian Science Congress, Indore, 1990.
15. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 1.
16. Ibid., pp. 28–29.

17. Ibid.
18. J.F. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum: Inscriptions of the Early Guptas*, Vol. III (1888).
19. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 1, pp. 37–38.
20. Fa-Hien, *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, trans. James Legge (1886), p. 100.

CHAPTER 3

1. S. Beal, *Records of the Western World* (1906), p. 194.
2. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, pp. 73–74.
3. Ibid., pp. 74–75; quoting from Vakpatiraja's *Gauda-Vaho* (Slaying of the Ruler of Gaur). The author, a court poet of Yashovarman, compliments the people of Vanga when he says that 'their face assumed a pale colour while offering obeisance to the victor, because they were not accustomed to such an act'.

CHAPTER 4

1. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas* (1955), p. 247.
2. For details see Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 1.

CHAPTER 5

1. Translated from Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray's *Bangalir Itihas, Adi Parba* [in Bengali] (1949; revised edition 1980).
2. Ibid.
3. *Pratna Samiksha*.
4. Dr Francis Buchanan (Hamilton), *A Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of the District, or Zila, of Dinajpur in the Province, or Soubah, of Bengal*, in *JASB*, 1833.
5. A.K. Maitra, 'The Ancient Monuments of Varendra (North Bengal)', *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum*, 5, 1976–77 (1979).
6. Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*.
7. S.K. Saraswati, 'Notes on a Third Tour in the District of Dinajpur—chiefly along the Chiramati River', *JASB*, NS XXVIII, 1932, p. 175.

CHAPTER 6

1. See Bihar Sharif inscription of Tughral (1242) in Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal (down to AD 1538)* (1957). This shows that south Bihar was a part of the Lakhnaoti sultanate.
2. Ibid.
3. See Jadunath [J.N.] Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 2 (1948).

CHAPTER 7

1. *The Delhi Sultanate 1300–1526*, volume 6 of *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1954; series ed. R.C. Majumdar), p. 202.

CHAPTER 8

1. G.H. Salim, *Riyaz-us-Salatin* (1788), trans. Abdus Salam (1902).

CHAPTER 9

1. M. Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)* (third edition, 2002).
2. Rakhal Das [R.D.] Banerjee, *Banglar Itihas*, Vol. II (1917), pp. 216–57.
3. See the original text with commentaries in the Asiatic Society of Bengal publication *Shekashubhodaya* (1963), ed. Dr Sukumar Sen.
4. Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (1994).
5. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir* (1953), pp. 136 and 221.

CHAPTER 10

1. In the Malda inscription (1495) he describes himself as the ‘*khalifa* of God’ in keeping with the tradition of royalty at Gaur. In another inscription found at Islampur near Saran in Bihar (1501), he traces his descent from Prophet Muhammad, the only Bengal sultan to do so.
2. Dani, *Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions*.
3. Ibid.
4. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (1954), p. 279.
5. Quoted in J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 2.
6. Sikanderpur (Azamgarh) inscription (1527) of Nusrat Shah. Here he is described as *malik* rather than sultan, showing that he ruled over eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP), but did not claim sovereignty there. Dani, *Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions*.
7. For medieval Bengal in general, see J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 2; Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 1; and Majumdar, *Bangladesher Itihas Madhya Yug* [in Bengali] (1987).

CHAPTER 11

1. Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of Bengali Language* (1985).
2. R.C. Dutt, *Cultural Heritage of Bengal* (1982), p. 13. Chapter III of this book contains an authentic account of the life and work of Jaydev.
3. For details, see Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Various Matters in New or Modern Indian Literature and the Romances of Medieval Bengal* (1982). Also see Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas* [History of the Bengali Language and Literature], 2 volumes (1987).

CHAPTER 12

1. Sen, *History of the Bengali Language and Literature*, p. 431.
2. *Delhi Sultanate (History and Culture*, Vol. 6), p. 568.

