Communal Riots in Bengal

Tanika Sarkar

Communal riot is very often a blanket term oversimplifying a variety of complexities. It often conjures up a picture of ugly mob violence sparked off exclusively by base criminality and blind religious hostility. The inexorable recurrence of such a phenomenon is often used to prove a fundamental incompatibility between two religious communities. This popular notion apart, historians have also attempted to explain communal violence in our country during British rule (self-conscious communal conflict in its present form was indeed a product of this period) by referring to the political calculations of the leaders of the two major communities who allegedly incited such clashes to pressurise the government before some impending constitutional readjustment.[1] But apart from such external manipulations, the riots themselves have been seen as a compound of rank criminal instincts and religious prejudice. The contention here is that the context and pattern of specific riots and of crowd behaviour may sometimes reveal various kinds of tensions beneath the surface of communal trappings. Through an analysis of such tensions the faceless mob comes to acquire the features of distinct social groups—of a pre-industrial crowd or of a depressed peasantry—helplessly dependent on world price trends. In this paper, our aim is to examine why such tensions acquired communal forms and were branded as communal riots. The main focus is on three Hindu-Muslim riots in Dacca and Mymensingh in 1930 and in Chittagong in 1931.

In Dacca town, the first round of trouble erupted on 26

January 1930, when the local Bengal Provincial Students' Association (the section of Congress students under Subhas Bose's leadership) took out a procession in front of the Narindia mosque at prayer time. Another rival Congress student organisation had opposed this move as, since the 1926 riots, this had been a foolproof way to provoke rioting. The BPSA procession, quite predictably, led to a scuffle between Muslims at prayer and Congress volunteers who entered the mosque and tore up a copy of the *Quran* while Muslims stoned the procession from within the mosque. This time the conflict did not go very far. The town, however, remained in a state of tension which exploded into a major riot over what was literally a schoolboys' quarrel.[2]

In the May riots a large number of rich Hindu houses and shops were looted and burnt, particularly in the predominantly business-area of Kayettuli. Altogether 80 Muslim shops and 190 Hindu shops were looted and Hindu losses were estimated to be 12 times bigger; twelve Muslims and ten Hindus were killed. Police action was extremely tardy and no firm moves were made in the first four days to control the clashes.[3] By the time the police stepped in, rioting had already spread to villages around Dacca. At Matwail, Jinjira, Ati and Rohitpur villages, there was an epidemic of *hat* (weekly local markets) looting by Muslim villagers; houses of Hindu Sahas and money-lenders were attacked and debt bonds torn up. At the Keraniganj Thana in Rohitpur, rumour was circulated by the Muslim Union Board President through the village *chowkidars*. The Nawab of Dacca was said to have sent a message that, the government had declared a week-long hartal during which Muslims could freely loot Hindu Saha houses and shops at the cost of only token punishment later. This caught on so much that even *chowkidars* looted in their uniforms, and a massive plunder of the local *hat* took place, described as "one of the biggest cases of *hat* looting ever known in Bengal".[4] In the entire course of rioting, Hindu property worth Rs. 243,182 was destroyed,[5] and rice godowns were attacked; 20,000 *maunds* of rice were taken away from a godown.[6] All other forms of violence like murder or rape were conspicuously absent in the rural rioting.

In the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district, the Young Comrades' League, (the youth organ of the Communist Workers' and Peasant Party) had been active since 1929 in

mobilising poor peasants against landlords and money-lenders, who were almost entirely Hindu. It seems that an anti-*Mahajan* movement was about to develop under their auspices when, in April 1930, the post-Chittagong Armoury Raid arrests removed all their leaders from the scene.[7] Many *maulvis* from Dacca and Noakhali immediately arrived to replace them and to continue the movement but under communal slogans. Their leadership was accepted by local villagers only after they had established their miracle-making claims. During the riots, the District Magistrate at first ordered his troops to fire above the heads of rioters and the *maulvis* claimed that they had eaten up the bullets.[8] Large-scale and organised attacks on *Mahajan* houses spread rapidly and about 60 villages were affected altogether.[9] Snatching of debt bonds was the most prominent feature, accompanied quite often with plunder, loot, arson and sometimes even murder when *Mahajans* resisted very strongly. Unlike in Dacca, however, here the police acted most promptly. Gurkha troops were despatched under senior officers, there were large-scale arrests, frequent firings, and major clashes with the rioters at several villages.[10]

