

**SOME ASPECTS OF BENGALI MUSLIM
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT
1918 - 1947**

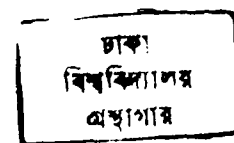
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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
BY
RANA RAZZAQUE AHSAN**



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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA
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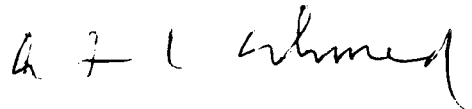
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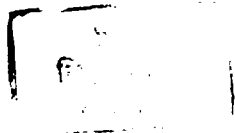
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This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Some Aspects of Bengali Muslim Social and Political Thought, 1918-1947" is the product of original research undertaken under my supervision by Mrs. Rana Razzaque Ahsan for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Dhaka. I further certify that this work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any other degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any similar title and that it represents an independent work on the part of the candidate Mrs. Rana Razzaque Ahsan.

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I hereby state that the thesis entitled "Some Aspects of Bengali Muslim Social and Political Thought, 1918-1947" submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) is my original and independent work carried out under the supervision of Professor A.F.Salahuddin Ahmed, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title.

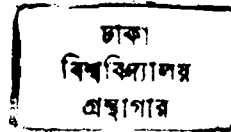
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18-1947**

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the history of ideas of the Bengali Muslim thinkers between the years 1918 and 1947. Attempt has been made to highlight the various dominant and subdued trends of thought represented by a cross section of politicians, social thinkers, journalists and literateurs of the time. Categorization has been made of those personalities into conservative - orthodox, moderate - liberal and radical - humanist, after a critical analysis of their ideas and beliefs. Putting an individual thinker under strict category is a risky and controversial thing to do but loose categorization has been made to identify the particular trend they highlighted. It did not always happen that a certain politician or a social thinker adhered strictly to one single trend all through his life. Just as circumstances are not static similarly individual belief might also change. Considering all the shifts and changes developments and contradictions present in the ideas of the personalities chosen for this study, categories have been made to highlight the distinct trends they represented. It is essential to note that there were many variations, diversities and contradictions in the ideas of each personality listed under the above mentioned categories.

Last chapter of the study deals with five novels based on the historical background of the time . The novels chosen for

the analysis of the period under this study significantly highlight the urban and the rural life of the Bengali Muslims. While politicians and social thinkers have expressed their ideas on governmental policies, colonial rule, communal relationship, regional and linguistic identity, novels expose life of the common man as it was in the midst of the existing social and economic conditions. These particular novels also depict social stratification and social mobility, inter-communal and intra-communal relationship particularly among rural Muslims. Economic activities, fluctuation in the price of cash crops, natural calamities and governmental policies at various times had affected the common people which have also been reflected in these novels. Existence of religious conservatism, preachings of **mullahs** and **maulvis**, ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and extravagance of the Bengali Muslims have been exposed vividly by the novelists who themselves lived in the age they wrote about as keen and conscious observers.

Introduction

During the early decades of the twentieth century the social and political outlook of the Muslims of Bengal had undergone significant transformation. This was also reflected in their economic development. The Muslims were a majority community in Bengal by the turn of the last century comprising over fifty-one percent of the total population according to the census of 1901. They were economically backward compared to both the Muslims of other provinces in India and to the Hindu community in Bengal. Wealth in the province was largely in the hands of the Hindus. Most of the **zamindars** and landholders in Bengal were Hindus. Vast majority of the Muslims were peasants who tilled the land of mostly Hindu landowners. Trade and commerce were also largely in the hands of the Hindus. During the Mughal rule the Hindus held monopoly of service in the revenue department which they retained even in the early years of British rule in India.¹ Muslims who were employed in the judiciary and civil administration in Bengal belonged mostly to upper class and were mainly non-Bengali. Unlike the Muslims of northern India who were wealthy landlords and well-placed in jobs, Muslims in Bengal were in a depressed economic condition. This was due to the fact that most Muslims in Bengal were peasants who lived in rural areas. When the first census was taken in 1871 Muslims in Bengal comprised 48.8% of the total population. According to 1891 census, few Muslims resided in urban areas comprising only about 3.5% out of the total population.² Most Muslims

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1. A.F.Salahuddin Ahmed, **Bangladesh: Tradition and Transformation**, Dhaka, 1987.p.33.
 2. Urban population in Bengal as a whole was 5.3% in 1872 which increased to 6.7% in 1921. "Even in Dacca (Eastern Bengal) urban population was less than 4% of the whole". **Census of India, 1921, Vol.V, Bengal, Part 1**, Calcutta, 1923.p.12. Also see, Shila Sen, **Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947**, New Delhi,, 1976.p.3.Rangalal Sen, **Political Elites in Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1986.p.31.

residing in urban areas particularly in Calcutta and Dacca were of upper class origin and were mostly Urdu-speaking migrants from upper India. Many of them had interests in land and commerce. In rural Bengal most Muslims were of indigenous origin, converted largely from Hindus and some from Buddhists.³ Rural Muslims were mostly poor peasants. Some also belonged to lower occupations like weaving, fishing and fish-selling, shoemaking, tailoring and pottery.⁴ Compared to the Muslims of other regions of India those in Bengal were largely homogeneous in respect of language, occupation and culture. Muslims in rural Bengal were comparatively more homogeneous than those in urban areas where they were a diversified community.⁵ The urban Muslims were mostly descendants of the

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3. The majority of the Muslims in Bengal were of indigenous origin. But this view was countered by a strong section of Bengali Muslims, particularly belonging to the educated class who claimed that a greater percentage of the Bengali Muslims were of foreign descent. This was an emotional claim which could not be proved by any authentic document. Controversy over the origin of the Muslims in Bengal started after the publication of the Census Report of 1872 of Bengal which revealed that a large proportion of the population in the province were Muslims. Most European scholars and officials like H. Beverley, Dr. James Wise, W.W. Hunter, Dr. Francis Buchanan, Sir Herbert Risley believed on the basis of ethnological and cultural affinities that large-scale conversion from low-caste Hindus to Islam had taken place to form a Muslim majority in Bengal proper. This argument was rejected by khondker Fuzli Rubbee, Khan Bahadur, Dewan of Murshidabad, in his book, *Haqiqat-i-Musalman-i-Bangala* which he himself translated into English under the title, *The Origin of the Muhammadans of Bengal*, published from Calcutta in 1895 (1896?) in which he attempted to prove that Muslims in Bengal were largely descendants from noble and aristocrat Muslim families who migrated to Bengal from outside at different periods of time. See, Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1983. (rpt. Academic Publishers, Dhaka, 1983) pp. 22-43. Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1855 - 1906, Collaboration and Confrontation*, Calcutta, 1984. pp. 48-49. 53-57. Also see, Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871 - 1906, A Quest for Identity*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981. (2nd. ed. 1988). pp. 113 - 114.
 4. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Ibid.* pp. 12, 18.
 5. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Ibid.* p. 13. Asim Roy, *Ibid.* pp. 20-21.

nobility or the **ashrafs** as they preferred to call themselves and spoke Urdu. They followed north Indian culture which was very much a characteristic of the Mughals. The **ashrafs** in the countryside chose to imitate the urban nobility in Bengal. Affectation in language and culture by the **ashrafs** was to prove their foreign origin. This resulted in their alienation from both the Hindus and the vast majority of the Bengali-speaking Muslims. The majority of the community residing in rural Bengal were considered of lower social order or **atraps** primarily because they were of indigenous origin and poor.⁶ The **ashrafs** treated the **atraps** with contempt. They were reluctant to learn and speak Bengali and refused to call themselves Bengalees. A sharp division in the Bengali Muslim community emerged out of this issue of their linguistic disaffinity.⁷

Economically the Muslims in Bengal were in a very depressed condition. Muslims were the ruling power when the British arrived in India. With the loss of political power the Muslims also lost their economic privileges. The upper-class Muslims in Bengal used to enjoy royal patronage during the Mughal rule. A few of the upper-class Muslims who were engaged

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6. Influence of Hinduism was strong among rural Muslims. Although they had been converted to Islam Muslims were found very often to practice Hindu rituals and customs. As the *Census of India, 1921* reports, "Even now it is not peculiar to find Muhammadans in some parts of the province make offerings to some tree or even at a temple dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali along with their Hindu neighbours.--" *Census of India, 1921, Vol. V Bengal, Part I, Calcutta, 1923, "Census Report of Bengal and Sikkim", 1921, P.159. Also see, A.R. Mallick, British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 1757-1856, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977. pp. 7-8, Amalendu De, Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal, Calcutta, 1974 . pp. 25 - 30.*
 7. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* pp. 6-9. The author points out clearly the social discrimination between these two ethnic and cultural groups existing in Bengali Muslim society both at urban and rural levels.

in the higher posts in land revenue administration and acted as an intermediary between the actual collectors of revenue and the government were replaced by the Hindus after the introduction of Permanent Settlement in 1793.⁸ Hunter had mentioned that the Permanent Settlement and the laws associated with it had destroyed the economic condition of the Muslims.⁹ But Hunter's opinion had long been discarded as incorrect in respect of Bengal. The Muslims in Bengal, unlike those in northern India, did not possess much landed property. During the rule of Murshid Kuli Khan (1700-1727), for instance, more than three-fourths of the big and small **zamindaris** and most of the **talukdaris** in Bengal belonged to the Hindus.¹⁰ The Muslims of Bengal held only two out of twenty-two small and two out of fifteen large **zamindaris** in the province.¹¹ Under Mughal rule Hindus were largely employed in the revenue department. Collection of revenue was left to the Hindus even by the Muslim landholders. Under Permanent Settlement regulations when lands of defaulters were sold by auction it was mostly the Hindu revenue collectors who had accumulated vast capital bought those lands.¹² This resulted in the creation of a class of wealthy Hindu **zamindars** in Bengal by the early nineteenth century. The Muslims, on the other hand, became economically more depressed by the 1840's when they lost the rent-free or **lakheraj** lands. They were put to further distress when in 1837 Persian which was used as official language was abolished and substituted by English and vernacular languages. The upper-class Muslims had neglected Bengali language out of contempt because they believed it was the language of the Hindus while the

8. A.R. Mallick, *op. cit.* p. 38.

9. W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, London, 1871, (rpt. Lahore, 1964). pp. 120 - 121.

10. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* p. 33.

11. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya (A Critical Analysis of the Muslim Literateurs in Bengal)*, Muktaadhara, Dhaka, 3rd. ed. 1983. p. 20.

12. *Ibid.* p. 21.

lower class Muslims had also shunned English because it was the language of the new Christian rulers. The Muslims had once been the ruling power in India, and, therefore, refused to acquire English education out of a false sense of pride which germinated in them after they had lost political power to the British. This psychological factor acted as a negative force resulting in their economic impoverishment and social and political backwardness. Trade and commerce in Bengal were largely in the hands of the Hindus. Most of the landholders were also Hindus. Muslims, mainly the upper-class and non-Bengalee had in the previous age formed the Mughal bureaucracy. After the establishment of British rule this non-Bengalee upper-class co-operated with the British and they were later to act as self-proclaimed leaders of the Bengali Muslim society.

The lower class Muslims, mostly peasants and landless, resided mainly in the eastern half of Bengal. They usually cultivated the land of the Hindu **zamindars** who in most cases were absentee landlords. The peasantry, mostly Muslims was left at the mercy of the middlemen, money lenders and collectors of revenue, mostly Hindu. The peasants cultivated land in most primitive conditions and had to depend on nature. Drought or bad harvest meant that they had to borrow money from **mahajans** (money-lenders), again mostly Hindus, at high interest rates often varying from thirty-seven to sixty percent and in case of advance of rice or corn interest rate charged went even upto hundred percent.¹³

Compared to the Muslims the position of the Hindus of Bengal was different. Their attitude, in fact, was more pragmatic than that of the Muslims. They had learnt English, the language of the new rulers, and had come to hold posts in all branches of administration since the early nineteenth century. They were also well-versed in Persian and had held administrative and clerical posts during Mughal rule. The establishment of the Hindu College in 1817 in Calcutta contributed greatly to the formation of an English educated Hindu

13. A.R. Mallick, *op. cit.* p. 60.

middle class in Bengal. After October 1844 when directions were given to government offices that appointments should be made to those having knowledge of English, not a single Muslim got appointed for the next few years.¹⁴ In the years 1851 - 1852 out of the 77 students from the Dacca College who were in the government employment only one was a Muslim and in the education department a few Muslims with knowledge of Arabic and Persian were employed for teaching in the **madrassahs**.¹⁵

By the middle of the nineteenth century two parallel but contradictory developments could be viewed both among the Hindu and the Muslim communities in Bengal. On the one hand an intellectual awakening had taken place among the Hindus and they were making progress through contact with enlightened western ideas of liberalism and humanism.¹⁶ The Muslims, on the other hand, receded backward drawing inspiration from their past glory and seeking solace in religion. During the nineteenth century religious reform movements took place in both the communities in Bengal. The Hindu religious reform movement coupled with a movement for social upliftment was initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833). He was critical of the irrational aspects of Hindu religion and imbibed by the spirit of rationalism he sought to reinterpret Hinduism in the nineteenth

14. **Ibid.** p.56

15. **Ibid.** p. 56 - 57.

16. This modern awakening is known as the "Bengal Renaissance". Close associates of Ram Mohan Roy included Dwarkanath Tagore (1794 - 1846) and Prasanna Kumar Tagore (1801 - 1868). Ultraradicalism was also present in the "Young Bengal Movement" which sprang from the Hindu College. This movement was started by Henry Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), a Portuguese-Indian who inspired a group of English - educated youths to revolt against all social and religious conservatism.

century perspective. A reformist movement which was backward looking also started during this time among the Muslims of Bengal. This movement was purely religious and puritanical in character which drew its inspiration from a similar movement that had started in Arabia in the eighteenth century. It manifested itself in various forms like the **Farazi** and the **Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah** movements. These reformist movements in the early decades of the nineteenth century advocated strict adherence to Islamic **shariah** and were directed particularly to purge Islam of all indigenous, meaning Hindu, influences. This reformist attitude was, however, not a general phenomenon. The movement was confined to a small section of rural Muslims.