CHAPTER 13

1. This name of a Muslim general of the sultan of Gaur is immortalized in the folk tales of Orissa and Nepal as the invading general who destroyed many temples in these areas. The popular story that he was by birth a Brahman but was converted to Islam and, out of vengeance, made it a point to destroy the symbols of a society that had turned its back on him lacks historicity. From Abu'l-Fazl's *Akbarnama*, backed by other chroniclers, it appears that Kala Pahar was an Afghan, the brother of Sikandar Sur who was called Raju—a name that is used by both Hindus and Muslims. He was a military commander in the service of the sultans of Bengal from Islam Shah till Daud. He must have been involved in some of the invasions of Orissa and Nepal. He survived Daud Karrani by several years and sided with Masum Kabuli, another Afghan chief. There was another Kala Pahar who, according to the *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, fought with Akbar's forces during his conquest of Orissa.
2. For details of the history of the kingdom of Koch Bihar, see Khan Chaudhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *History of Cooch Behar* [in Bengali] (1942).

CHAPTER 14

1. For details see J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 2; and Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir*. Also see, Majumdar, *History of [Medieval] Bengal*, Vol. 2.
2. Ibid.

CHAPTER 15

1. See J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal* (1979).
2. Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India* (1958).
3. N.K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal from Plassey to the Permanent Settlement* (1956).
4. Quoted in Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Clive of India* (1975).

CHAPTER 16

1. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, p. 3.
2. Yusuf Ali Khan, *Tarikh-i-Bangla-Mahabat Jangi*, trans. Abdus Subhan (1982).
3. Ibid., p. 7.
4. Ibid., p. 19.
5. This is an adaptation of the Maratha word *bargi*, which meant horsemen who were provided with horses and arms by the Maratha state in contrast to *siladar*s who arranged their own horses and arms.
6. Ali Khan, *Tarikh-i-Bangla-Mahabat Jangi*.

CHAPTER 20

1. R.M. Martin, *Political, Commercial and Financial Condition of Anglo-Eastern Empire in 1832* (1832).
2. Karl Marx, 'The Future Results of the British Rule in India', *The New-York Daily Tribune*, 1853.
3. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, pp. 146–49.
4. B.B. Kling, *The Blue Mutiny: The Indigo Disturbances in Bengal 1859–1862* (1966).

5. Rajat Kanta Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1875–1927* (1984).

CHAPTER 21

1. Arnold Toynbee, *The World and the West* (1953), p. 81.
2. Rangpur Collectorate Records quoted in Majumdar, *History of [Medieval] Bengal*, Vol. 2, p. 97.
3. S.B. Chaudhuri, *Civil Disturbance during the British Rule in India, 1756–1857* (1955), p. 66.
4. Sunil Sen, *Bharater Krishak Andolan, 1855–1975* [in Bengali] (1990).

CHAPTER 22

1. Susobhan Sarkar, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* (1970), pp. 121–22.
2. For details see A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *History and Heritage: Reflections on Society, Politics and Culture of South Asia* (2007), chapters 2, 3 and 5. See also Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (1983).
3. Abdul Kadir, ed., *Begum Rokeya Rachanavali* [Works of Begum Rokeya] (1973).

CHAPTER 23

1. This and subsequent quotations by Vivekananda from *Collected Works of Vivekananda* (Ramakrishna Mission).
2. Romain Rolland, *Prophets of New India*, trans. E.F. Malcolm-Smith (1930).

CHAPTER 24

1. Surendranath Banerjee, *A Nation in Making* (1925).
2. Sir Henry Cotton, *New India, or India in Transition* (1886).
3. Bipin Chandra Pal, *Memories of my Life and Times* (1932), Vol. I, p. 237.
4. Anthony Read and David Fisher, *The Proudest Day: India's Long Road to Independence* (1997), pp. 72–73.