The Chittagong riot of August 1931 was in a different category. Unlike Dacca or Mymensingh, Chittagong did not have a background of Hindu-Muslim tension. But ever since the Chittagong Armoury raid of April 1930 by the terrorists acute tension had existed between Europeans and middle class Hindus of the town. Since many of the raid leaders had so far escaped arrest, all Hindus were indiscriminately suspected of giving them shelter or withholding information from the police and a number of punitive measures had been taken against them. These measures produced no results, however, and official panic exploded on 30 August when Ahsanullah, a Muslim police officer, notorious for his brutality against revolutionary terrorists, was assassinated by a young revolutionary in Chittagong town. The same evening a senior police officer called a Muslim meeting on the premises of the police station and openly incited the audience to attack Hindus.[11] That night a campaign of terror was unleashed against all nationalist Hindus of Chittagong town, not by Muslin politicians or crowds but by Europeans and Police officers. Pleaders defending the Armoury Raid convicts and men working in a

local nationalist press were selected as targets. Senior police officers, the European Signalling Officer in Assam-Bengal Railways and other Europeans broke into the press building, assaulted the men inside and systematically smashed up the press machinery. All political suspects were rounded up in a midnight raid and tortured under the direction of the European Additional Superintendent of Police in the presence of several other Europeans. White officers and armed Gurkha bands were also responsible for a number of organised assaults, including on a woman and an old man who died of injuries. Several raids into nearby villages were organised later under European officers.[12]

The next morning the entire police force of the town withdrew to the funeral of Ahsanullah and did not reappear until rioting had gone on for three hours. Even Muslim witnesses later testified to police encouragement to looters.[13] From now on, the pattern more or less followed the Dacca model. The official enquiry report made an interesting remark about the social composition of the rioters: the preponderance of "mainly Muhammadans of the labouring class" was marked rather than regular criminal elements.[14] Bengali Hindu and Marwari shops were looted and set on fire at the Andarkilla Bazar and looting soon spread to other *bazars*. Altogether 280 shops were looted, the worst sufferers being Hindu goldsmiths, money-lenders and cloth merchants; the total damage was estimated to be 10 *lakhs*.[15] No other kind of violence was involved and in the rural rioting no Muslim took any part. Inside the town "responsible and respectable" Muslims were extremely helpful to Hindu victims and set up joint peace committees together.[16]

The pattern of events is clear. Up to 31 August morning, rioting was entirely a police and European offensive against Hindu nationalists combined with police propaganda to make communal capital out of a patriotic assassination. From the 31st morning the scope of rioting was officially extended. The urban Muslim poor was assured of police support in attacking Hindu shops and money-lenders and they fully utilised the opportunity. But their more prosperous co-religionists stood apart. Also, apart from Muslim police officers no political groups from among the local Muslims were involved.

A number of points strike us in this rather bald summary of

events. In the first place, although these were all categorised as Hindu-Muslim riots, forces at least initially involved were of a very different political character. In Chittagong it was clearly the fear of revolutionary terrorists that made the officials impose a riot from above. In Kishoreganj, the Young Comrades' League had built up quite a strong base among local Muslims many of whom had enrolled as members. A Muslim poor peasant, Abdul Jalil, for instance, had emerged as an influential League orator.[17] A Communist Party leaflet published in August 1930 went so far as to deny any communal element in the clashes.[18] This was no doubt an exaggeration. Yet even in their communal phase the attacks remained confined against *mahajans* and were thus more or less true to the original impulse which had been provided by the League.

Before the May riot in Dacca, the Civil Disobedience movement had acquired rather formidable proportions in Dacca; Muslims were not entirely indifferent to it. On 26 January, even after the spate of rioting in the morning, the Muslim Hall hostel of the Dacca University was illuminated to celebrate Independence Day, the national flag was raised and Muslim youths paraded the streets, chanting *Bande Mataram*.[19] Later, they held public meetings to read out proscribed literature, sent volunteers to Contai, and actively promoted picketing in the Muslim *bazar* areas. Muslim labourers[20] and petty traders also joined enthusiastically in protest hartals and the boycott campaign.[21] Among the Muslim leaders of Dacca, one major group under Khwajah Atiullah, President of the 22 Panchayts, "was inclined to coquet with the Congress Party".[22]