Islam in Bengal since its advent however, contained a syncretic element in this region. Since most Muslims in Bengal were converted either from Buddhism or Hinduism they retained many indigenous influences in their cultural and religious practices. Thus a strong syncretistic tradition prevailed

Disciples of Derozio like Krishnamohan Banerjee (1813 - 1885) even gave up Hinduism and accepted Christianity to make an open defiance of the existing social conventions. There was, however, a moderate reform attitude present among a section of educated Hindus like Debendranath Tagore (1817 - 1905), Akshoy Kumar Datta (1820 - 1886), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820 - 1891), Kaliprasanna Sinha (1840 - 1870) who preached against idolatry, advocated widow remarriage and female education. Contrary to all these reform movements there also existed a religious revivalist movement called "neo-Hinduism" which included men like Radhakanta Deb (1784 - 1867), Ramkamal Sen (1783 - 1844) and others who advocated strict adherence to orthodox religious society. Susobhan Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays*, New Delhi, 1970 (2nd. ed. 1981), pp. 5-31. Also see, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Changes in Bengal, 1818 - 1835*, Leiden 1965 (2nd ed. Calcutta 1976). Shunil Gangopadhyay, *Shei Shomoy*, Vols. I and II, Calcutta, 1981 and 1982 respectively. An interesting novel based on the Hindu society in the first half of the nineteenth century. Vol. 1 (12th ed. 1993), Vol.11 (8th ed. 1991).

in the Muslim community in Bengal.¹⁷ Muslim **Sufi** saints and Hindu mystics had contributed greatly to the development of syncretic Islam since the medieval times. Polytheistic practices were particularly common among Muslims in rural Bengal where a majority of the Muslim population resided. Attempts of Islamization, therefore, took place largely in rural Bengal.¹⁸ But religious reform movements made little impact upon the vast majority of the Bengali Muslims. However, under the leadership of Titu Mir (1782-1831), Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840) and his son Dudhu Miyan (1819-1862) the religious reformist movements stirred rural areas of Bengal in a different form.¹⁹ Under their influence a religion-based agrarian uprising took place in certain areas of rural Bengal. Local uprisings were organized against **zamindars** and indigo planters protesting against levying of excessive cesses (taxes) upon the poor peasants who were mostly Muslims.²⁰ Landholders in Bengal were mostly Hindus and the European indigo planters, mostly Christians. Economic exploitation and the clash between the employers and the employees acted as a major factor behind those uprisings. The illiterate and poverty-stricken Muslim peasants in Bengal were easily influenced and motivated by a religious zeal to oppose the **zamindars** and the indigo planters.²¹ Titu Mir organized Muslim peasants and artisans at Barasat in West Bengal and Dudhu Miyan collected as many as 80,000 active followers and organized uprisings in Faridpur district of East Bengal in the 1830's and the 1840's.²² Religious revivalist movements generally thrive

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17. Asim Roy, *op. cit.* pp. Xii, 4. The author terms this phenomenon as "folk Islam", a blend of indigenous practices and Islamic beliefs. Roy has made a serious and extensive study on this aspect prevalent in the Bengali Muslim society.
 18. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* pp. 39 - 50.
 19. Titu Mir was the nick-name of Mir Nisar Ali while Dudu Miyan was the nick - name of Mohammad Mohsin. A.R. Mallick, *op. cit.* p. 82, 88.
 20. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* pp. 39 - 48. Indigo plantation was extensive in the Muslim majority areas like Faridpur, Dacca, Rajshahi, Pabna, Nadia, Murshidabad and Jessore districts. See A.R. Mallick, *op. cit.* p. 61.
 21. A.R. Mallick, *op. cit.* p. 84. The author asserts this aspect by pointing out that "this accidental grouping unfortunately deepened the hatred and roused the fanatical zeal of Dudhu Miyan's followers."
 22. A.R. Mallick, *Ibid.* p. 86.

among the ignorant masses and in depressed economic conditions. Even so, not all Muslims joined the religious revivalist movements in rural Bengal. Often coercion and physical torture were carried out by reformist leaders over the poor peasants to join these religio-economic movements.²³ This indicates that not all Muslims in rural Bengal had joined the movement spontaneously and a section of them actually stayed away.

Rural Muslims were not very much enthusiastic about religious revivalist movements. The reason, of course, was their longstanding continued adherence to indigenous beliefs and customs which they shared with the Hindus. Syncretic influences in rural Bengal was in fact, a deep-rooted phenomenon. Eclecticism of the **bhakti** and the **baul** mystics like Sri Chaitanya (1485-1533) and Lalan Shah (c.1774-c.1890) respectively and the **Sufi** saints had made significant and lasting impact upon the spiritual life of the rural Muslims. The **bauls** (folk singers) who blended mysticism of the **bhakti** movement with that of the teachings of the **sufi** saints were popular in the countryside.²⁴ The rural population in Bengal retained a general feeling of communal harmony due to the influence of humanism preached by various socio - religious syncretic groups.²⁵

23. *Ibid.* p. 83.

24. **Baul** ideas flourished in Bengal between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries. A synthesis of **Vaishnavism** and **Bhakti** mysticism and **Sufi**ism, **baul** ideas denounced caste differences and communalism. See, Abul Ahsan Choudhury ed. **Lalon Memorial : Bicentenary (1774 - 1974) Volume**, Dhaka 1974. Anwarul Karim, **Baul Poet Lalan Shah**, Nauroze Kitabistan, Banglabazar, Dhaka 1966. Anwarul Karim, **Baul Shahitya O Baul Gan (Baul Literature and Baul Song)**. Kushtia, Bangladesh, 1971.

25. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, **Bangladesh : Tradition and Transformation**, Dhaka, 1987. p.4. The author mentions that the influence of Islamic fundamentalist movements had a limited impact in rural Bengal. The author also points out that orthodoxy and heterodoxy have co-existed in Bengal Muslim society. Also see, Amalendu De. *op. cit.* pp. 72 - 73. The author points out that inspite of the attempts of Islamization by the **Faraizis** and the **Wahhabis** and by the **Maulanas** and **Maulvis**, the liberal and humanistic elements present in the Bengali society helped the growth of a distinct Bengali nationality.

Attempts of Islamization were made by the religious reformists as a reaction to this syncretic trend. The **mullahs** and the **maulvis** played a dominant role in rural Bengal in the process of Islamization but the existence of the opposing force of syncretism had prevented them from being completely successful.²⁶ This phenomenon was not just limited to rural Muslims in Bengal. Syncretism of the Mughal rulers and princes like Akbar (1556-1605) and Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) and the orthodoxy of the religious leaders like Shaikh Ahmad of Sirhind (1564-1624) and of the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb (1618-1707) represented these two dominant trends which exist even today in the intellectual milieu of the Muslims of Bengal and in the whole of the Indian subcontinent.²⁷ These two contradictory streams of beliefs, one representing orthodoxy and legalistic Islam and the other syncretic, eclectic and folk Islam formed the basis of two broad categories of thought among Muslim intellectuals in Bengal.

Among the upper-class Muslims in Bengal the general tendency was to stay away from religious reform movements. This did not, however, indicate that they held an eclectic view. The so-called **ashrafs** believed that they were free from indigenous influences and refrained from involvement in the reform movements. The religious reform movements did not remain exclusively religious. Religious issues were interlinked with economic issues. The **ashrafs** were economically privileged, and, therefore, stayed away from such movements. The rural Muslims had economic grievances against the landlords

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26. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* pp. 28 - 31 where the author exposes the extent of influence of the **mullahs** and reformists in rural Bengal. The effort of the **mullahs** and the reformists failed to Islamize fully the rural masses. *Ibid.* pp. 70 - 71.
27. One can view a similar phenomenon existing in a dominant manner in Pakistan. Akbar S. Ahmed has distinguished the characteristics of those trends and their antithetical nature existing in Pakistan politics. See. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Pakistan Society*, Karachi, 1986. pp. 10-13.

but the upper-class had no such reason. Another explanation behind their non-participation could be the anti-Christian overtones of the movements. Urban leaders were pro-British at this stage and, therefore, avoided any risk of encounter with the British rulers. For the same reason they did not get involved in the 'mutiny' of 1857. In fact, they expressed loyalty to the British.²⁸ They had realized that it was futile to take an anti-British stand and accepted a principle of peaceful co-existence with the British.²⁹

The **ashraf** class was largely Urdu-speaking and Calcutta-based. Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893), who, for instance, hailed originally from eastern Bengal and knew Bengali including other languages like Urdu, Arabic, Persian and English but preferred to speak Urdu which limited the dissemination of his ideas to urban Muslims only. He gave full support to the British during the uprising of 1857 and had urged the Muslims to be loyal to the British government. He had contributed greatly to the education of the Muslims in Bengal. He preferred Urdu and Persian to Bengali language and advocated that Urdu should be the vernacular of the middle and upper-class Muslims of Bengal.³⁰ Vast majority of the Muslims in Bengal who were mostly peasants and artisans, spoke Bengali. For them he suggested an

28. Latifa Akanda, **Social History of Muslim Bengal, 1854 - 1884**, Dhaka, 1981. p.20. Jayanti Maitra, *op. cit.* pp. 4, 97. The author mentions that the "bourgeois-intellectual society of Bengal en masse" professed loyalty to the British government during the 'mutiny'. Both the Hindu and Muslim upper-class in Bengal allied with the British. Also see. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, **Bangladesh : Tradition and Transformation**. p.43 where the author mentions that Abdul Ghani Mia of the Dhaka Nawab family had, in fact, assisted the British officials in disarming the sepoys at Dhaka in November, 1857.

29. Rafiuddin Ahmed. *op. cit.* p. 52.

30. Amalendu De, *op. cit.* p. 21.

Islamized Bengali containing words which were Arabic, Persian and Urdu.³¹ The tendency of the educated Muslims in Bengal to reject Bengali as their own language was manifest in Abdul Latif's suggestion. In order to emphasize distinct Islamic identity Nawab Abdul Latif suggested that the vast majority of the Muslims in Bengal should be given primary education in Islamized Bengali.³² He also insisted that **madrassah** education should prevail.³³

31. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* pp. 125-126. See, Mohammad Mohar Ali ed. *Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur, Autobiography and other Writings*, Mehrub Publications, Chittagong (rpt. 1968), (2nd. c d.1968). pp. XXI - XXii, 194 - 195. In reply to the question sent to the members of the Education Commission, appointed by Lord Ripon in February 1882, Nawab Abdul Latif said in March 1882,

"I have already, in the course of my answers to the previous question, anticipated the subject of the vernacular language, which I think should be taught to Mahomedans in Bengal. Briefly summarised, my opinion as regards Bengal is that Primary Instruction for the lower classes of the people, who for the most part are ethnically allied to the Hindoos, should be in the Bengali language ---- purified, however, from the superstructure of Sanskritism of learned Hindoos and supplemented by the numerous words of Arabic and Persian origin which are current in every day speech; for this the Bengali of the Law-Courts furnishes a good example.

For the middle and upper classes of Mahomedans, the Urdu should be recognized as the vernacular. ----"

Ibid. pp. 194 - 195. Also see. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed. *Ibid.* pp. 43 - 47.

32. Nawab Abdul Latif did not neglect the rural Muslims. He felt it necessary to create a vernacular language for them. The vernacular he wanted was intended to lessen the extremities of the highly Sanskritized Bengali used by the Hindus and the **Musalmani Bengali** of the Puthis, popular among ordinary Muslims. See, Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* pp. 125-126. Also see, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Ibid.* p. 47.
33. Nawab Abdul Latif was convinced that English education among Muslims in Bengal had to be improved and he was equally convinced that **madrassah** education was popular and still useful and should be continued. See, Md. Mohar Ali ed. *op. cit.* pp. 197 - 199. **Madrassahs** taught Arabic and Persian. English and Bengali were excluded from the **madrassah** curriculum. The **Calcutta Madrassah** introduced English education in 1829 but little importance was given to it. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century education through **maktabs** in rural Bengal further continued to maintain exclusiveness of the Muslims in Bengal. The **maktabs** taught Urdu and Persian but excluded English and Bengali. Amalendu De, *op. cit.* pp. 9-12.

One can notice serious contradictions prevailing among the western-educated Muslims. Although Nawab Abdul Latif had formed the Mahomedan Literary Society in 1863 in Calcutta which promoted English education and arranged lectures in several languages other than Bengali, he was very much against the dissemination of western ideas and customs which he believed would change outlook of the English educated youths and destroy the existing social fabric.³⁴ Nawab Abdul Latif was pragmatic in the sense that he encouraged the learning of English language for practical consideration such as securing jobs under the government but his attitude was conservative in respect of social reforms. He feared that western ideas would subvert traditional Muslim social values. This strange attitude was a strong factor behind the backwardness of the Muslims not only in Bengal but in the whole of India.

The urban élite claimed to be the leaders of the Muslim community. One can view two broad divisions of ideas among them. Nawab Abdul Latif represented the conservative trend while Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928) held more liberal ideas. He represented the urban progressive trend³⁵. Syed Amir Ali declared that **Madrassah** education was of no practical use and should be discarded ³⁶. Western influenced and English-educated, Syed Amir Ali, stressed that English language should be given more importance. But, in respect of the vernacular of the Muslims of Bengal he, like other **ashrafs**, advocated that Urdu should be their language just as Bengali was to the

34. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Ibid.* pp. 46-47. Also see, Jayanti Maitra, *op. cit.* pp. 105, 112 - 113.

35. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Ibid.* pp. 46-47. Nawab Abdul Latif is generally compared to his near-contemporary Raja Radhakanta Deb (1784 - 1867), a religious and social reformer of the Hindu community. Both were English educated but at the same time "were staunch upholders of orthodoxy". Syed Amir Ali's ideas could be, in most cases, compared to the reformist ideas of Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833) but Ali too, was not free from the contradictions that existed in both "renascent Hinduism and renascent Islam in the later nineteenth century." *Ibid.* pp. 49-50.

36. *Ibid.* P.52.