CHAPTER 25

1. W.W. Hunter, *Indian Musalmans* (1876), p. 158.
2. Tazeen M. Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses 1871–1977* (1995).
3. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912* (1974).
4. For details see Salahuddin Ahmed, *History and Heritage*, pp. 48–51.
5. Quoted from *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1894 in Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal*, p. 2.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
7. Tamijuddin Khan, *Memoirs* (unpublished), quoted in Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932–1947* (2004), pp. 41–42.
8. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal*, p. 164.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
10. Salahuddin Ahmed, *History and Heritage*, p. 51.

11. See Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal*, p. 164.
12. S. Sarkar, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*, p. 52.
13. Mohammad Noman, *Muslim India: Rise and Growth of the All India Muslim League* (1942).
14. Lady Minto, *India, Minto and Morley*, 1934.
15. B.D. Banerjee, *East Pakistan: A Case Study in Muslim Politics* (1969).
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

CHAPTER 26

1. R.C. Majumdar, *History of Modern Bengal: 1765 to 1905*, p. 23.
2. BS is the ‘Bangla Sone’, or Bengali year, and is a traditional solar calendar. It begins on 14/15 April and is 593 years less than the year in the Gregorian calendar, or AD.
3. Sir Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, as quoted in Majumdar, *History of Modern Bengal*, p. 73.
4. Majumdar, *History of Modern Bengal*, p. 36.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–64.

CHAPTER 27

1. For details see Majumdar, *History of Modern Bengal*, pp. 90–93.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
5. *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (1958), ed. Atulchandra Gupta, p. 226.
6. In his *Deshe Bideshe* (Here and Abroad; 1948) Syed Mujtaba Ali records how, when on his way to Kabul he landed at Peshawar railway station, the sight of one Bengalee face was enough to fill the whole platform with the police and the CID.

CHAPTER 28

1. Majumdar, *History of Modern Bengal*, p. 223.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
3. Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After* (1970), p. 44.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
6. Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, *Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das* (Government of India, Publications Division, 1969).
7. Aparna Devi, *Manush Chittaranjan* [in Bengali], pp. 287–95.

8. Ibid., pp. 290–91.
9. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Samakalin Barati Subhas* [in Bengali].
10. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism: A Study in Indian Nationalism, 1928–1940* (1990), p. 10.
11. Vincent A. Smith and T.G. Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of India* (1981), p. 363.

CHAPTER 29

1. Quoted in Majumdar, *History of Modern Bengal*, p. 142.
2. Sir Horace Williamson, *India and Communism* (1935).
3. R.C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4, pp. 243–81.
4. Sir Percival Griffiths, *The British Impact on India* (1952).
5. Gopal Haldar in foreword to Jadu Gopal Mukhopadhyay's *Biplabi Jibaner Smriti* (1982). Also see the Centenary Volume on Bipin Chandra Pal.

CHAPTER 30

1. P. Acharya, 'Education and Communal Politics in Bengal: A Case Study', IIM Calcutta Working Paper Series, September 1998.
2. Bidyut Chakrabarty, 'The Communal Award of 1932 and Its Implications in Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3 (1989), pp. 493–523.
3. Jatindra Nath De, 'The History of the Krishak Praja Party' (unpublished PhD thesis, 1980), cited in Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Partition of Bengal and Assam*. Also see Tazeen M. Murshid, 'The House Divided: The Muslim Intelligentsia of Bengal' in D.A. Low, ed., *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan* (1991).
4. Nitish Sengupta, *Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy* (Government of India, Publications Division, 2002).
5. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (1973).
6. Murshid, 'The House Divided.'
7. Bidyut Chakrabarty, 'The Communal Award of 1932.'
8. Murshid, 'The House Divided.'
9. Ibid.
10. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (1985). Also see Bimal Prasad, *The Foundations of Muslim Nationalism* (1999); Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya* (1964); and Rajat K. Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal*.
11. De, 'History of the Krishak Praja Party.' Also see Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937* (1972); Bhola Chatterjee, *Aspects of Bengal Politics in the Early Nineteen-Thirties* (1969); and Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (1994).
12. Murshid, 'The House Divided.'
13. *Rabindra Rachnavali* [in Bengali], Vol. 9, p. 605.
14. Quoted in Bhola Chatterjee, *Aspects of Bengal Politics*, p. 62.
15. Murshid, 'The House Divided.'
16. Tamijuddin Khan, *Memoirs*.
17. Quoted in Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4.