These contexts help to explain police and official connivance at rioting as well as determined counter-action by Muslim communal leaders to prevent the spread of nationalism and other dangerous ideas among Muslims. In Kishoreganj, communal *mullahs* arrived posthaste to step into the shoes of the Young Comrades' League leaders. In Dacca, Khwaja Atiullah was faced with a formidable rival in Syed Abdul Hafeez (President of the Islamia Anjuman) who had links with the Nawab of Dacca. Hafeez had issued a notice forbidding Muslim participation in the hartals but this failed to have much effect. This led to an immediate hardening of policy which was decided at a meeting at Ahsan Manzil (the Dacca Nawab's palace) attended,

curiously enough, among others, by the District Magistrate.[23] The Magistrate also forced Atikullah to resign and his base in the 22 Panchayts was taken over by the Ahsan Manzil group.[24] The initiative taken by a senior official in encouraging communal divisions is extremely significant. The broader context behind such a move was probably provided by the Peshawar mutiny of April 1930 when Hindu Garhwali troops refused to fire on Pathan demonstrators. It was from then on that we find the *The Statesman* editorials systematically expounding the theory of Muslim separatism.[25]

Apart from the mutiny, participation of Muslims in civil disobedience in quite a few places in Bengal had made such interference imperative. The Subdivisional Officer at Madaripur (Faridpur District) described how he organised a Muslim loyalist meeting which, however, boomeranged. 'We had arranged for a very influential local Pir to come to deliver a strong pro-Government speech . . . but . . . at the last moment he appeared as a Non-Cooperator.[26] The Collector of Bakarganj wrote in his travel diary in July 1930: 'There are about 100 anti-civil disobedience volunteers lined up for review by me. . . . They are all Muhammadans'.[27] Another deliberate method to promote divisiveness in areas where civil disobedience was most acute was the concentration of Muslim policemen for purposes of repression.[28]

Police behaviour during riots also consolidated communal rift. In most cases the police followed a policy of masterly inactivity (when it was not directly involved in rioting as in Chittagong) in sharp contrast to its remarkable promptness in attacking unarmed salt satyagrahis in remote villages in the interior. It took the police 4 days to mobilise action in Dacca,[29] and Hindu appeals for help were met with mocking rejoinders telling them to ask Gandhi to save them. There were numerous Hindu complaints about police unresponsiveness and callousness.[30] The official *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report* admitted: 'We are not satisfied that better use could not have been made of the forces'.[31] In Chittagong, we have seen how a senior police officer himself ordered attacks, and then, when rioting began, the town was drained of its entire police force. The police remained absent for the first three hours of rioting even though Ashanullah's funeral (which they were supposed to attend *en masse*) was

held within the town itself. When they came back to take charge, many of them openly egged on the rioters.[32]

In Kishoreganj, the situation was rather different and Hindu property-owners were gratified by prompt and determined police action. Official connivance was out of the question and antagonism between the Gurkha troops and the rioters was open.[33] At Kaliachapra, the crowd seized the Circle Officer, tied him to a cowshed post and beat him up. Police was "hemmed in on all sides" by a fierce mob at Kodalia village. They had brought some pet *maulvis* with them who pleaded with the crowd to stop rioting but the crowd rudely told them to go away.[34] Stephenson, the acting Governor of Bengal, later requested the Viceroy to recommend District Magistrate Burrows for a C.B.E. on the strength of his severe handling of the Kishoreganj crisis.[35] The striking contrast in police action here is due to the fact that despite leadership by communal *maulvis*, the anti-property nature of the conflict was quite unambiguous. It was officially recognised that the incidents were not really communal as both Hindu and Muslim property-owners were attacked. What is even more crucial was that, in Kishoreganj there was no identification between Hindu and nationalist activities which had necessitated a temporary withdrawal of official protection from Hindu property in Dacca and Chittagong. In fact, Krishachandra Ray, a moneylender, who was murdered along with his family, was the president of the local Union Board.[36] This was a position which was officially protected since the Congress at the moment was leading an anti-Union Board campaign.