Hindus of Bengal³⁷. Since the urban leadership in Bengal was predominantly Urdu-speaking **ashraf**, they had an aversion to Bengali language. Although the need for an Islamized Bengali was felt by some leaders, like Nawab Abdul Latif, in order to narrow the linguistic gap between the Urdu-speaking **ashrafs** and the Bengali-speaking majority of the Muslims residing in rural Bengal, they declined to recognize Bengali as the vernacular of the Muslims of Bengal³⁸. Muslim leadership in Bengal was thus predominantly upper-class and non-Bengali, which considered the needs of the upper-class only. They failed to reach the vast majority of the Muslims in rural Bengal who were Bengali-speaking.³⁹

Another Urdu-speaking and English-educated thinker was Delwar Hossain Ahmed (1840-1913). He was a contemporary of Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Amir Ali. Delwar Hossain represented a somewhat radical and modernist trend. He was radical in his ideas relating to Muslim education and a rationalist in his religious views. Unlike Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Amir Ali he believed that government patronage was not enough for improving the condition of the Muslims. He advocated self-reliance and unity among all

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37. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* p. 125. Although Syed Amir Ali agreed that Urdu was not spoken by the majority of the Muslims in Bengal he made such a demand. *Ibid.* p. 225.
38. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op.cit.* pp. 124-126. Educated Muslims in Bengal also resented increased Sanskritization of the Bengali language. Men like Nausher Ali Khan Yusufzai (1864 - 1924), Maulvi Abdul Karim (1863-1943), Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhuri (1863-1929), Maulvi Abdul Hamid Khan Yusufzai (1845-1910), Munshi Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed (1862 - 1933), Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859 - 1931) and others at this stage supported Islamization of the language. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Ibid.* pp. 126-130. Also see, Wakil Ahmed, **Nausher Ali Khan Yousafjee**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1990. For short biographies on the others see, Shamsuzzaman Khan and Selina Hossain (ed.) **Charitavidhan** (Dictionary of Biography) Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1985.
39. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* pp. 46-47. Muslim leadership in Calcutta was divided by bitter internal rivalry. Syed Amir Ali had little influence on Bengali Muslims. His leadership could not be effective in Bengal because of an alienation created for his religious beliefs. He was a Shia Muslim whereas Bengali Muslims were mainly of the Sunni sect. Nawab Abdul Latif was a Sunni Muslim. See, Jayanti Maitra, *op. cit.* pp. 139 - 140.

sections of Muslims for the development of the community.⁴⁰ The most radical view he held during his time was the need for adopting Bengali as the vernacular of the Muslims of Bengal.⁴¹ He believed that since the **ashrafs** did not learn Bengali and the indigenous Muslims, i.e. the **atraps** did not know Persian, a linguistic gap was created which prevented the growth of fellow-feeling among them. He was of the opinion that because of this gap the Muslims in the countryside were usually swayed by fundamentalism and religious intolerance⁴². As a practical consideration he believed that Bengali should be adopted as the vernacular to the exclusion of Urdu.⁴³ He wrote, "Bengali will be our vernacular-- this is now a physical certainty."⁴⁴ He pointed out that the "obstinate resistance" to Bengali language by the rich and urban Muslims had adversely affected their relation with the vast majority of the Muslims in Bengal. He stressed that Bengali should be a necessary part of education of the Muslim gentry of Bengal.⁴⁵

Delwar Hossain Ahmed also observed that the greatest factors contributing to economic backwardness of the Muslims in Bengal were the lack of accumulated capital caused by the Islamic religious prohibition on taking interest and the Muslim law of inheritance.⁴⁶ He also believed that state should be governed by secular laws.⁴⁷ He stressed on tolerance and

40. Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.) *Muslim Modernism in Bengal* (Selected Writings of Delwar Hossain Ahmed Meerza, 1840 - 1913), Vol. I. Dhaka, 1980. p. 113.

41. Delwar Hossain Ahmed wrote,

The time is certainly come for the high class Mosalmaans of Bengal to adopt the local vernacular; and their neglect of it as a branch of education is not the least of the causes of their decline. The Mosalmaans had to adopt an indigenous language in a part of India where they were most powerful ----.

See, Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.), *Ibid.* pp. 95 - 96.

42. *Ibid.* pp. 97, 113.

43. *Ibid.* p. 96.

44. *Ibid.* p. 97.

45. *Ibid.* pp. 96 - 97.

46. *Ibid.* pp. 108, 115.

47. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed. *op. cit.* p.73.

secularism which, he believed, could not be attained without education and advancement of liberal ideas.⁴⁸ He advocated the importance of English education and the necessity for diffusion of western ideas through translations of English books on Science, Philosophy and Arts into Bengali vernacular.⁴⁹ Indeed Delwar Hossain Ahmed was very modern in his social views. He opposed the practice of **purdah** (veil) by Muslim women and also spoke against polygamy and extravagance among Muslims.⁵⁰ But he was not free from contradictions. He strongly opposed intermarriage between the migrant Muslims, i.e. the so-called **ashrafs** and the indigenous Muslims, the **atraps**.⁵¹ He believed in maintaining the purity of race and felt that the only means to prevent degeneration was to "raise the lower classes without allowing the higher to descend" through introducing education system suitable to "the exigencies of the times and to the requirements of our community."⁵² Delwar Hossain possessed the typical aristocratic feeling of the **ashrafs** but nonetheless his views were bold and very radical in the contemporary intellectual milieu of the Muslim community. His ideas relating to the use of Bengali as the vernacular and the need for learning English were particularly radical but not given much importance by his contemporaries. Some of his ideas, however, were later taken up seriously in the early decades of the twentieth century by Bengali Muslim thinkers and social reformers.

48. Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.) *op.cit.* p.113.

49. *Ibid.* p. 113.

50. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* p.74.

51. Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 106. Delwar Hossain Ahmed wrote that intermarriage between the "higher classes" and the "inferior" was because the former were small in number in Bengal and this had "diluted the blood" and had "diminished" their "feelings of pride and self-respect."

52. *Ibid.* p.107. Also see A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* p.69 where it has been mentioned that Delwar Hossain Ahmed gave much importance to his foreign descent and himself used to add honorific titles like "Mirza" and "Bukhari" to prove his respectable lineage.

Nawab Abdul Latif, Syed Amir Ali and Delwar Hossain Ahmed thus represented three distinct trends in Muslim thought. Nawab Abdul Latif contributed greatly to the ideas of exclusiveness and separatism. Syed Amir Ali was liberal, progressive and somewhat rationalist. Like Nawab Abdul Latif he was loyal to the British government in India and opposed the movement of the Indian National Congress. Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Amir Ali had attempted to remove the suspicion of the British against the Muslims after 1857. At the same time they had attempted to establish that Hindus and Muslims were two exclusive and separate communities.⁵³ Both had openly expressed their dislike for Bengali language and had never identified themselves with the people of Bengal.⁵⁴ Delwar Hossain Ahmed, despite some contradictions was a modernist, nationalist and a secularist. His views on separation of religion from politics and his stress on adopting Bengali as the vernacular of the Muslims of Bengal were considered radical in his time.

By the early decades of the twentieth century social and political leadership began to be shifted to the emerging Bengali - speaking Muslim middle-class. The English-educated Bengali Muslim leaders like A.K. Fazlul Huq had their origin mostly in rural Bengal. Influence of indigenous culture and syncretic beliefs were present in them. They developed a comparatively rationalist and liberal approach to religious and social issues. They also stressed the need for adopting Bengali as the vernacular of the Muslims. In fact, two parallel trends of thought could be distinctly viewed in Bengal in the first half of the twentieth century. While on the one hand there existed a separatist and a communal trend, on the other, there was a humanist and a syncretist trend representing secular views. Intellectual debates and controversies on religious, social and political issues reflected the prevalence of these two major trends.

53. Amalendu De, *Bangali Buddhijibi O Bichinnatabad*, (Bengali Intelligentsia and Separatism), Calcutta, 1974. p. 178.

54. Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940*. New Delhi, 1974. (rpt. New Delhi, 1979). p.73.

With the emergence of a new English-educated Muslim middle-class in Bengal a shift in the political perspective took place in the early twentieth century. Sons of rural **ashrafs** and well-off peasant families formed this middle-class in the Muslim community. This Bengali-speaking Muslim middle-class began to move from rural to urban centres. The non-Bengali Muslim élite resided mostly in urban centres like Calcutta and Dhaka. The nascent Muslim middle-class faced conflicts with the non-Bengali Muslim élite in respect of political supremacy and with the Hindu middle-class in respect of jobs, particularly in these urban centres. Leadership over the Muslim community had been in the hands of the Urdu-speaking urban **ashrafs**. Conflict over political leadership was obvious as the newly emerged Muslim middle-class began to assert itself. Communal relation with the Hindus also worsened particularly after the creation of a Muslim majority province of Eastern Bengal and Assam by the partition of Bengal in 1905 because larger share of jobs and opportunities in the new province went to the Muslims.⁵⁵ The middle-class was offended most and they started the Swadeshi movement. Communal disturbances also began to take place.⁵⁶

Muslim opinion was divided on partition. The Calcutta- based Muslim leadership and a section of the Marwari community who apprehended the loss of a potential field for commercial base and political stronghold opposed the partition. The newly emerged Muslim middle-class in Eastern Bengal began to support the move with the hope of getting more jobs and greater facilities.

55. Conflict over share of jobs contributed greatly to communal discord. In the 14 districts of the newly created East Bengal in 1905 Muslims comprised 65.85% of the total population and 41.13% of the total number of literate people but held only 15.05% of government jobs. See, Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903 - 1908*, New Delhi, 1973. p. 410.

56. Communal riots took place in various parts of Bengal in 1906 - 1907 particularly in districts like Mymensingh and Comilla. See, Sumit Sarkar, *op. Cit.* pp. 445-463. Also see, Amalendu De, *Bangali Buddhijibi O Bichinnatabad*, *op. cit.* p. 259.

Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka and Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury of Mymensingh gave lead in this respect. The Mahomedan Provincial Union was formed in October 1905 in support of the partition scheme.⁵⁷

Muslim leaders who could be called nationalists at this stage like, Abdur Rasul (1872-1917), A.H. Ghaznavi (1876 - 1953). Abul Kasem (1872 - 1936), Ismail Hossain Shiraji (1880 - 1931). Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1874 - 1950) and others joined the Hindus in protest against the partition.⁵⁸ The section of the Muslim community supporting the anti-partition agitation was small and limited to few liberal - minded intellectuals who believed in tolerance and communal harmony. They believed that partition would strain communal relation in Bengal. They believed in Hindu-Muslim unity and upheld the need for harmony and co-operation between the two communities. Muslim supporters of the Indian National Congress formed the Bengal Muhammadan Association in Calcutta on 3 November 1906 with an attempt to make the anti- partition agitation stronger. The All-India Muhammadan Association was also formed on 31 December, 1906 with the purpose to maintain communal harmony and at the same time to counter the All-India Muslim League which was formed the day before on 30 December, 1906.⁵⁹ These associations formed by the nationalist Muslims represented the view of

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57. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *Bengali Muslim Thought (1818 - 1947) Its Liberal and Rational Trends*, Calcutta. 1991. p. 71.
58. *Ibid.* pp. 74-75. Khawaja Atiqullah, Alimuzzaman Chowdhury of Faridpur, Khan Bahadur Mohammad Yusuf, Mohammad Golam Hossain, Maulvi Liaqat Hossain and Mujibur Rahman were some of the other notable Muslim supporters of the anti-partition and Swadeshi movement. Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Mohammad Akram Khan, whose attitude in the 1940's was very much in favour of the partition were interestingly against the partition of Bengal in 1905. Also see, Jayanti Maitra, *op. cit.* p.244 and Amalendu De, *Ibid.* p. 331. Muslim participation in favour of the anti-partition and Swadeshi movement both at urban and local levels has been traced by Sumit Sarkar in his book. *op. cit.* pp. 425 - 440.
59. Sumit Sarker, *Ibid.* p. 440. Jayanti Maitra, *Ibid.* p. 279.

a small section of the educated Muslims and had, in fact, made limited impact on the Muslims of Bengal.⁶⁰ Nonetheless a new current in politics was brought to the forefront. Opinion of the nationalist Muslims in Bengal was also expressed through a number of contemporary journals like the **Hindu-Muslim Sammilani**, the **Pracharak**, the **Soltan**, the **Mussalman**, the **Kohinoor** and the **Naba Nur** which preached liberal views and opposed the idea of partition.⁶¹ These journals expressed Muslim opinion against partition and supported the Swadeshi movement. Two of the journals namely the **Soltan** (in Bengali) and the **Mussalman** (in English) were much vocal in favour of the Swadeshi movement.⁶² Both the journals criticized the Muslims

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60. Sumit Sarkar, *Ibid.* P. 440. The author is of opinion that the nationalist Muslims worked mainly as individuals. The associations formed by them remained just "paper organizations".
61. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p. 83. Sumit Sarkar, *op. cit.* pp. 306, 431, 436. Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Bengali Muslim Public Opinion As Reflected in the Bengali Press, 1901 - 1930.** Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1973. pp. 46,55,59. The **Hindu - Muslim Sammilani** (1887), a monthly published from Magura; the **Pracharak** (1899 - 1902), a monthly from Calcutta; the **Soltan** (1902 - 1903), a weekly from Calcutta; the **Mussalman** (1906 onwards) published in English first as a weekly, published three times a week from 1924 onwards and from 1932 onwards as a daily ; the **Kohinoor** (1898), a monthly published between 1903 - 1907 from Faridpur and between 1911 and 1916 from Calcutta; the **Naba Nur** (1903 - 1907), a monthly from Calcutta. M.N. Islam, , *Ibid.* pp. 289, 293, 300, 302; M.N. Islam, **Shamaikpatre Jiban O Janamat**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977. pp. 429, 431-32, 433; Shamshuzzaman Khan and Selina Hossain (ed.) **Charitavidhan** (Dictionary of Biography), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1985 - p. 191.
62. Sumit Sarkar . *op. cit.* p. 436.

for their lack of self-reliance in economic life and education.⁶³ Although the **Soltan** was critical of anti-Muslim attitude of the Hindus, for instance, use of abusive terms like **Jabon** and **Neré** while referring to a Muslim, holding of the Shivaji festival, oppressions by Hindu **zamindars** on Muslim tenants, opposition to cow slaughter, it urged the Muslims to support Swadeshi programme and to participate in the Congress.⁶⁴ The **Mussalman** criticized those educated Muslims who detested Bengali language and culture and denounced those who considered themselves non-Bengali and of foreign descent. The journal despised their attempt to promote Urdu language and declared strongly that Bengali was the mother-tongue and vernacular of the Bengalees — both Hindus and Muslims.⁶⁵ The secular and nationalist overtones of these two journals represented the view of a comparatively smaller group of Bengali Muslims who opposed the partition of 1905.

Other journals like the **Islam Pracharak**, a monthly from Calcutta, on the other hand, expressed anti-Swadeshi, anti-Hindu and anti-Congress feeling representing the view of the broader section of the Muslim community who favoured partition.⁶⁶ The **Mihir O Sudhakar**, a weekly, brought out from Calcutta and financed by Nawab Ali Choudhuri (1863 - 1929) and Nawab Salimullah (1871 - 1915), the two staunchest supporters of the partition scheme, also expressed strong anti-Swadeshi feeling.⁶⁷ To the newly

63. *Ibid.* pp. 437, 439, Mujibur Rahman, the editor of the **Mussalman** personally denounced the Muslims craving for government jobs and the **Soltan** urged the Muslims to follow the Hindus in respect of self reliance. Both the journals were concerned about the upliftment of the Bengali Muslim community but never isolating the Muslims from the Hindu community in Bengal. The journals stressed the need for higher education for the Muslims and supported the process of fair competition in respect of jobs.

64. Sumit Sarkar, *Ibid.* pp. 306, 438 - 439. On the pro-Congress attitude of the **Soltan** see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press, 1901 - 1930**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka 1973, pp. 62-63.

65. Sumit Sarkar, *Ibid.* p. 437.

66. Amalendu De, **Bengali Buddhijibi O Bichinnatabad**, pp. 259-261. Also see, Amalendu De, **Islam in Modern India**, Calcutta, 1982. p. 26.

67. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *op. cit.* p. 431. Also see, Sumit Sarkar, *op. cit.* p. 443.

educated Bengali-speaking Muslims in urban Bengal partition was an advantage since there was hope for them in the newly formed province to obtain a greater share of jobs.⁶⁸ There was also a feeling among them that Bengali, the vernacular of the great majority of the Muslims would be free from the increased influence of Sanskritization by the Hindus.⁶⁹ It was also hoped by the newly emerging middle - class that persuasion by the Muslim élites in Calcutta to make Urdu the vernacular of the Muslims of Eastern Bengal would no longer be effective as before.⁷⁰

Middle-class Muslim youths in Bengal supported partition out of a strong anti-Hindu feeling. Religion was not the only cause behind this. Unemployment among the middle-class was a potent factor. Increased propaganda through journals and the electoral concessions achieved through Morley-Minto reforms in 1909 also contributed to worsening of communal relation. Rural Muslims, mostly poor peasants, were much affected by the Swadeshi programme of boycott of foreign goods but on the whole they remained indifferent to partition.⁷¹

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68. Jayanti Maitra, *op. cit.* p. 240. Also see, Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884 - 1912*. Dhaka, 1974. p. 287.
69. Jayanti Maitra, *op. cit.* p. 240. Influence of the Calcutta University in this respect and the use of Sanskrit terms and Hindu images in Bengali literature was increasingly getting unacceptable to the emerging Bengali Muslim middle - class.
70. *Ibid.* p. 240.
71. *Ibid.* p. 244. As a result of the Swadeshi movement home made goods were introduced in the market in quite a large scale and Swadeshi shops were opened in many places. Essential items like indigenous salt, sugar and textile goods cost more and were also of inferior quality. Rural Muslims, mostly poor, were unwilling to pay more for goods that were both expensive and of lower quality. Riots occurred in some places when Swadeshi activists tried to enforce sale of Swadeshi goods. These riots worsened Hindu-Muslim relation. Also see, Sumit Sarkar, *op. cit.* pp. 444 - 460 and Mustafa Nural Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press. 1901 - 1930. op. cit.* pp. 49-51.

Annulment of the partition in 1911 brought resentment particularly among the younger generation and English-educated section of the Muslim community in Eastern Bengal. They lost faith on the British and were displeased with the Muslim League leaders because of their continued loyalty to the British government. The older leaders like Nawab Salimullah (1871-1915), Syed Nawab Ali Choudhuri (1863-1929), Chowdhury Kazimuddin Ahmed Siddiqui (1876-1937) remained loyal to the British government even after the annulment and were very much anti-Congress. The branch of the Muslim League formed in Eastern Bengal and Assam in July 1908 included mostly the landowning aristocrats. The west Bengal Muslim League, formed in January 1909 also included men of the landed aristocracy and wealthy merchants who neither participated in the partition movement nor resented the annulment. The upper-class Muslims who were mostly non-Bengali had little concern with the affairs of eastern Bengal. Conflict between the non-Bengali Muslims and the Bengali speaking Muslims became apparent on the issue of partition of 1905. Creation of an independent Eastern Bengal and Assam went against the interest of the merchants and professional class of western Bengal. It is also to be mentioned here that the Bengali-speaking Muslims who were members of the Indian National Congress also welcomed the annulment of the partition.⁷² It was the Muslim middle-class in Eastern Bengal which resented the annulment and soon began to take an anti-loyalist stand. Politics in Eastern Bengal, after the annulment, came under the control of the Bengali-speaking professional middle class who now preferred to adopt politics of agitation and collaboration with the Congress. In the Lucknow Pact in December 1916 a percentage of seats was given up by them in the Punjab and Bengal Provincial Councils. To the older generation of the Muslim League leaders this was a selling out to the Hindus and a betrayal to the

72. Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987. pp.2-11. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, *Provincial Autonomy in Bengal (1937-1943)*, The Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University, Bangladesh, 1981. pp.7-9.

Muslim community.⁷³ As the prospect of self-government was assumed to be approaching near after the British government declaration in August 1917, the question of representation became a matter of vital consideration to the Muslim leaders in Bengal like Nawab Ali Choudhuri (1863-1929), Abdur Rahim (1867-1952) and A.K. Ghaznavi (1872-1939). They were greatly alarmed at the provision of a wider franchise. Being pro-British and conservative they had never sincerely attempted to organize the Muslim League as a platform for the Muslims in Bengal.⁷⁴ They had been associated more closely with the Calcutta based Central National Mohammedan

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73. Harun-or-Rashid, *Ibid.* pp. 18-19. Also see, Bazlur Rahman Khan, *Politics in Bengal, 1927-1936*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987. pp 11-12. J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*, University of California press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986. pp. 114-115. Also see, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, "The Indian Muslims and Separate Electorates", an unpublished thesis presented at the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania for the degree of Master of Arts, 1953. In Bengal Muslim population was 52.6% but received 40% of the seats in the provincial legislature and in the Punjab Muslims formed 54.8% but received 50% of the seats. Besides there were other points of agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League, for instance, i) the Congress accepted the system of communal representation, ii) conceded separate electorates and agreed to introduce the system in the Punjab and the Central Provinces, iii) According to this pact, the Muslims agreed to surrender the right to vote in the general electorates (obtained under the Morley-Minto reforms), iv) The Congress accepted the demand of the Muslims that in no province they should be an ineffective minority. The Muslims, therefore, were to receive representation far in excess to the actual percentage of population. In return they were to obtain slightly less representation in the provinces where they were in majority.
74. Harun-or Rashid, *op. cit.* p.19. This was, in fact, their attitude after the Lucknow Pact and the shifting of leadership to the younger, middle-class and Bengali-speaking Muslim.

Association upholding the landed interest of the Muslim nobility.⁷⁵ Conflict between the Bengali speaking middle-class Muslim élite on the one hand and the Urdu-speaking Muslims on the other became an established fact by the 1920's.

The non-Bengali and the Bengali-speaking conservative leadership were pushed aside first after the annulment of the partition and later after the failure of the Khilafat movement (1919-1924). The Bengali middle-class élite resented the interference of the Urdu-speaking Muslim Khilafatists of Calcutta in Bengali Muslim politics.⁷⁶ Besides the Urdu-speaking Muslims, the **ulema**, who had so long remained aloof from politics in Bengal, joined the Khilafat movement. Although the **ulema** objected to Hindu involvement in the movement they participated in this anti-British campaign in order to express their support for the Caliphate. There was little participation of the Bengali-

75. Sufia Ahmed, *op. cit.* p. 176. Syed Ameer Ali founded the National Mohammedan Association in 1877 in Calcutta, which was renamed the Central National Mohammedan Association in 1883 comprising mostly government officials, professional people and landowners. By 1909 it had branches in Bogra, Barisal, Burdwan, Chittagong, Comilla, Dinajpur, Hoogly, Gaibandha, Jessore, Khulna, Midnapur, Mymenshingh, Noakhali, Rajshahi and Rangpur. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* p.165. With the support of the mercantile group Nawab Ali Choudhuri revived the CNMA as a rival organization to the Muslim League in 1916. See, Bazlur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.* p.12. Also see, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* p.51. Nawab Ali Choudhuri was a Bengali and a great landholder. He was very much against the nationalists. He was the president of the Central National Mohammedan Association in 1918. J. H. Broomfield, *op. cit.* p.125.

76. Tushar Kanti Barua, *Political Elites in Bangladesh*, European University Studies, Berne, 1978. p.277. The non-Bengali Muslims in Calcutta having a strong pro-Turkish and Pan-Islamic sentiment joined the Khilafat movement. See, Mushirul Hasan ed. *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*, New Delhi. 1981. (rpt. New Delhi, 1985), pp. 29,32,74.

speaking Muslims in the Khilafat movement.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, some leaders like Muhammad Akram Khan (1868-1968) and Tamizuddin Khan (1889-1963) had joined the Congress-Khilafat movement hoping to restore the authority of the Caliphate and to establish communal harmony. Even though the anti-partition agitation (1905-1910) and the worsening of communal relation by 1918 had reduced the hope for Hindu-Muslim unity, a considerable number of Bengali - speaking Muslims had joined the Congress-led Khilafat movement.⁷⁸ Committees were set up to raise funds for the movement and centres were set up to collect funds both in urban and rural areas of Bengal.⁷⁹ The futility and impracticality of such efforts were, however, realised later.

Some significant changes in Muslim society occurred by the 1920's when a Bengali-speaking western educated Muslim **bhadralok** class began to play a prominent role in the socio-political arena of Bengal.⁸⁰ The dominance of the Urdu-speaking and urban-based leadership was declining. After the death of Sir Khwaja Salimullah in 1915 A.K. Fazlul Huq (1873-1962) gained prominence in the Muslim League and popularity among the vast majority of

77. Bazlur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.* p.12 Also see, Kamruddin Ahmed, *A Socio Political History of Bengal*, Dhaka, 1967. (rpt. Dhaka, 1975), p.8.

78. Tamizuddin Khan, *The Test of Time, my life and days*, Dhaka, 1989. pp.96-97. Also see, Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar (Fifty Years Of Politics As I Saw It)*, Dhaka, (2nd. ed. 1970), pp.36-37.

79. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Ibid.* pp.36-37.

80. J.H. Broomfield, *op. cit.* pp. 113-115. Broomfield used the term **bhadralok** in this respect to indicate the rise of the middle and upper-middle class and English educated professional group from the Bengali-speaking Muslims since the 1920's who had began to exert influence on politics.

the Bengali-speaking Muslims in urban and even at rural level.⁸¹ Leaders like Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968), Abul Kasem (1872-1936), Mujibur Rahman (1873-1942), Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1874-1950) who were middle class and Bengali-speaking rose to prominence. In 1914 these leaders conceived the idea of forming the **Proja Samities** (Peasant Associations) primarily in the jute-intensive districts of Eastern Bengal like, Dacca, Faridpur, Mymenshingh, Tippera and Pabna to the directed against the **zamindars**.⁸² The **Proja** movement was secular and based on economic programme aimed at realizing the demands of the peasants. The most significant development in Bengal in the 1920's was that both the **Proja** and the Khilafat movement drew the Muslim masses to politics. The former drew the peasants of all levels while the latter, the general Muslim masses. However, the **Proja** movement was very much limited in its goal since it left out the lower categories of peasants like the **bargadars**, sharecroppers and tenants out of its consideration. The Bengal Tenancy Act was passed in 1928 after much opposition from the landlords and the wealthy section of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities. They had been strongly against the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bills because they apprehended that the bills, if passed, would benefit the peasants being mostly Hindu **namasudras** (untouchables) and lower class Muslims. The obstructive attitude of most of the Congress leaders towards the tenancy bills and the failure of the **proja** leaders in carrying out their programmes created discontent at the grass roots

81. A.K.Fazlul Huq was elected General Secretary of the Provincial Muslim League and Joint Secretary of the All-India Muslim League in 1914. In 1918 he was elected President of the annual session of the All-India Muslim League and Joint Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee. Humaira Momen, **Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja party and the Elections of 1937**. Dhaka, 1972. pp.38-39. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, op.cit. pp. 17,20.

82. Tanika Sarkar, **Bengal 1928-1934, The Politics of Protest**, oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987. p. 45.

level among peasants of all categories.⁸³ Controversy over the Tenancy Bill (1923-1928) and the Nehru Report (1928) over the proposed joint electorate, created a communal rift between the upper level of politicians. Several nationalist Muslim leaders like Mujibur Rahman, Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chowdhury, Shamsuddin Ahmed left the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee earlier in 1926 as a protest against increasing communal ill-feeling among Congress politicians.⁸⁴

By the end of the 1920's the Bengali Muslim leaders were themselves divided into many groups depending on their linguistic and regional, political and ideological differences. H.S. Suhrawardy, A.H. Ghuznavi, Khwaja Nazimuddin among others, formed the Bengal Muslim Council Association in July 1929 with a strong communal stand. While other non-communal leaders like Fazlul Huq, Tamizuddin Khan and Shah Abdul Hamid (of Mymenshingh) formed the **Bengal Proja Party** at the same time. The **Nikhil Banga Proja Samity** was formed in July 1929 including Muslim leaders from both western and eastern Bengal. The synchronous formation of the two associations, completely opposite in ideology, highlighted the difference of attitude of the Bengali Muslims to communal relation in the province. Leaders who were mostly non-communal in their attitude to the Hindus and the scheduled castes joined this party. Men like Mujibur Rahman, A.K. Fazlul Huq, Syed Nausher Ali, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Nawabzada Hasan Ali (of Bogra), Tamizuddin Khan, Abdul Karim, Abdul Momen, Sir Abdur Rahim, Abdullah Suhrawardy, Mohammad Akram Khan represented the **Proja**

83. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p.30. Tanika Sarkar, *Ibid.* p.38. Peasant resistance took place at Dacca, Khulna, Faridpur and Jessore. Both Muslim and **namasudra bargadars** or agricultural labourers participated in these struggles.

84. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 28.

Samity.⁸⁵ The members of the **Nikhil Banga Proja Samity** came mostly from the middle class and had base among richer peasants. The **Proja** movement could not in practice introduce radical measures for the peasants but it did signify an open challenge to the leadership of the old guard of the Muslim League in Bengal in the 1920's and the 1930's.

Polarization in the politics of Bengal occurred on the eve of the general election to be held in January, 1937. Controversy between Bengali and non-Bengali Muslim leaders heightened up. The upper-class and non-Bengali Muslim leaders mostly of the landed and commercial interests, formed the United Muslim Party in May, 1936. Men like Nawab Habibullah, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Khwaja Shahabuddin, M.A.H. Ispahani joined this party. Some prominent Bengali-speaking Muslims like Mohammad Akram Khan, Abdul Momen and Tamizuddin Khan of the **Proja** Party joined it out of conflict with Fazlul Huq.⁸⁶ The non-Bengali leaders were glad that these **proja** leaders had joined the United Muslim Party. They had earnestly attempted to unite the Muslims in Bengal, particularly to win over the **Krishak Proja**

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85. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p.33. Not all leaders were permanently non-communal in their attitude. For instance, Sir Abdur Rahim and Abdullah Suhrawardy had earlier instance of being communal and Mohammad Akram Khan became strongly communal in his later life. The **Proja Samity** included a number of zamindars which made the party in real sense a party of richer elements. The party gathered its main support from the occupancy ryots in rural Bengal. The poor peasants were actually not represented in the party. *Ibid.* pp.64-65. Muzaffar Ahmad (1889-1973), a left-wing revolutionary working among the workers and peasants in Bengal in the 1930's, compared the "Proja movement" with "Bourgeois Socialism". See, Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal and the Birth of Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1967. (4th. ed. 1975). p.27.
86. Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi, 1976. p.74. The younger and radical members of the **Proja Samity** mostly represented Eastern Bengal and backed A.K. Fazlul Huq as did the bulk of the peasantry. Conflict between Fazlul Huq and the elder group of leaders like those mentioned above was both on ideological and regional grounds. Mohammad Akram Khan, Abdul Momen represented city-based leadership, particularly Calcutta. See, Harun-or-Rashid, *Ibid.* p.73. and Rangalal Sen, *Political Elites in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1986. p.38.

leaders because the **Proja** Party had gained a large support in rural Bengal which they hoped would come to their electoral gain.⁸⁷ The Bengali-speaking Muslims remained disunited and the creation of the United Muslim Party meant that the Muslim League also became a factional party.⁸⁸ With Jinnah's mediation in August 1936, however, the United Muslim Party members were won over to the Muslim League. In the elections of 1937 the **Krishak Proja Party** secured more seats than the Muslim League particularly in eastern Bengal.⁸⁹ In April 1937 Fazlul Huq formed the League-**Proja Samity** coalition ministry which in a way formed the basis for Muslim unity. Political conflict in respect of ideology and leadership, however, remained between the two parties. It is commonly held by historians that a coalition ministry formed by Congress and the **Proja Samity** would have provided ground for communal harmony. Since the **Krishak Proja Party** was led by the Bengali - Muslims with secular and nationalistic outlook there was a possibility of establishing a non - communal atmosphere in politics.