18. Murshid, 'The House Divided.'
19. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4.
20. Hamidul Islam, ed., *Shrestha Nazrul Geeti* [in Bengali], p. 31.

CHAPTER 31

1. De, 'History of the Krishak Praja Party.'
2. Mohammad H.R. Talukdar, ed., *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy* (1987), p. 102. Also see [Begum] Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography* (1991).
3. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4. Also see Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876–1940* (1974), pp. 283–85; and Kalipada Biswas, *Yukta Banglar Sesh Adhyaya* (in Bengali; 1966).
4. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4.
5. Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (1961).
6. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4, pp. 141–42.
7. S. Bandopadhyaya, 'Abibhakta Banglar Sesh Adhyaya 1937–47' [in Bengali], in *Chaturanya*, 5 September and 6 October 1990.
8. S.C. Das, *Biography of Bharat Kesri Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee* (2000), p. 52.
9. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4.
10. Ibid., pp. 54–55.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981), pp. 52–53.
17. Ashok Mitra, *Teenkuri Dash*, Vol. II (1403 BS), pp. 113–17; and his two articles in *Chaturangaa*, 11 March 1992 and 12 April 1992.
18. Ashok Mitra, *Teenkuri Dash*.
19. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4, p. 364.
20. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (1989). Also see Tarakchandra Das, *Bengal Famine, 1943* (1948); and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, *Panchaser Manwantar* [in Bengali] 'A Collection of Essays' (1946).
21. Ashoke Kumar Bose, *Rulings in Bengal Legislative Assembly and West Bengal Legislative Assembly, 1937–1970* (1986).
22. Quoted in Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4, p. 370.
23. Murshid, 'The House Divided', pp. 207–08.

CHAPTER 32

1. For a good account of his life, see Mihir Bose, *The Lost Hero: A Biography of Subhas Bose* (2004).
2. For Subhas's political views, see his own *The Indian Struggle: 1920–1934* (1948).
3. Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After*, p. 148.
4. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism*, p. 21.

5. Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger: A Study of A Revolutionary* (1959).
6. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement*, p. 40.
7. Reba Som, *Differences within Consensus* (1998), p. 225.
8. Ibid., p. 249–50.
9. Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After*, p. 192.
10. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism*, pp. 55–56.
11. Taya Zinkin, *Reporting India* (1962).
12. Ibid., p. 84.
13. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism*, pp. 55–56.
14. For a general perspective, see Rajat K. Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal*. Also see Subhas Bose's *The Indian Struggle*.
15. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism*, p. 56.
16. Ibid.
17. Mihir Bose, *The Lost Hero*, p. 194.
18. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism*.
19. Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After*, p. 257.
20. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism*.
21. For details see Barun Sengupta's *Mystery of Netaji's Disappearance* (1979). Also, Dr Sisir Kumar Bose's *The Great Escape: A Personal Account of Netaji's Secret Journey Out of India in January 1941* (1995).
22. See Subhas Chandra Bose, *Chalo Delhi: Writings and Speeches, 1943–45* (2007), eds, Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose.
23. This committee, clearly ignoring available evidence including eyewitnesses, and pandering to political prejudice, concluded in 2006 that there was no proof of the air crash. But this has not been accepted by Govt of India. According to a news item in *Hindustan Times* of 29 October 2000 titled 'Soviet Papers Add to Bose Mystery', three researchers working on declassified documents in the Russian military archives have come to the tentative conclusion that Subhas Bose was alive in the Soviet Union till 1946 and that the story of the Taiwan plane crash on 17 August 1945 was pre-planned and contrived.
24. Unfortunately, to this day there is no authentic published history of the Azad Hind Government and the Azad Hind Fauj. Around the time of Independence, the ministry of defence of the Government of India planned a volume on the INA as a part of a history of the Indian armed forces. Dr Protul Chandra Gupta, who taught history in the Calcutta University (later vice-chancellor Visva-Bharati), was entrusted with this task. He spent two years in Simla and after rummaging through volumes of records in the army archives completed his task by 1947. But neither his study nor other documents connected with the INA were made public until the year 2006 and that too was happened due to an order passed by Pranab Mukherjee, the then defence minister.