Kishoreganj apart, calculated non-intervention by the police led to permanent communal hostility by forcing self-defence efforts on both the communities which further reinforced mutual suspicions. That this was a standard police practice is borne out by very similar stands during other riots as well. Police encouragement to Muslim rioters as well as deliberate inaction in the early stages were evident in Jamalpur (Mymensingh) and Comilla riots in April 1907.[37] In the Calcutta riots of September 1918, too, the Government was 'slow to recognise the gravity of the situation' and took no preventive measures at first.[38] Again, during the Kanpur riots of April 1931, both Hindus and Muslims 'frequently remarked . . . on the reluctance of Government to intervene to stop Hindu-Muslim clashes'.[39]

II

A feature common to these riots is that they all occurred during an active phase of the national movement. This brings us to the question of the responsibility of the nationalist leaders and their failure to provide a broad, political orientation to local Muslim grievances. A definite callousness towards Muslim sensibilities was revealed by a section of Congress volunteers who were directly involved in the 26 January riot in Dacca. After every communal outbreak, the nationalist press furiously and one-sidedly condemned the Muslims and demanded police reprisal.[40]

Another strand in nationalist activities which reinforced a sense of insecurity among Muslims was the crop of physical culture associations or *akharas* for Hindu youths in Calcutta and mofussil towns; the presence of Hindu centres of *lathi* and dagger-play made Muslims nervous and stimulated similar preparations among them. Dacca had a large number of such *akharas*,[41] and their exclusively Hindu ritual and modes of thinking repelled the most secular of Muslims. Muzaffar Ahmad, the leader of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, felt: 'They (the terrorists) did not admit the Muslims. They were Hindu revivalists themselves'.[42] Several of the terrorist leaders active in the *akharas* were also responsible for adding a markedly Hindu colour to the activities of the Bengal Congress. The Hindu-Muslim Pact C.R. Das had concluded in 1923 on the basis of substantial concessions to Muslims was rescinded in 1926 due to terrorist pressure.[43]

The Das Pact ensured amity only at an elite level, but it could not check communal organisation among up-country Hindus in Calcutta, particularly among the Marwaris, which had the sanction of senior nationalist leaders like Malaviya and Lajpat Rai. The centre of communal propaganda was the predominantly Marwari trading area of Burrabazar in Calcutta. Since the Swarajists greatly depended on Marwari financial support, they tried to woo them with anti-*Korbani* slogans. This led to a corresponding growth of communal associations like the *tanzim* and *tabligh* movements among the Muslims.[44] Accumulated bitterness exploded in a vicious bout of rioting in Calcutta, Dacca and other mofussil towns in 1926. Clashes originally

began between up-country Hindus and Muslims who, at first, spared Bengali Hindus. Bengali Hindus, however, took the offensive against Muslims. Rioting eroded all possibilities of even elite-level cooperation,[45] and sections of the Bengal Congress (the Dacca Congress in particular) cultivated closer relations with the Hindu Mahasabha; this further alienated the Muslims.[46]

If Swarajists in conjunction with revolutionary terrorists were not especially sensitive about Muslim fears and susceptibilities, Gandhians from their rural *ashrams* certainly showed a warm sympathy towards the Muslims.[47] But they too failed to achieve much in terms of mobilising Muslim support; their persistent use of Hindu scripture and precepts precluded Muslim response. Also, apart from very localised and marginal relief operations they provided no programme of action for the urban and rural Muslim poor. In fact, the Congress in Bengal alienated a large section of Muslim peasants by its firm espousal of zamindari rights in the 1928 Tenancy Amendment debates,[48] by its refusal to take into account the growing indebtedness of the peasants, and its failure to initiate any moves after the onset of the agricultural depression. The Workers' and Peasants' Party had a radical and secular enough programme but it was an extremely small unit. The Meerut arrests of March 1929 had further depleted its ranks.