87. Shila Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 74-75.

88. The Muslim League in Bengal was not yet organized properly by 1937 and had, in fact, existed more in name than in its activities. Tamizuddin Khan, *op. cit.* p. 140. It was commonly held by the members of the United Muslim Party and as also expressed in this book that the purpose of this new party was to attempt to bring unity among the Muslims in Bengal before the election. A general opinion prevailing during this time that Muslim unity was needed in order to avoid the possibility of Muslim vote being divided leaving the Congress to have better chance. See, *Ibid.* p. 140.

89. Pradip kumar Lahiri, *Bengali Muslim Thought, 1818-1947, Its Liberal and Rational Trends*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 157. In the elections, the **Krishak Proja Party** got 31.78% of the rural votes, 15.39% of the urban votes and 31.51% of all Muslim votes, while the Muslim League got 27.10% of the total Muslim votes. Also see, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 88-89. The author notes that the Muslim League polled 61.47% of the urban votes and 26.52% of the rural votes. All the seats won by the **Krishak Proja Party** belonged to rural constituencies being situated mostly in the eastern districts of Bengal.

Attempt was made but the Congress refused to form coalition with either the **Proja Party** or the Muslim League. A **Krishak Proja Party** and Muslim League coalition gave scope for the growth of communalism in Bengal.⁹⁰

In the years between 1937 and 1947 several distinct trends in Bengal Muslim politics could be traced. In the **Proja Party** Fazlul Huq's relation with the members like Shamsuddin Ahmed and Syed Nausher Ali became strained.⁹¹ Shamsuddin Ahmed was left out of the cabinet because he held somewhat radical views on agrarian problems and spoke for the cause of the **ryots**.⁹² He had strong support of the radical students of Calcutta. He remained loyal to the original programme of the **Krishak Proja Party** and left the coalition with a group of twenty-one members in October 1937.

90. Leonard A. Gordon, *op. cit.* p.283. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, **Provincial Autonomy in Bengal (1937-1943)**, Dhaka, 1981. pp. 104-105.

91. Shamsuddin Ahmed (1889-1969) was a lawyer by profession and a member of the Indian National Congress in his early life. He left the Congress in 1929. He was one of the founder members of the **Krishak Proja Party** and was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937. After October 1937 when Fazlul Huq joined the Muslim League Shamsuddin Ahmed was elected the leader of the **Krishak Proja Party**. He joined the Muslim League in 1944. He was member of the Bengal Ministry between 1946-1947. After the partition of India he was made the Pakistan ambassador to Burma. **Charitavidhan**, *op. cit.* pp. 246-247. Syed Nausher Ali (1890-1972) was also a lawyer and a leader of the **Krishak Proja Party** since 1929. He was member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937 but left the cabinet in 1938. He joined the Congress in 1941 and was the leading person behind the formation of the Progressive Coalition party. Nausher Ali was speaker under the ministry of Nazimuddin and held the post till 1946. Contested the 1946 election as Congress candidate. He opposed the partition of India in 1947 and remained with the Congress as member of the **Rajya Sabha**. In 1956 he resigned from the Congress and 'hob-nobbed' with the communists till his death. See, **Charitavidhan**, *op. cit.* pp. 281-282. Also see, interview with Syed Mansoor Gilani, son of Syed Nausher Ali, taken at London in November, 1987 by Dr. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed under the Oral History Project. National Museum, Dhaka.

92. Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* p.127. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 94.

Syed Nausher Ali, another leading **Proja Party** member, who had favoured progressive legislations to protect the rights and interests of the **ryots** and had been more inclined to the Congress left-wing than to the Muslim League, was made to leave the coalition. Huq forced him to resign in June 1938 on charge of carrying on secret negotiations with the Congress for an alternative coalition with the Congress left group.⁹³ Fazlul Huq was more accommodating in his attitude to the Muslim League at this stage. He had already joined the Muslim League in October 1937 and now that the hard core of the **Krishak Proja Party** had been out of the coalition ministry the position of Muslim League was stronger in the government. The right wing of the **Proja Samity** supported Fazlul Huq who now began to take more interest in the Muslim League party affairs. Criticism by the Congress leaders and their disruptive attitude towards Huq's coalition ministry made him very much anti-Congress.⁹⁴ In his long political career Huq had contradicted himself and vacillated between secular nationalism, Muslim religious nationalism and Bengali regionalism.⁹⁵ As Huq got more inclined to Muslim League, Tamizuddin Khan, a leading member of the **Proja Party** also left the

93. Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* p. 143. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* pp. 94-95. Also see, *The Sunday Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, July 3, 1938. p.29 where the Bengal Premier A.K. Fazlul Huq explains how dissension arose between him and Syed Nausher Ali. See, Fazlul Huq and Nausher Ali Correspondence on this matter in *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Friday, June 24, 1938 and Saturday, June 25, 1938.

94.. Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* p. 135.

95. Fazlul Huq contradicted himself in many respects. He himself admitted that he contradicted often and used to say quoting Walt Whitman :

"Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself.

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)". He was an emotional and impulsive person and towards the end of his life he admitted that "the strongest impulse of the moment governed all his actions." But, there was, no doubt, a strong element of political pragmatism in him. His broad outlook and flexibility in views allowed him to put forward the Muslim cause in the national current of politics. Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.* pp. 56-57. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* p. 115.

coalition with thirteen other members in March, 1938.⁹⁶ In Bengal the progressive Muslim politicians like Syed Nausher Ali and Shamsuddin Ahmed believed in secular politics and were supported by the left-wing of the Congress.⁹⁷ Conflict developed between the progressive Bengali Muslims of the **Krishak Proja Party** and the right-wing, including Fazlul Huq and the Muslim League, primarily on the question of reform for peasant's rights and abolition of the **zamindari** without compensation. The right-wing politicians,

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96. Tamizuddin Khan (1889-1963) was a lawyer and a member of the Congress in his early political life. Left Congress in 1929 and became a leading member of the **Proja Party**. He joined the United Muslim Party in 1936 and then joined the Muslim League. He was Minister for Agriculture and Health, Industries and Commerce in Fazlul Huq's coalition government after Shamsuddin Ahmed resigned in 1939. Between 1943 and 1945 he was Minister for Education under Khwaja Nazimuddin's government. He then became elected member of the Indian National Assembly. After 1947 he was elected member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. He was elected Deputy President and later President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan after the death of Jinnah and remained in office till October 24, 1954 when the Assembly was dissolved. He filed a case at the Sindh court against the dissolution of the Assembly. Later he became the Speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly in 1962 and held that post till his death. See, Tamizuddin Khan, his memoirs *The Test of Time*. Also see, *Charitavidhan*, op. cit. p. 113. Tamizuddin Khan, including those who left the government party, formed the Independent **Proja Party** in March 1938. It was believed that Tamizuddin Khan left the coalition because he was neither nominated as the Speaker nor included in the cabinet. See, Enayetur Rahim, op. cit. p. 138. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, op. cit. pp.95-96. Tamizuddin Khan, however, mentioned in his memoirs that he had formed the **Assembly Proja Party** including several others and a large number of members from rural areas. He also mentioned that they had talked about a no-confidence motion seriously against the coalition government. But, quite surprisingly, he does not mention in the context that he left the coalition. See, Tamizuddin Khan, op. cit. p. 141.
97. The Congress, in fact, had supported Syed Nausher Ali later in 1943 to become the Speaker of the Bengal Provincial Assembly. Nausher Ali also contested the election of 1946 as a Congress candidate. He, however, lost the election very badly. Interview with his son, Mansoor Gilani.

both of the Congress and the Muslim League opposed such demands.⁹⁸

Conflict in Bengal politics between non-Bengali and Bengali-speaking leadership was strongly manifest in the Muslim League inter-party controversies and dissensions. Fazlul Huq's rift with the Muslim League in the two decades before partition was the result of his conflict with Jinnah. Despite his rightist leanings Fazlul Huq was in constant conflict with him. Huq had resented from the beginning the interference of non-Bengali leadership in Bengal. The root of their conflict could be traced as early as December 1919 when Huq was replaced by Jinnah as President of the All-India Muslim League at the annual session of the League. Huq had been elected President at the League Council in April 1919.⁹⁹ Huq considered his removal a serious scheming to drive out Bengali leadership out of League by Jinnah and the non-Bengali leadership. Jinnah had also hurt Fazlul Huq when he removed him from the Central Parliamentary Board on the eve of the election in 1937 on charges of "insubordination" and "disloyalty".¹⁰⁰ But they reconciled when Huq joined the Muslim League in October 1937 during the **Proja**-League coalition. Conflict between Huq and Jinnah escalated in December 1939 when Huq promised unconditional support to the British war effort. Jinnah's and the Working Committee's decision was to give conditional support of the League to British government. Jinnah disliked any independent move made by Huq. Huq was forbidden to make any alliance outside League which he did defying Jinnah's wishes in February 1940. Huq convened a conference of Muslim and Hindu leaders including leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha hoping to work out a politically expedient settlement on

98. The progressives, it was expected, would support the cause of the poor and the oppressed. But the so-called progressives in the Congress were divided. Among the urban élite both the professional class and those having landed interest did not ally with the **Krishak Praja Party**. One section of the urban élite who were left oriented, spoke for the rights of the peasants and workers and supported the ideals and programmes of the **Krishak Praja Party**.

99. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 122.

100. *Ibid.* p. 123.

communal issue.¹⁰¹ Huq disliked the increasingly dictatorial attitude of the League High Command towards him and he hoped to make a communal arrangement to find a possible way out.¹⁰² By attempting to do so he had undoubtedly earned the displeasure and anger of Jinnah. As a compromise with the central League authority earlier in December 1939 Fazlul Huq had to declare in the Assembly that he would abide by the decision of the League and its president. But by arranging a conference with parties outside League Huq further alienated his position in the party. The non-Bengali coterie, active in Bengal, kept Jinnah promptly informed about Huq's independent moves. Huq, however, assured Jinnah repeatedly that he never intended to supersede Jinnah in any way or play the part of dictator in party decision.¹⁰³

Between the years 1937 and 1940 Huq was the most effective leader of the Muslims in India being the premier of Bengal, a Muslim majority province. He had declared in 1939 that he was Muslim first and Bengali afterwards and had courageously declared that he would take revenge if the Muslims were hurt in Congress-ruled provinces.¹⁰⁴ By expressing his feelings in such an ardent manner he had made him more acceptable to the Muslim League leaders for the time being. He was hailed as "Sher-e-Bangla" (Tiger of Bengal) since his speech at Patna in 1939. Because of his popularity he was asked to move the so - called "Pakistan Resolution" at the Muslim League

101. *Ibid.* pp. 124-125.

102. *Ibid.* p. 125.

103. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah's Correspondence*, Karachi, 1944. (2nd. ed. 1966). In a letter to Mr. Jinnah Huq wrote on 8th. December, 1940 that he did not wish to do anything without Jinnah's consent and he sought permission of the Muslim League Working Committee on his attempts to solve the communal problem in India. p. 55. In another letter, dated 14th December, 1940 Huq wrote to Jinnah "----- I do not wish to dictate to you anything, but only to express the desire that there should be an effort for peace.----" *Ibid.* pp. 57-58.

104. Huq's speech at the Muslim League session at Patna in 1939. See, Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.* p. 45.

session at Lahore in March, 1940.¹⁰⁵ The resolution was based on the two-nation theory that Hindus and Muslims were two divergent communities so different in religion, language, culture and race that they could not live together. Fazlul Huq was basically not at any time communal. Though willing to make compromises and alliances with the Congress leaders when needed, he was constantly on the guard that Muslim community in Bengal was never oppressed or deprived at any time politically or economically either by the Hindu community or by the non-Bengali Muslim community. He had moved the so-called Pakistan resolution in 1940 with the hope that the creation of an independent and sovereign north-eastern zone would free the Muslims of Bengal from all domination by the non - Bengali leadership of the Muslim League. Huq had also opposed the celebration of Pakistan Day on 23rd. March, 1941 arguing that such incident would heighten communal tension.¹⁰⁶ Huq was expelled from the Muslim League in September, 1941

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105. The resolution did not contain the word "Pakistan" but it envisaged independent and sovereign states in the north-east and north-west regions of India where Muslims formed a majority of the population. The Resolution adopted on the 23rd. March, 1940 at Lahore, commonly known as the Pakistan Resolution contained the provision that "--- no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, viz., that geographically continuous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute 'independent States' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign."--- See Appendix-A, Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.* p.390. Also see, C.H. Philips (ed.) *The Evolution of India and Pakistan : Select Documents 1858-1947*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962. pp. 354-355.
106. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p.129.

because he refused to follow the dictates of Jinnah.¹⁰⁷ The Muslim League members in his cabinet resigned in December 1941. Huq then formed a new coalition cabinet with Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, Santosh Kumar Bose, the chief of the Forward Bloc and those members of the **Krishak Proja Party** inclined to Congress. The Congress declined to join the cabinet. The Progressive Coalition Ministry made Huq extremely unpopular to the Muslims in Bengal because he allied wholly with the non-Muslims. Both Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy accused Huq of worsening Hindu-Muslim relation in Bengal.¹⁰⁸ Huq had earnestly spoken for Hindu-Muslim unity in June 1942 at a conference of the Hindu-Muslim Unity Association in Calcutta stressing that the Hindu and the Muslim communities must live together and if need be lay down their lives together.¹⁰⁹ At the same time he proposed the formation of a Progressive Muslim League which would be distinctly Islamic in its ideal and would uphold the interests of the Muslim community.¹¹⁰ Fazlul Huq was criticized by the League leaders in Bengal as a betrayer of the Muslims. Since the fall of the first Huq ministry in December 1941 the demand for Pakistan was made popular in Bengal through constant effort of men like Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy, Tamizuddin Khan, Akram Khan and others who formed the rightist group of the Muslim League.¹¹¹

107. The non-Bengali leaders kept Jinnah constantly informed about Huq's moves supporting the British war-effort. On one instance (June, 1940) Jinnah's reply was that he felt that the time had come to purify League at all costs. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p.127. Conflict between Huq and Jinnah intensified on the issue as to who to dictate the fate of Bengal. Huq being the premier and a popularly accepted leader in Bengal obviously took decisions he felt wise and politically expedient. But Jinnah armed himself with the constitutional power "to control, direct and regulate all the activities of the various provincial Leagues" and began to do so quite authoritatively. *Ibid.* p.126.

108. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* pp. 138-139.

109. Shila Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 159-160.

110. *Ibid.* p. 161.

111. *Ibid.* p. 164.

During Huq's second ministry (December 1941-March 1943) relation between Huq and the governor worsened. The adoption of "denial policy" by the government and the requisitioning of food grains and boats due to the fear of a Japanese invasion in Bengal in early 1942 had been done without consulting Huq. An unworkable situation took place as Huq criticized the governor (Sir John Herbert) severely of not consulting him before taking those decisions. Severe food crisis since October 1942, Japanese bombing in December-January 1942-1943 had worsened Huq's position as a premier.¹¹² The 'Quit India' movement launched by the Congress in 1942 caused dislocation and further complicated political situation in Bengal. Famine situation could not be tackled efficiently. The shooting of prisoners in Dhaka central jail in August 1942 further embarrassed Huq when he failed to take any action against the officer responsible for such incident. S.P. Mukherjee, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha resigned as a protest against the government. As a result of these incidents Huq was made extremely unpopular to both the Muslims and the Hindus as well as to the British government. He was forced to resign in March 1943. A Muslim League dominated ministry was formed in April 1943 with Sir Nazimuddin as the premier. Nazimuddin was the favourite of Jinnah and the League Working Committee at this stage and was also supported by the British government. In the overt contest for power between Huq, Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy in Bengal, Huq's political supremacy was lost. Both Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims who participated in the anti-Huq campaign were glad at this change. But, the **Krishak Praja Party** members and the Congress stayed away from supporting Nazimuddin.¹¹³

112. It was strongly felt by the anti-Huq group in Bengal that Huq concentrated more on keeping his ministry in power than solving immediate problems, particularly the problem of famine. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.* pp. 235-237 where the author points out another view that neither Huq nor Nazimuddin could be blamed completely for failing to tackle the problem of famine. The British government and its politics were more to blame in this matter.

113. Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.* p. 57.

Conflict for political leadership now centered between Khwaja Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy. The latter had more organizational capacity and had been the chief architect behind the anti-Huq campaign. He had roused Muslim sentiment and rallied behind him students and workers in both rural and urban Bengal to fight Fazlul Huq's ministry, particularly his second one. As Nazimuddin's ministry failed to tackle severe famine situation in Bengal (August-September 1943) Suhrawardy began to build up his power base. Suhrawardy got himself involved in providing meals to the famine-stricken through gruel kitchens which brought him prestige and popularity in a very short time. He had been working among the middle and lower class Muslims and had broadened his support base through efficient organising ability. Together with Abul Hashim, a distant relation of his, Suhrawardy consolidated his power base among the general Muslim masses, the workers and students. Abul Hashim was strongly anti-Jinnah and anti-bourgeois who supported Suhrawardy to organize a political camp that was against the Khwaja group and the Dhaka nawab family.¹¹⁴ In the elections to the Provincial Assemblies in March 1946 Suhrawardy managed to get a majority and formed the ministry in April 1946.

In the 1940's the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims of India took a very strong shape. The original Lahore Resolution of 1940 which envisaged more than one Muslim majority "independent states" including predominantly Muslim provinces in the north-west and the north-eastern regions of India, was changed by the non-Bengali Muslim bourgeoisie and a resolution for "a sovereign independent state" for the two Muslim majority regions of India was adopted in April 1946 at the Delhi Convention of the Muslim legislators who were elected in 1946 elections. Internal factions in the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in the 1940's was centered around the questions whether there would be one Muslim state or more than one and

114. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* pp. 160-161. Abul Hashim held a strong post in the Muslim League at this stage. He was the secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in late 1943.

whether Bengal, the Muslim majority state should be partitioned. Three distinct political factions emerged among Muslim leaders in Bengal. Suhrawardy managed to monopolize political power among the Muslim community in Bengal. He was backed by Abul Hashim, the secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Both of them favoured the creation of a sovereign independent Bengal. Khwaja Nazimuddin was supported by the Central League leadership and Mohammad Akram Khan, the president of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.¹¹⁵ Abul Hashim, a staunch socialist, was very much against Nazimuddin who was supported mainly by the non-Bengali Muslim merchants and industrialists of Calcutta. The British and the Anglo-Indian business élite also supported Nazimuddin.¹¹⁶ Fazlul Huq was not acceptable to Suhrawardy. Huq's shifting tendencies in political affiliation and inclination to gain Hindu support for his ministry were matters of criticism both from the conservative Muslim leaders and the communal section of the Muslim middle class in Bengal. Personality clash was prime factor behind such factionalism which worked on parallel lines with ideological reasons. Conflict after the 1946 elections heightened up as the demand for Pakistan became stronger. Amendment of the original Lahore Resolution at the convention of the Muslim League Legislators held at Delhi in April 1946 proposed demand for a single Muslim state including two Muslim majority zones in the eastern and western regions of India.¹¹⁷ Suhrawardy moved the official resolution at this convention to the great surprise of the

115. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* pp. 161-163. Also see, Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 63-64.

116. Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.* p.65.

117. Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 65-66. Shila Sen, *op. cit.* pp.204-207. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* pp.148-150. Also see, Mohammad H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka,1987. pp.21-22. The original content of the Lahore Resolution was changed and it was Liaquat Ali Khan who corrected the word "states" for "state" stating that it was a typing error.

Bengali-speaking leaders present there particularly Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (1880-1976) and Abul Hashim (1905-1974).¹¹⁸ This move exposed the inconsistency in Suhrawardy who had never wanted Bengal to be partitioned. Considering the political situation of the Muslims he had realised that no other Muslim majority province like the Punjab, Sind and the North West Frontier Province had accepted Jinnah's Pakistan scheme although the Muslims there had voted for the Muslim League. Bengal was the only province where the Muslim League leaders supported Jinnah's scheme. Being the premier of a Muslim majority province he felt it essential to support Jinnah in this respect otherwise he might fall into the risk of being dominated by the Congress when India would achieve independence. In that case, he apprehended that no Pakistan would be created let alone a separate sovereign state of Bengal.¹¹⁹ He felt it necessary to act like an all-India nationalist Muslim leader to create Pakistan although he retained in principle the idea of creating a separate sovereign state in eastern Bengal. He justified his incongruity by strongly pointing out that he acted rightly according to the needs of the time for the security and existence of the Muslims in India.¹²⁰ Fear of a Congress dominated government after independence also worked in him strongly. Besides, in his power ascending conflict with Nazimuddin and Liaquat Ali Khan, Suhrawardy did not want to risk losing the favour of Jinnah.¹²¹ The contradiction in Suhrawardy lay in the dominant issue

118. Mohammad H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs*, Ibid. p.22.

119. Mohammad H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs*, Ibid. p.22

120. Ibid. pp. 22-23, Also see, Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.* pp.66-67 where it is pointed out that Suhrawardy could never ally himself with the plan of a "Sovereign independent state" for the two Muslim majority regions of India. The provisions of the Lahore Resolution of 1940 envisaging the creation of more than one Muslim majority "independent states" acted as a great factor behind winning of almost all Muslim seats by the BPML in the 1946 elections. Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan cleverly used Suhrawardy to amend the resolution after the election.

121. Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.* p.66. Also see, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p. 208. It is essential to note in this respect that Suhrawardy kept close touch with the Khwajas. He never wanted to disoblige them or Jinnah. At the same time he kept association with Abul Hashim and the so-called leftists as Hashim wrote, "he always hovered between the right and the left." See, Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, Dhaka, 1974. p.79.

of whether to put religion before language or language before religion. A linguistic affinity between Eastern and Western Bengal made him demand a united sovereign Bengal while religious affinity between the Muslims of Bengal and the Muslims of western region of India made him demand a sovereign independent state of Pakistan.¹²² Later, however, he tried to build an independent position for Bengal. Conflict between language and religion was a matter of contradiction among most Muslim leaders in Bengal in the 1940's and later. Abul Hashim, who talked of liberalism, Marxism and Islam also opposed the creation of a single state of Pakistan. He was a staunch anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist and believed that creation of Pakistan would allow economic exploitation over the Bengali Muslims in the eastern zone by the non-Bengali western province.¹²³ Among the other prominent political figures of Bengal Nazimuddin and Mohammad Akram Khan supported the one-state Pakistan scheme. While Fazlul Huq never accepted the plan for either the partition of India or the partition of Bengal. However, he later favoured the plan for a "sovereign independent united Bengal". The orthodox Muslim groups like the **Jamiat-e-Ulama-i-Hind** and the **Majlish-e-Ahrar** opposed the Pakistan movement. They declined to join Jinnah's movement for Pakistan because he was a **Shia**, who they believed

122. Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.* p.66. When the partition plan was accepted by Mountbatten Suhrawardy began to fight against the partition of Bengal. He openly proposed the scheme for a Sovereign United Bengal in April 1947. The proposal was supported by others like Abul Hashim, Habibullah Bahar, Hamidul Huq Choudhury, Sarat Chandra Bose. See, Suhrawardy, *Memoirs, op. cit.* pp.27-29.

123. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p.142. Although in the early 1940's Abul Hashim had worked in conformity with the ideals of Jinnah to sponsor Pakistan movement he later supported the Greater Bengal scheme of Suhrawardy realising the possibility of economic exploitation. See, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p.184.

could not lead the Muslims of India being predominantly **Sunni**.¹²⁴ The **Jami'at-e-Ulama-i-Hind** leaders in Bengal followed the ideals of Congress.¹²⁵ However, the **Nikhil Bharat Jamiyat-i-ulama-i-Islam** and the Muslim League together mobilized the Muslim masses in favour of partition.¹²⁶ The Communist party of India and M.N.Roy's Radical Democratic Party which supported the right to self-determination of the Muslim majority areas supported the partition scheme.¹²⁷ In Bengal the difference between the right and the left wings of the Muslim League widened. The right wing managed to consolidate the conservative elements and gain power in 1947 with Khwaja Nazimuddin as the Chief Minister in East Bengal's first parliamentary government.

Since 1942 some Muslim League leaders and a group of Muslim intellectuals developed the idea of the creation of Eastern Pakistan consisting Muslim majority areas of Bengal and Assam and portion of Bihar to be a sovereign state.¹²⁸ This idea was held by those who believed that Bengali Muslims formed a distinct nationality. The East Pakistan Renaissance Society

124. Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.* p.51. It has been pointed out by the author that since Pakistan was the demand of Muslim middle class, those who studied Arabic and Persian were not competitors for jobs and did not ally with the movement. Other possible reason why Indian Muslim religious groups like the **Jami'at-e-Ulama** and the **Ahrar** opposed Pakistan was that division of India would mean division of the Indian Muslim Community which they did not want.

125. Shila Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 198-201. Where the author mentions the name of organizations formed by non-League Muslims rejecting the Pakistan scheme. Besides the **Krishak Proja** movement against Pakistan, organizations like the Bengal Provincial League-e-Rasul and the All-India Muslim Majlish were formed which got support from the **Jamiat-ul-Ulama**, Bengal and the **Jamiat-ul-Ulama-e-Hind** in their opposition to the demand for Pakistan.

126. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p. 141.

127. Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.* p.62. The Communist Party of India supported the principle of self-determination for Muslims on the basis of Rajagopalacharia's formula which contained the provision of plebiscite. *Ibid.* pp. 62-63.

128. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* pp.177-178.

was formed by this group of Bengali Muslim youths in 1942. Members of the society included a number of journalists of Calcutta like Mujibur Rahman Khan (1911-1984). Abul Mansur Ahmad (1897-1979), Abul Kalam Shamsuddin (1897-1978).¹²⁹ They upheld the idea that Bengali Muslims were separate from both the Hindus of Bengal and the Muslims of other provinces of India.¹³⁰ It was pointed out by the society that religion and culture were not the same thing. The members of the society, particularly Abul Mansur Ahmad pointed out at the society's conference in May 1944 that religion might surpass all geographical boundaries but culture does not, and here lay the difference between **Purba** or Eastern Pakistan and Pakistan.¹³¹ On this interpretation the basis of East Pakistan was formed. Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim and the younger members of the Muslim League supported such scheme. Two opinions became stronger in the Bengal Provincial Muslim League by 1947 relating to boundaries of the state to be carved out of India. One was the demand for Sovereign Eastern Pakistan, the other was Sovereign United Bengal or Greater Bengal. The nationalist Muslim leaders like those of the **Krishak Proja Party** particularly, were against partition both of India and of Bengal.¹³² Partition, they believed, would increase communal strife and also weaken India's economic and defence powers. Humayun Kabir (1906-1969), a prominent **Krishak Proja** leader, regarded the partition scheme a short-sighted policy of the Muslim League. He supported Suhrawardy's proposal for a sovereign and united Bengal but he believed that unity of Bengal could not be achieved unless proposals for joint electorate

129. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 180.

130. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It)*, *op. cit.* p.241. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 181. Also see, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p.179.

131. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Ibid.* pp. 240-241 where the author mentions that this explanation got acceptance of the nationalist Muslims and also of those who believed that religion could never be the basis for the creation of a state at the cost of the unity of India. *Ibid.* p.241. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p.181 and Shila Sen, *op. cit.* pp.178-180.

132. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p.152.

were considered and Congress members were included in the cabinet.¹³³ The members of the Communist Party of India and those of the left-wing of the Muslim League did not accept the division of India and of Bengal. Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy had strongly demanded for a United Sovereign Bengal even outside the Indian union. Fazlul Huq wanted both a United India and a United Bengal. Nazimuddin, Mohammad Akram Khan and the majority of the Muslim League leaders opposed Suhrawardy's view of a United Sovereign Bengal.¹³⁴ They demanded the creation of a separate nation for the Muslims of India on the basis of "two-nation theory".

In February 1947 British government declared the decision of partition of India. The Hindu Mahasabha then demanded partition of Bengal. Earlier, the Great Calcutta Killing during the Direct Action Day programme of the Muslim League on August 16, 1946 and the subsequent riots in Noakhali and Tippera had persuaded the British Government to hasten its decision to partition India and Bengal in August 1947.

Bengali Muslim social thought could be traced from the ideas and opinions of Muslim literateurs, social thinkers and journalists of Bengal. Muslim writers like Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859-1931) and Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed (1862-1933) in the early twentieth century represented a conservative and Islamist trend. In their early writings they preached against Christianity and protested against attempts of conversion by the Christian missionaries.¹³⁵ But both were loyal to the British raj. They wrote about the past glory of Islam and sought to evoke in the minds of the Muslims of

133. *Ibid.* p.153.

134. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* pp.152-154.

135. Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, *op. cit.* pp.44-45. By the end of the nineteenth century Muslims in certain areas of rural Bengal like Jessore, Bashirhat, Bongaon, Satkhira and Dacca embraced either Christianity, Brahmoism or Hinduism. Also see, Anisuzzaman, *op. cit.* p.268 and Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Shamaik Patre Jiban O janamat (Public Opinion As Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930)*, *op. cit.* pp.105-107.