CHAPTER 33

1. See Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*. Also, Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual Biography*, eds, Gail Minault and Christian W. Troll (1988).
2. Read and Fisher, *The Proudest Day*, p. 367.

3. Article by Sisir Kumar Bose and Krishna Bose in the *Telegraph*, Kolkata, Nehru Centenary edition.
4. Humayun Kabir, 'Bengal Elections 1946: A Mockery', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14 April 1946. Also, Maulana Azad, 'Report on Bengal Elections', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 April 1946.
5. For details see Harun-ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947* (2003), pp. 224–26.
6. Ibid.
7. Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj* (1961), pp. 21 and 23.
8. Report of the commissioner quoted in V.N. Bandopadhyaya, *Bangla Samayika Patra*, Vol. 2, 1952, p. 460.
9. Mosley, *Last Days of the British Raj*, pp. 26–30.
10. Even Wavell wrote in his diary: 'The chief points to my mind were Suhrawardy's continued presence in the Control Room on the first day with many Muslim friends and his obvious communal bias.' Archibald Percival Wavell (Earl of) and Penderel Moon, *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* (1973).
11. Mosley, *Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 26.
12. Begum Ikramullah, *Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography*.
13. Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Vol. LXXI, No. 3, 1946, p. III.
14. Read and Fisher, *The Proudest Day*, pp. 394–95.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Begum Ikramullah, *Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography*.
18. Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular*, pp. 177–81.
19. Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase* (in two volumes: 1956 and 1958).
20. It was rumoured that Wavell was opposed to the inclusion of Sarat Bose, but yielded on Nehru's insistence on observing constitutional propriety of recognizing the leader of the Congress in the Central Assembly.
21. Quoted in S. Bandopadhyaya, *Abibhakta Banglar Sesh Adhaya 1937–47*.
22. Quoted in Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 4, pp. 401–02.
23. V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (1957).
24. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 28 April 1947.

CHAPTER 34

1. Leonard Mosley, *Last Days of the British Raj*, pp. 21–23.

CHAPTER 35

1. Harun-ur Rashid, *Foreshadhowing of Bangladesh*.
2. Ibid.
3. J.N. Mandal's long letter of resignation may be seen in the present author's *Bengal Divided* (2007), pp. 181–96.
4. Rehman Sobhan, *Milestones to Bangladesh*, in *Collected Works of Rehman Sobhan*, Vol. 2 (2007), p.143.
5. Ibid., p. 144.

6. There were marked differences between the subcontinent's Partition and the 1905 partition of Bengal.

CHAPTER 36

1. It is also important to note that 75 per cent of Pakistan's Central Secretariat comprised West Pakistanis. Between 1947 and 1958, not more than half a dozen Bengalee officers had become secretaries, and that too in unimportant ministries. In the armed forces the situation was even more ominous. Only one Bengalee had become a general in the army and one had risen beyond captain's rank. See Sobhan, *Milestones to Bangladesh*, pp. 204–05.
2. Sobhan, *Milestones to Bangladesh*.

CHAPTER 37

1. Records of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
2. Sobhan, *Milestones to Bangladesh*, pp. 166–67.
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