Programmatic, ideological and organisational limitations of the radical/nationalist leadership left the field clear for the operations of Muslim communal forces—the Nawab of Dacca and his Ahsan Manzil clique, communal *maulvis* from Dacca and Noakhali and the *tanzim* and *tabligh* movements. Apart from them, another group of Muslim politicians began to reap a rich harvest. This was the Proja Movement under Fazlul Huq which basically represented the up-thrust of prospering Muslim tenants, particularly in the jute-belt of Eastern Bengal. This section found its growing aspirations repeatedly thwarted by a combination of Hindu landlords, money-lenders and traders whose interests were ably defended by the Swarajists in Council.[49] They tried to prevail against this bloc by formulating some populist demands to enlist the support of Muslim poor peasants. There was nothing intrinsically communal in their programme,[50] but the configuration of rural interests in Bengal was such that exploiters could easily be identified as Hindus and mobilisation against them could proceed on Muslim sectional lines. This had

happened in the 1926 anti-*Mahajan* movement at Ghiur (Manikganj subdivision in Dacca) under Huq against evicting tenants for debt-recovery. The 1925 tenant movement against the oppressive Hindu zamindar of Kalaskathi (Barisal district) took the form of cow-slaughter and refusal to participate in immersion ceremony by the Muslim tenants.[51]

What was the configuration of rural forces that helped communal polarisation? In most parts of Bengal zamindars, *mahajans* and traders were overwhelmingly Hindu. Partly because of a religious taboo on usury, Muslims generally kept out of money-lending activities which were monopolised by Bengali Sahas and, more recently, by Marwaris.[52] Both in Dacca and in Mymensingh the proportion of *mahajans* was exceptionally high. Indeed, Dacca's ratio of money-lenders per lakh of population was the highest in Bengal—280 compared to 40 in Bankura or 26 in Birbhum. Mymensingh came second with 175 per lakh. The usual rate of interest charged in Dacca was 12% to 192% while in Mymensingh it ranged between 24% and 225%.[53] After the passing of the Sarda Act which restricted the minimum age for marriage, a spate of hasty weddings immensely increased the debt burden.[54]

Both Dacca and Mymensingh were in the heartland of the jute belt of Bengal and the fortunes of their peasants were closely bound up with fluctuations in jute prices. The world slump in agricultural prices which became evident in Bengal from around mid-1930 vitally affected the cash reserves of the jute-growers and consequently, their state of indebtedness. The magnitude of the problem is clear from the index of jute prices. In 1928, the index number was 107.3; in 1930 it fell to 54.9 and again went down to 50.4 in 1931.[55] It was claimed that, from 1930 to 1937 every *maund* of jute was grown at a loss.[56] The exceptionally heavy dependence of Dacca and Mymensingh peasants on Hindu *mahajans* and the exorbitantly high rate of interest charged by them explains why snatching of debt bonds constituted the single most important element in rural rioting. Preoccupation with *mahajans* may also be related to the social composition of rioters. Resentment of high interest rates may be taken to indicate that it was Muslim peasants of some substance (though not the really rich ones who would not be very dependent on credit) who were the moving spirit behind the riots. Desire for credit indicates

credit-worthiness as well as need. The Keraniganj Union Board President, who spread the rumour referred to earlier, to incite rioting, probably belonged to this group. The slump in jute prices and the paucity of hard cash explains another important feature. While the major cash crops were bringing in less and less money, there was no parallel decline in prices of manufactured articles. So at village *hats* there were frequent rushes on shops and here again Hindus suffered more as almost invariably they owned the *hats* and had the largest stalls. *Hat* looting on a very large scale had already occurred in Mymensingh in 1929 when in the Baghaitola *hat* of Haluaghat thana peasants tried to barter grain for oil, clothes and farming tools. When the traders refused, they looted the shops, clashed with the police and assaulted the agent of the local zamindar who owned the *hat*.[57]

In Dacca town 'the economic position of the Muhammadan population has remained much the same . . . while they have seen the Hindus growing richer and richer'.[58] Hindus carried on considerable banking operations, were involved in the jute trade and had recently established some cotton mills. They also controlled important small industries while there was no comparable, profitable Muslim business enterprises.[59] The comfortable position of Hindus in Dacca town is indicated by the fact that economically and socially superior castes there overwhelmingly outnumbered the relatively inferior castes. There were 8,465 Brahmins, 20,224 Kayasthas and 10,946 Sahas as against only 536 Barui and 1,314 Namasudras.[60] Another pointer to the relatively privileged social status of Hindus is that there were 17,068 literate Hindus as against only 8,932 literate Muslims. What is even more significant from the point of view of social status was that only 5,922 Muslims had any English education as against 15,827 Hindus.[61] The difference in social status was most glaring in the contrast in types of accommodation. In the town of Dacca, Muslims were compressed into insanitary slums, while Hindus had built palatial residences on the best sites.[62] The social envy this generated among the Muslims determined an important feature of urban rioting: repeated and furious attacks on "palatial residences" and deliberate and wanton destruction. This cannot be explained entirely by the motive of loot. Photographs in the *Modern Review* reveal pictures of enormous,