Bengal an Islamic religious feeling. Both of them believed that Muslims in India had a distinct identity and that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations. To Abdur Rahim Islamic meant a non-Indian tradition which was close to Turkey than to India.¹³⁶ Pan-Islamic feeling was strong in him which exposed his belief in the separate existence of Muslims as a distinct community.¹³⁷ Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed was a conservative and was opposed to any change in the society. He disliked the modern reforms made in Turkey in the 1920's.¹³⁸ He felt sorry that Bengali language was spoken by the vast majority of the Muslims in Bengal. He considered Bengali a language of the **Kafirs** i.e. infidels because it was spoken by the Hindus and thought seriously to purify the language by introducing more Arabic and Persian words into Bengali.¹³⁹ He was intolerant towards the Hindus and disliked the indigenous Bengali culture because it contained syncretic elements.¹⁴⁰ They were more appropriately the forerunners of the separatist movement of the Muslims in Bengal.

The other group of thinkers like Reazuddin Ahmed Mashadi (1859-1918), Mozammel Huq of Shantipur (1860-1933) and Kaikobad (1857/58-1952) represented a secular trend. Mashadi pointed out that syncretism was so deep-rooted among the majority of Muslims that failure of the religious reform movements like the **Wahhabi** was inevitable in India.¹⁴¹ He maintained that a secular and a united movement of all religious communities were needed to drive the colonial power out of India. He pointed out that differences existed between the Muslims and Hindus but attempts should be

136. Anisuzzaman, *op. cit.* p.270.

137. Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism*, *op.cit.* p.45. The author associates Pan-Islamic feeling with the idea of separatism of the Muslims in India. However, extra-territorial patriotism of the Muslims in India proved that they were more inclined to establishing a communal identity rather than a secular nationalism.

138. Anisuzzaman, *op.cit.* p.286.

139. *Ibid.* p.286.

140. *Ibid.* 290.

141. *Ibid.* p.277.

made to organize a non-communal nationalist movement.¹⁴² Kaikobad upheld the glorious past of the Muslims and at the same time preached Hindu-Muslim unity.¹⁴³ Mozammel Huq was pro-British but remained free from Islamic revivalist influence.¹⁴⁴ Strongly influenced by syncretism and Sufi thought, he preached tolerance towards all religions.¹⁴⁵

Besides these two broad categories of intellectual trends among Bengali Muslims in respect of social thought, there was another category of religious reformists who wanted to restore purity of Islam while at the same time preached communal harmony. Most notable among them in the early twentieth century in Bengal was Nausher Ali Khan Yusufzai (1864-1924) of Mymensingh. He advocated modern education for Muslim women and stressed that Bengali, the mother tongue of the Muslims in Bengal, should be the medium of communication.¹⁴⁶ Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1874-1950) also belonged to this category. He was a religious reformist and Pan-Islamist but at the same time a nationalist and a secularist.¹⁴⁷ He upheld liberal attitude towards communal relation. During the anti-partition movement in Bengal in 1905 he joined the Hindus in their opposition to partition.¹⁴⁸

One cannot, however, categorize the intellectual thinkers of a certain period of time into distinct water-tight compartments but their ideas and inclinations towards certain aspect of thought at a particular time could be

142. *Ibid.* p.277.

143. *Ibid.* p.233. The real name of Kaikobad was Mohammad Kazem al-Qureshi but was popularly known as Kaikobad. *Ibid.* p.244.

144. *Ibid.* p.243.

145. *Ibid.* p. 238.

146. *Ibid.* pp.252,254,389. Nausher Ali Khan Yusufzai (1864-1924) wrote a book on the Bengali Muslims, titled *Bangliya Mussalman* in 1890/91 which revealed his ideas and opinions on the Bengali Muslim society its social, religious and economic conditions and mentioned ways to overcome its problems.

147. *Ibid.* p.290.

148. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p.75.

measured and analysed in groups. It must also be kept in mind that a person could hold an opinion at certain stage of his life while a completely different opinion on the same matter at other times. Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji (1880-1931) for instance, in his early writings expressed views which were liberal in respect of female education and communal relation but in his novels particularly, he depicted not so harmonious picture of communal relationship between Hindus and Muslims.¹⁴⁹ He was at the same time a Pan-Islamist and believed that Arabic should be the language of Muslims everywhere in the world. In his later speeches and writings in the 1920's, however, he expressed that Bengali should be the vernacular of all the Muslims in Bengal.¹⁵⁰ S. Wajed Ali (1890-1951) was a pan-Islamist in his early life but later on, believed in secular nationalism.¹⁵¹

One could trace similarities in the ideas of these early twentieth century Bengali Muslim intellectuals with those of nineteenth century Muslim thinkers. The conservative, reformist and anti-Bengali attitude of Nawab Abdul Latif was also upheld by Reazuddin Ahmed and Abdur Rahim. The non-communal and syncretic trend was prominent in the ideas of Mashadi, Kaikobad and Mozammel Huq. A strong feeling in favour of Bengali language had also began to develop. Demand for Bengali to be used as the vernacular as well as the mother tongue of the Muslims in Bengal was made in the early twentieth century by men like Yusufzai, Islamabadi and Shiraji.¹⁵² Intellectual trends on these broad issues were carried into the later decades of

149. Anisuzzaman, *op. cit.* pp.347-352. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p.75.

150. Anisuzzaman, *op.cit.*p.352-c.

151. Syed Akram Hossain(ed), S.Wajed Ali Rachanabali (Complete Works of S.Wajed Ali), Vol. 1. Bangla Academy, Dhaka.1985. pp.14-15,35,463-474, 522-524. Also see, Abdul Qadir, "S.Wajed Ali", *Uttaradhikar*, Journal of Bangla Academy, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, March-April,1977.

152. Although many Bengali Muslims demanded Bengali as the vernacular of the Muslims in Bengal there was also an opinion in favour of Islamization of the language by adequate use of Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages. Shiraji, for instance, believed that Bengali language could be "invigorated" by such use of those languages. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p.17.

the twentieth century. These diverse opinions got bold and mature expressions as sharp conflicts began to develop with the changing socio-political scenario.

An attempt has been made in this study to identify the main trends of Muslim thought in Bengal in the first half of the twentieth century and identify those who represented those trends. In order to discuss the various streams of ideas one needs to draw the threads together since ideas evolved in the past never disappear. They develop and transform and take diverse shapes depending on the socio-political, economic and religious perspectives of a particular society at a particular period of time. Attempt has been made to link up the intellectual trends of the nineteenth century with those of the early half of the twentieth and to bring the various scattered ideas of social reformers, politicians, journalists and literateurs in clearer perspectives. In order to find out the pattern of behaviour of various sections of a community one would need to analyse the existing trends of thought. Clear and specific tendencies among a certain group of people at a certain period of time denote a distinct trend. Importance of intellectual history lies in the fact that it helps to identify those trends and to analyse how those trends determine the course of history.

The Bengali-speaking Muslim intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century were influenced by the contemporary European intellectuals and philosophers. But, it must be retained in mind that the social and political thinkers in Bengal as in the whole of India, formulated ideas on the background of colonial rule and in the midst of religious and ethnic diversity. They expressed opinions and criticisms on social backwardness, conservatism and religious excesses and at the same time focused on colonial administration, constitutional development, nationalist movement and communal relationship. It must be kept in mind that Bengal was not much industrialized and, therefore, Bengali Muslim thinkers were little concerned with the economic aspect. Although during Swadeshi movement (1903-1908) and boycott of foreign goods economic issue played a major role in the movement. **Zamindar** - peasant relation, price of essential products, particularly cash-crop, jute were matters of great significance in Bengal politics. But there was little concern over the ideas of democracy and universal suffrage. Illiteracy and poverty were two main problems which

distinguished the condition of the Muslims in Bengal from that of other provinces of India. Social reformers in Bengal were also preoccupied with suggesting measures to eliminate and overcome those problems. But, above every other concerning issue the major crisis they lived with was their search for an identity. Their ambivalence centered predominantly around the question whether they were Muslims first and Bengalees second or Bengalees first and Muslims second. This dualism appeared in their thought depending on a geographical and a religious identity which were conflicting in nature. This crisis found expression through the controversy over the use of Bengali language as the vernacular of the Muslims in Bengal. Intellectual debates in the first half of the twentieth century reflected the controversy over upholding identity through either linguistic, ethnic or religious affinity. As a Bengali-speaking Muslim middle class emerged by the early decades of the twentieth century conflict between them and the non-Bengali Muslims on the one hand and the Hindu community in Bengal on the other, resulted in creating diverse opinions.¹⁵³

Contemporary journals like the **Islam Pracharak** (1891-1910) and the **Mihir O Sudhakar** (1895-1910) expressed anti-Congress and anti-Hindu feeling while the **Soltan** (1902-1910) and the **Mussalman** (1906-1935/36) represented a somewhat progressive trend expressing nationalistic and secular feeling.¹⁵⁴ The **Mussalman**, however, advocated the cause of the Caliphate

153. After the partition of India in 1947 a strong linguistic conflict became dominant between the Bengali-speaking Muslims and the non-Bengali speaking Muslims in Pakistan. It brought up the question of the identity of the Bengali Muslims anew. The Bengali-speaking Muslims in Pakistan had a very complicated and ambivalent feeling as to determine their identity. The Urdu-speaking section considered the Bengali-speaking section closer to Hindus than to the world of Islam. A Urdu versus Bengali controversy started soon after 1947 and a bloody conflict took shape after the language movemet in East Pakistan in 1952 which gave birth to a new secular-regionalist movement ultimately leading to the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state.

154. Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Shamalk Patre Jiban o Janamat, 1901-1930** (Public Opinion as Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), op. cit. pp. 430, 431, 433, 441. Also see, Chandiprasad Sarkar, **The Bengali Muslims, A study in their Politicization (1912-1929)**, Calcutta, 1991. p.23.

during the Khilafat movement even though the movement was extra-territorial and quite impractical in Indian perspective. Consciousness of a linguistic identity of the Muslims in Bengal was highlighted in journals like the **Islam Pracharak** (1891-1908), the **Nava Nur** (1903-1907), the **Kohinoor** (1891-1915) and several others as early as the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁵ There were other journals, like the **Soltan** (1902-1910 ; 1923-) which preached religious tolerance, supported Muslim participation in the Congress nationalist movement and upheld syncretic beliefs.¹⁵⁶ The **Saogat** (1918-1950) and the **Sikha** (1927-1932) expressed opinions that were considered very secular and progressive in respect of social and religious issues like the practice of **purdah** (veil) among Muslim women, female education, use of Bengali language as the vernacular of the Muslims of Bengal. The **Mohammadi** (1918-1945) on the other hand, expressed a communal and separatist feeling. Later, the **Azad** (1939-1971?) contributed greatly to the separatist movement by the Muslims in Bengal in the 1940's. By the nineteen forties two distinct trends emerged in Bengali Muslim social thought, one stressing religious identity and the other, a regional and linguistic identity. The former represented views of a larger section of the population in Bengal who turned communal and separatist while the latter comprised a smaller section remaining nationalist and secular. To the illiterate Muslims, comprising largely the peasantry, residing in rural areas the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims meant freedom from oppression by the **zamindars** and money-lenders who happened to be Hindu. A strong wave of communalism swept them towards the demand for Pakistan.

155. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Ibid.* pp.314-316. Also see, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Ibid.* p.14. Opinions also existed in favour of the use of Perso-Arabic words in Bengali language. Some Bengali Muslim writers also believed that the use of such words made the language more Islamic, Mussalmani language as it came to be known popularly. Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Ibid.* p.18.

156. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Ibid.* pp. 110, 113, 209, 433, 441. The journal was comparatively very modern in its time. It spoke in favour of progressive ideas including English education, female education and family planning for Muslims in Bengal, *Ibid.* pp.14,97.

The social and political trends of thought among Muslims in Bengal during the period under study can be broadly classified into three categories, (i) Conservative, (ii) Moderate-Liberal and (iii) Radical. These dominant trends had their respective variations and sub-trends. The conservatives preferred to maintain a continuity with the past and resisted all reforms either social or political. They condemned all kinds of progressive ideas which they feared would break the traditional framework of the Bengali society. They rejected the rationalist mode of thought. Such rejection, however, exist as a strong phenomenon among most Muslim intellectuals.¹⁵⁷ Among the conservatives were the fundamentalists whose identity was wholly based on Islamic revivalism. They stressed on strict adherence to religious scriptures and complete authority of religion over every aspect of life. They were orthodox and defended religious dogma. The **ulema**, representing this orthodox trend promoted the process of Islamization.¹⁵⁸ The **mullahs** and the **maulvis** mostly generated fundamentalism both in rural and urban Bengal. Because of high illiteracy among rural masses the **mullahs** and **maulvis** made great impact on them.

The liberals and the modernists, on the other hand, acted as their counterforce in forming a secular and a rationalist point of view. They wanted reform but never completely destroying the structure of society. They were reformists but at the same time traditionalists. The liberals were largely a product of the European influence. Most English-educated Bengalees in the early twentieth century began to shun religious dogmas and take recourse to a pragmatic approach to all religious, social and political

157. H.A.R. Gibb, **Modern Trends in Islam**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1947. p.7.

158. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* pp.41-42. It is interesting to note that though fundamentalist and orthodox in religious views, the **ulema** of the Deoband School remained non-communal and opposed the partition of India which was a striking contrast to the idea of Aligarh's modernist separatism. Muslim religious leaders in Bengal were greatly influenced by ideas preached by the contemporary religious thinkers at Deoband and Aligarh.

issues. They considered themselves the carrier of modern ideas and perceived the world through a modern outlook. They recognized the practical need for changes and reforms in the society but never going against the traditional way of life. The liberals in India were a comparatively smaller group. They were generally pro-British and though modern in their views were strongly aware of their Muslim identity. The liberals in India, broadly speaking, were of two categories— one was indigenous believing in syncretism like the mystics and **sufi** saints and the other, non-indigenous who were western-educated and believed in ideas of liberalism prevailing in Europe in the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁹

There emerged a group of English-educated and western-influenced youths in Bengal in the 1920's who believed in liberalism and preferred to retain syncretic and eclectic views. The Bengali-speaking Muslim intellectuals particularly in the eastern half of Bengal, like Mozammel Huq (1860-1933), Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894 - 1970), Abul Husain (1897 - 1938), Kazi Motahar Hossain (1897-1981) and Motahar Hossain Choudhury (1903-1956) and others belonged to the **Sikha** group who initiated a movement known as the **Budhir Mukti Andolon** or the movement for freedom of the intellect.¹⁶⁰ This group of thinkers upheld the trend of rationalism. Though modern in outlook they were not free from contradictions and most of them though

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159. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957. pp.61-64. The author has made an interesting distinction between the indigenous and non-indigenous liberals among Muslims in India and in those countries where Muslims formed a large proportion of the total population. By "indigenous liberals" the author meant those thinkers who believed in syncretism like those who upheld the ideas of **baul** and the **sufi** mystics while by "non-indigenous liberals" he meant the English-educated, western-influenced thinkers who believed in liberal and humanitarian ideas of the west.
160. Khondkar Sirajul Huq, *Muslim Sahitya-Samaj: Samaj Chinta O Sahitya Karma* (Muslim Cultural Society: Social Thought and Literary Works), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1984. **Sikha** means "flame" in Bengali. This group of youth aimed at social reform through the use of rational thought. It was mainly a literary movement centered at Dhaka in eastern Bengal.

radical in the beginning were later forced or persuaded to compromise with the existing social norms.¹⁶¹

The modernists in Bengal as in the whole of India, recognized the practical need for changes and reform but never completely opposing or rejecting religion. They preferred change but that had to be within the frames of religion and social customs. Muslim modernists in India are accused of an "intellectual confusion" which had prevented them from taking a role independent of religious jurisdiction.¹⁶² The modernists, in both thought and action, failed to play a positive role in the progress of the Muslim community. Modernism and liberalism among Muslim intellectuals, therefore, proved weaker forces which in a way led fundamentalism to flourish.