imposing houses with their walls torn down, floors dug up, and doors and windows hacked to bits.[63] The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* also commented on the destruction of "beautiful buildings" rather than murder as in earlier riots. It noted: 'On the above two occasions (1926 and 26 January 1930) the rioters were after breaking one another's heads—but no attempt was made to set fire to houses'.[64] Interestingly enough, there were only a few attacks on Hindu temples although that would have been a more typical feature of communal frenzy.

Social differences were equally acute in the countryside where the combination of Hindu zamindars, *mahajans* and traders arrogantly lorded it over the Muslims in general. Abul Mansur Ahmad has vividly described the humiliation that even better-off Muslims suffered in day-to-day social relations in the Mymensingh village.[65] Social envy also provided a powerful impulse to Kishoreganj rioting. Krishna Chandra Ray of Jangalia, before being killed during a communal riot, built himself a house the like of which the village had not seen and had bought a car which Muslims were not allowed to touch. The account of his murder has an interesting point; at first he had opened a volley of fire on the gang of attackers who fled. But after they had gone a little away, a servant of the house with a Hindu name ran after them and called out that his ammunition was exhausted and they could come back. The crowd returned and killed the entire family.[66]

III

The pattern of rioting, the main targets, the chief participants, and the aims of rioters reveal that the three riots were either rural or urban social protests behind a facade of Muslim attacks. A fine discrimination in the choice of targets bears this out. In Dacca, only one or two temples were attacked, domestic shrines in Hindu houses were not desecrated and only houses along with shops, godowns and markets that were seen as symbols of wealth and ostentation were attacked. In fact it was the Hindus who attacked Muslim slums and small poor shops in the Ticcatooly area.[67] The Hindu business area of Kayettuli was the scene of repeated attacks although Ramna, the seat of the Hindu professional middle class, was left alone. At least in one

instance caste Hindus, Muslims and untouchable "chamars", jointly looted a Hindu shop.[68] Loss of property, rather than murder, was the chief Hindu grievance. There was no report of rape although the Hindu press had systematically built up a stereotype of the bestial Muslim male lusting after Hindu women.[69] In one instance, an armed gang of Muslims exercised remarkable self-restraint when they attacked a Hindu house occupied by four young girls; the girls only lost their jewels.[70]

Such a definitely class-based selection of targets reminds us of the Gordon riots of 1780 in London when anti-Catholic rioters concentrated only on houses of rich Catholics.[72] In villages around Dacca there was a similar pattern. The Keraniganj *hat* was entirely looted but except for one case of arson there was no other kind of violence like rape or murder. A Brahmin child widow was threatened with abduction but nothing actually happened.[73] The rumour circulated by the Union Board President was that, Muslims could loot Hindu Saha houses with perfect freedom; it did not say that all Hindu houses must be attacked. In Kishoreganj, rioting started with an attack on a Muslims taluqdar. Even when the communal organisation *Khadem-ul-Mulk* assumed leadership, its instructions had nothing to do with a crusade against Hindus as such, but were concerned with maintaining discipline during confrontation with *mahajans*.[74] Generally, rioters would snatch away guns of *mahajans* and throw them into nearby ponds and destroy debt bonds; violence usually ensued only if the *mahajans* resisted.[75] In Chittagong villages, there was no Hindu-Muslim rioting, and in the police attacks on Hindus, Muslims did not participate. During rioting in the town only the *bazar* area was affected and Hindu residences were spared.[76]

If we do not regard these outbreaks as purely communal incidents, we can then try to identify some other features in the collective mentalities of the relatively depressed Muslim crowd. In the first place, in all cases anger was focused on Hindu money-lenders rather than on Hindu landlords.[77] Rent burden in Bengal was not as excessive as in some other places like Oudh[78] and this partly explains it. Also, landlords were perhaps vested with some amount of customary legality in the peasant mind whereas *mahajans* appropriating the lands of indebted peasants had been attacked as an unacceptable, alien imposition since the

days of the 1857 Revolt. As a result anti-landlord outbreaks in Bengal were a far more infrequent occurrence than anti-*mahajan* riots.

Even at the height of rioting there were instances when an alternative concept of fair deal was indicated in crowd behaviour In the Baqhaitola *hat* looting in Mymensingh, looters at first tried to enforce a barter system of exchange and went in for plunder when that failed.[79] In Kishoreganj, *mahajans* were generally asked to surrender documents relating to debt and not their other valuables.[80] In Dacca town, after the Muslims had entirely taken over certain areas, looted goods from Hindu shops were sold against ridiculously low prices and not simply appropriated.[81] After the most intense phase of rioting was over and a few stalls opened in the market, Muslims imposed a strict rationing on the amount of goods that could be sold to rich Hindus of the locality.[82] Hindus later retaliated by opening five Municipal markets; these were closed to all Muslims.[83] After the 1926 Calcutta riots too they had boycotted all Muslim shops and services, causing serious economic dislocation among Muslim labourers and petty traders.[84] In contrast, it seems that the Muslim poor exerted their temporary power during riots to enforce a crude, primitive form of punitive justice against their social superiors and their oppressors.

In Dacca and Kishoreganj riots, rumours played an important role in mobilising the masses for action.[85] But this feature was common to other types of movements as well. Both during non-cooperation and civil disobedience, many kinds of rumours circulated among the sub-political, largely, illiterate peasant and tribal communities, holding out the promise of the sanction of some superior authority to activise large crowds.

In Kishoreganj, Muslim religious leaders from Dacca and Noakhali not only gave a broader communal orientation to a local protest movement, but also exerted their influence in other directions. Pir Badshah Mian of Faridpur was an important factor in linking up Muslim peasants and the national movement, and other *Pirs* also issued directions asking Muslims to join civil disobedience.[86] The role of the religious leaders as the link-up between the unorganised local peasantry and broader provincial and national political movements was thus shared by different movements and had its parallel among the Hindu peasants.

In Kishoreganj where official sanction to rioting was absent, Muslim attackers or plunderers of Hindu property unhesitatingly identified the police as collaborators in oppression. Kodalia and Kaliachapra clashes between Muslim rioters and the police had their exact parallels in clashes between Congress peasants in Midnapur and police forces taking place at about the same place.

But the Congress organisation which was leading the peasants of Midnapur showed no interest in knitting together such similar impulses on the basis of a radical economic programme. Thus what were fundamentally agrarian jacqueries or the fury of the urban poor against a social system reinforced by an alien imperialism turned into communal fighting due to imperfect politicisation. Such missed chances were a perennial feature of Bengal politics from the 1920s onwards and foreshadowed the tragedy of partition.

FOOTNOTES

1. Reaction to constitutional changes has been accepted as the determining factor by J.H. Broomfield in 'The Forgotten Majority—The Bengali Muslims: September 1918,' in D.A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London, 1968). This is also the approach in F. Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: Politics of U.P. Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge, 1974).
2. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report* of 12/8/1933—Government of India—Home Poll. 4/9/1930. Also Home Poll. 10/2/1930.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Bengal Chief Secretary Hopkyns to GOI (Home) 26/6/1930—Enclosing Dacca Police Superintendent's Report No. 9555-36 of 14/6/1930, *ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Statement by Secretary, Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 June 1930.
7. Pramatha Gupta—*Je Sangramer Sesh Nei* (Calcutta, 1971), pp 40-47. Also Dharam Goswami, *Ekti Krishak Vidroher Kahini Parichay*, (Calcutta, 1969), p. 215.

8. Interview with Professor Shantimoy Ray. He was a terrorist pensioner in Mymensingh jail and met a number of convicts from Kishoreganj.
9. *Ganer Bohi-Loter Gan* (Published by Lakshmikanta Kirtanya and Kumud Bhattacharya, Mymensingh, 1930). Proscribed Literature Collection, P. Ben B 24 (India Office Library).
10. *Statesman*, 16 July 1930.
11. A Muslim eye-witness later wrote that two Muslim police officers made vicious anti-Hindu speeches to incite the Muslim crowd. Mohammad Waliullah, *Yugavichitra* (Dacca, 1967), p. 298.
12. *Report of the Non-Official Enquiry Committee*—E.B. Baker Collection, Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge (hereafter SAS).
13. *Ibid.*
14. Home Poll. 4/49/1932.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Report of the Non-Official Enquiry Committee.*
17. *Je Sangramer Sesh Nei*, p. 42.
18. *The Peasant Uprising in Kishoreganj*—Leaflet of August 1930. Courtesy: Sri Chinmohan Sehanobis.
19. *The Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report.*
20. *The Political Situation in Dacca Before the Disturbances, Modern Review*, July 1930, p. 23.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report.*
23. Home Poll. 10/2 of 1930.
24. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report.*
25. See, for instance, Political Notes in *Statesman*, 28 May 1930, or editorial of 29 May 1930.
26. E.B. Baker to his father, 12 August 1930, Baker Papers, SAS.
27. Entry for 22 July 1930, J.T. Donovan Papers, SAS.
28. Probodh Chandra Bose, *Medinipur Jelar Bhagawanpur Thanar Itibritta* (Calcutta, 1976), p. 127.
29. Home Poll. 10/4 of 1930.
30. *Modern Review*, July 1930.
31. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report.*
32. See above.

33. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 July 1930.
34. *Statesman*, 16 July 1930.
35. Stephenson to Irwin, 27 August 1930, Letter 542—Halifax Collection, IOL.
36. *Statesman*, 16 July 1930.
37. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1905-1908* (New Delhi, 1973), p. 452.
38. J.H. Broomfield, 'The Forgotten Majority', *op. cit.*, p. 216.
39. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-1934* (New Delhi, 1978), p. 139.
40. *Modern Review*, July 1930; the BPCC Bulletin of 17 July 1930 wrote about Kishoreganj: "A most horrible story of loot and murder ... as a result of communal frenzy at Kishoreganj"—*AICC Papers*, G 86 and Kw(i) of 1930, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, (NML).
41. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report*.
42. Interview by P.C. Joshi, 1967. Courtesy: Gautam Chattopadhyay.
43. Bimalananda Sasmal—*Swadhinatai Phanki* (Calcutta, 1967), p. 137.
44. Kennetth Macpherson, *Muslim Microcosm—Calcutta 1918-1935* (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 78-89.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report*.
47. Transcript of Satish Chandra Das Gupta's interview with Aparna Basu, 5 January 1969, NML.
48. For Muslim reactions to the Swarajist stand, see Abdul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachhar* (Dacca, 1970), pp. 61-62.
49. Jatindranath De, 'The History of the Krishak Proja Party of Bengal 1929-47' (Unpublished thesis, Delhi University, 1978).
50. B.D. Habibullah, *Sher-e-Bangla* (Barisal, 1962), p. 33.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60; also, p. 34.
52. *Report of the Bengal Banking Enquiry Commission 1929-30*, vol. I, p. 194.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Home Poll. 10/4 of 1930.
55. B.B. Chaudhuri, 'The Process of Depeasantisation in

Bengal and Bihar, 1885-1947', *Indian Historical Review*, July 1975, p. 117.

56. *Report of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission*, vol. I, 1940, p. 83.
57. *Je Sangramer Sesh Nei*, p. 37.
58. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report*.
59. *Report of the Bengal Banking Enquiry Commission*, p. 31.
60. Table IV, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Statistics, 1921-22* to *1930-31*, Dacca.
61. Table XXII in *ibid.*
62. *Daeca Disturbances Enquiry Report*.
63. *Modern Review*, July 1930.
64. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 June 1930.
65. *Amar Dekha Rajnitia Panchash Bachhar*, p. 7.
66. *Loter Gan.*
67. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 June 1930.
68. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report*.
69. *Yugavichitra*, p. 211.
70. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 June 1930.
71. Home Poll. 10/4/1930.
72. George Rudé, *Crowd in History 1730-1848* (New York, 1964), chapter 7.
73. Home Poll. 10/4/1930.
74. *Ekti Krishak Vidroher Kahini*, p. 215.
75. *Loter Gan.*
76. See above.
77. *Ekti Krishak Vidroher Kahini*, p. 215.
78. *Bengal Land Revenue Commission*, p. 100.
79. See above.
80. *Loter Gan.*
81. *Glimpses of Dacca Disturbances—Modern Review*, July 1930.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Report*.
84. *Yugavichitra*, p. 95.
85. See above.
86. *Sher-e-Bangla*, p. 35.