Among the modernists were the progressives who believed in advancing reforms and demanding advancement in the society. They stressed on religious liberalism and a peaceful coexistence of all religious communities. The progressives looked to the future development of society and advocated reforms like female education, abolition of **pardah**, but they, like those progressive youths of the **Sikha** group in the 1920's and in the 1930's had no significant role in politics or in respect of social reform. Weaker economic footing of the educated section of the Bengali Muslims was an essential factor

161. Khondkar Sirajul Huq, *Ibid.* pp.122-127. Most of the members of the **Sikha** group were chastised by the orthodox leaders of the Muslim society in Dhaka. Kazi Abdul Wadud and Abul Husain were made to beg apology for their writings which preached rational thinking and criticized the conservativeness prevailing among Muslims in Bengal.

162. H.A.R.Gibb, *op. cit.* p.105. Gibb has termed this strain of thought among Muslim intellectuals a "paralyzing romanticism" referring to their constant harping on the greatness of Islam, which, he believed, had clouded their minds.

behind their failure.¹⁶³ The dominance of traditionalism in the Bengali society also contributed greatly to their failure. Although western educated and apparently modern in outlook, a psychological pull towards medieval past prevented the progressives to express or act freely.

The radicals, however, sought to bring major reforms to the society changing its very foundation. Like the modernists the radicals were also progressives but while the former wanted reforms in limited perspective, the latter advocated a complete change of structure of the society. Among the Bengali-speaking Muslims in the first half of the twentieth century Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) and Muzaffar Ahmad (1889-1973) represented an ideologically oriented radical trend. While Kazi Nazrul Islam made an emotional approach to establish humanism and secular nationalism, Muzaffar Ahmad made an intellectual approach towards establishing socialism. Ideas of socialism, however, made comparatively little impact upon Bengali Muslim youths. A socialistic programme within the codes of Islam gained some popularity in Bengal in the 1930's and in the 1940's the exponents of which believed in introducing Islamic Socialism or **Rabbaniyat** initiated by Abul Hashim (1905-1974).¹⁶⁴ Ideas of communism and socialism and attempts to establish secular nationalism on the one hand, and the idea of Islamic socialism as in the ideology of **Rabbaniyat** on the other, were both radical and anti-tradition. The contradiction in the beliefs of Abul Hashim as in others is very clearly exposed. Nonetheless, these ideas made a great impact

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163. It is essential to note that most educated Muslim youths in Bengal had very poor economic background, their parents being mostly agriculturists. The progressive-minded youths could not go that far as to risk their jobs or social patronage. While, on the contrary, the middle class youths of the Hindu community had comparatively stronger economic position being sons of mostly zamindars, landholders, mahajans and professionals. By the early twentieth century they had at least two generations of educated ancestors. It was easier for them, therefore, to preach and practice liberalism.
164. Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.* pp.74-75. Kamruddin Ahmad was himself a leader of the Dacca group of Abul Hashim's leftist workers. See, Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p.167. Also see, Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, *op. cit.* pp.31-32.

on the younger generation of educated Muslim youths and professionals. Fact remains however, that the impact of such ideas was short-lived and limited mostly to urban Bengal only.

Middle class Muslim youths in Bengal in the first few decades of the twentieth century desperately aspired for jobs. It was particularly after 1937 elections that middle-class and the lower-middle class Muslims adopted a very hostile attitude against the Hindus. They faced tough competition with the Hindus in every respect. The middle-class youths came from rural background mainly and suffered from a sense of insecurity. They faced unequal competition for jobs with the Hindus which made them intolerant and communal. This was the prime reason for the growth of separatist and communal trends in Bengal. The Muslim League, after initiating its "two-nation" theory spread a separatist feeling among the Muslims. It is interesting to note that the Muslim League which originally emerged out of a liberal atmosphere of Aligarh College and University turned into a major force against liberalism, nationalism and secularism. The western-educated Muslims who had expressed loyalty to the British in the nineteenth century were the ones to demand partition while the fundamentalist **ulama** of the Deoband school, largely steeped in classical Islamic teachings who got involved in religious reform and anti-British movements, were to demand a united India in the 1940's.¹⁶⁵ Questions, therefore, arise as to whether those who demanded Pakistan should be called progressives or conservatives. A wave of intolerance and anti-rational feeling dominated the Muslim mind in the decade before partition.

This study would also include an analysis of a selected number of Bengali novels written by Bengali-speaking novelists who depicted contemporary society and social values. Novels reflect social and political

165. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India -- A Social Analysis*, (rpt. Lahore, 1943). pp.42-43.

ideas of the time. The social novels by Charles Dickens in the years between 1830's and the 1860's like the **Hard Times** (1854), **The Tale of Two Cities** (1859-60), Margaret Mitchell's **Gone With the Wind** (1955) and Boris Pasternak's **Dr. Zhivago** (completed in 1956) are classic works depicting realistic pictures of socio-economic and political conditions of societies in England and France, the United States and Russia respectively. Similarly novels like **Anwara** (1914) by Mohammad Najibur Rahman, **Abdullah** (1926) by Kazi Emdadul Huq, **Sangshaptak** (1964) by Shahidullah Kaiser, **Padma Meghna Jamuna** (1974) by Abu Jafar Shamsuddin and **Prem Nei** (1981) by Gour Kishore Ghose depict vivid picture of contemporary social scene of the early decades of twentieth century Bengal. The need to analyse the novels is of much significance because novels depict opinions and reactions of common man to various political and social movements, their religious beliefs and contemporary economic issues. Novels, particularly historical and biographical, reveal ideas and beliefs of the common people of both urban and rural levels which are normally left out of consideration by historians. Participation of the subaltern people in the making of history are studied with greater interest recently and as such, novels are receiving greater importance as sources of information on the subject. The authenticity of sources used from novels, however, needs to be strictly judged.

The validity of choosing the year 1918 as the starting point of this study bypassing the most commonly accepted dates like 1905, 1911 or 1919 needs to be explained. The year 1918 opens up a completely new dimension in the socio-economic and political milieu of the Muslims in Bengal through the advent of a secular and humanist trend represented by poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, the publication of the **Saogat** and the spread of more radical ideas of communism through Muzaffar Ahmad. The Government of India Act of 1919 introducing dyarchy in the provinces led to significant political development in Bengal. Bengal being a Muslim majority province, the provisions of dyarchy led to major political shifts in the province. The most logical point, of course, is that professor Anisuzzaman has made a study of the intellectual

trends of thought of the Bengali Muslim literateurs between the years 1757 and 1918 in his book, **Muslim-Manas O Bangala Sahitya**.¹⁶⁶ No other integrated study has been made on the trends of thought of the Bengali Muslims after this period. The end of the First World War was also approaching near. The after-war condition of Bengal and the growing politicization of the Bengali Muslim middle class also make the choice of 1918 more valid.

166. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim-Manas O Bangla Sahitya (A Critical Analysis of the Muslim Literateurs in Bengali)*, Muktaadhara, Dacca, 1968. (3rd ed. 1983).

SECTION - 1

CHAPTER -1 : CONSERVATIVE -ORTHODOX

Ahl-i-Hadith

Contrary to the syncretic trend so strongly embedded in the socio-religious milieu of the Bengali Muslims, was the parallel existence of a fundamentalist reform movement known as the **Ahl-i-Hadith**. The revivalist movement in Islam initiated by Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) and Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786-1831) was carried into Bengal in various forms.¹ The **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement, also known as the **Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah**, aimed to establish the pristine quality of Islam by adhering strictly to the **Quran** and the **Hadith** (sayings of Prophet Muhammad). Although the movement was activist in the nineteenth century it took a quietist approach by the early twentieth century.² The **Ahl-i-Hadith**

1. Muinud-Din Ahmed Khan, "Social and Political Implications of the Islamic Reform Movements in Bengal in the Nineteenth Century", Rafiuddin Ahmed ed. **Bangladesh Society, Religion and Politics**, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 1985 p. 84. It must be noted that the **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement in India was not influenced by the **Wahabi** movement of Arabia. See, Taziruddin Paramanik, "The Title of the Indian Wahhabis : A Review", **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh**, Dhaka, Vol. XXIX, NO. 2, December 1984. p. 121.

2. Muinud-Din Ahmed Khan, **Op.Cit.** p.87. Although the **Ahl-i-Hadith** "was war-like (**jihadi**) in the Punjab and Peshawar, it thrived peaceably in Bengal focussing attention on propagating the "pure" doctrines of Islam amongst the Muslim masses." **Ibid.**

movement denied interpretations of the four schools of **Sunni** Islam - the **Hanafi**, **Shafi'i**, **Hanbali** and **Maliki**³ and maintained that interpretation of the **Hadith** and the **Quran** should be precise and should include no **qiyas** (analogy or symbolic interpretation). The **Ahl-i-Hadith** opposed practices like visiting **mazars** or **dargahs** (shrines), prohibited **urs** (feast at the memory of the dead), **qawwali** (religious songs at gatherings with music and rhythmic claps), **manat** (sacrificing animals and wealth at tombs of saints), **milad** (praising Prophet Muhammad at religious gatherings) and similar such practices which are considered extra-**Shariah** (rules set in

3. The **Hanafi** were the followers of Abu Hanif (d. 767 A.D.), the **Shafi'i** were followers of Muhammad Ibn Idris (767-820 A.D.) the **Hanbali** were followers of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855 A.D.) and the **Maliki** were of Malik Ibn Anas (d. 795 A.D.). The **Hanafis** were the most moderate of the four schools; they recognized analogical deduction of the **Quran** and the **Hadith**. They are widespread among the Turkish people. The **Shafi'ites** accepted a limited deduction of the **Quran**. Muslims, mainly in the Arab countries, Indonesia and South India are **Shafi'ites**. Most Muslims in Bengal are of **Sunni-Hanafi** sect. The **Malikis** regarded the **Hadith** having first claim after the **Quran** while the **Hanbalis** rejected all interpretations and followed the **Quran** and the **Hadith** in the strictest manner. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** were closest to the **Hanbalis**. Mircea Eliade, ed.-in-Chief, **the Encyclopedia of Religion**, Macmillan, New York, 1987. Also see, Annemarie Schimmel, **Islam in the Indian Environment**, Leiden, 1980, pp. 265, 273.

the **Quran** and the **Hadith**). The process of Islamization in Bengal was carried out by the **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement through its attempt to reform Islam.⁴

It has been maintained by Hunter, Hardy, Tarafdar, Mallick and other scholars that Islam in Bengal never existed in its pure form.⁵ A synthesis of

4. It must be remembered in this context that Islamization in Bengal, however, did not mean that orthodox religious beliefs and practices were firmly established. In fact, indigenous elements of folk Islam were often accepted through Islamization. Imtiaz Ahmed, "Unity and variety in South Asian Islam", Dietmar Rothermund ed. **Islam in Southern Asia** (A survey of current Research), Wiesbaden, 1975. pp. 6 - 7.

5. Most notable works on this aspect are W.W. Hunter, **The Indian Musalmans**, London, 1871. reprint, Lahore, 1964; P. Hardy, **The Muslims of British India**, Cambridge, 1972; M.R. Tarafdar, **Husain Shahi Bengal (1494-1538) : A Political Study**, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca, 1965; A.R. Mallick, **British Policy and the Muslim Bengal, 1757-1856**, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca, 1961, 2nd. ed. Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977; James wise, "The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal", **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal**, Vol. LXIII, Part III, No. 1, 1894; Rafiuddin Ahmed, **The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906 - A Quest for Identity** : Oxford University Press, 1981, 2nd, ed. New Delhi, 1988; Asim Roy, **The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal**. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983; M. Enamul Huq, **A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal**. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1975. Note that the "folk elements of popular Islam were neither characteristically Hindus nor Muslims, nor even a product of syncretist **rapprochement**, but represented the folk religion of rural Bengal with its roots in a pre-historic past." Rafiuddin Ahmed, **Op.Cit.** p. 70.

Islamic mysticism with the indigenous cultural and religious practices had taken place in Bengali Islam since the end of twelfth century. Since a large number of indigeneous population had been converted to Islam, a variety of local beliefs, rituals and religious practices were enrooted in Bengali Muslim life. Influence of **Sufi'ism** also introduced extra-**Shariah** practices in Islam. Although saint-worship is prohibited in Islam, it became popular among the Bengali Muslims. Polytheistic practices had become widely prevalent among them by the nineteenth century. It was then that the revivalist movements took place in Bengal as in various other provinces of India.

Terms like "semi-conversion" and "incomplete conversion" have been used to indicate this phenomenon of deviation from the austere form of Islam among the Muslims in Bengal.⁶ It was in the Eastern, South-Eastern and Northern Bengal that vast majority of the inhabitants were converted Muslims and mostly rural peasantry.⁷ Alongside of the low-caste Hindus

6. Asim Roy, "The Social Factors in the making of Bengali Islam", **South Asia, Journal of South Asian Studies**, No. 3, August 1973, p. 23.

7. Census report of 1901 used by Asim Roy to indicate that Eastern and South-eastern Bengal had two-thirds, while North Bengal had three-fifths Muslim inhabitants. **Ibid.** p. 24. Census reports of 1931 on the percentage of Muslims in these areas show a nearly similar trend. Chittagong division had 73.7%; Dhaka division had 71% and Rajshahi division 62% of the population. Bazlur Rahman Khan, **Politics in Bengal, 1927-1936**, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987, p. 9.

like the **Pods**, **Mahishyas** and **Namashudras** this rural Muslim peasantry represented an indigenous culture which was syncretic in nature.⁸ In districts like Bakarganj, Barisal, Noakhali, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Bogra, the rural Muslims were comparatively greatly influenced by folk elements. One can see the obvious reason why later these areas became strongholds of **Ahi-i-Hadith** in Bengal.⁹

The **Ahl-i-Hadith** is a fundamentalist sect which advocate strict following of the **Shariah** (the rules of the **Quran** and the **Hadith**) and denounce all intermediaries between man and God. They strongly reject any

8. Asim Roy, **Op. Cit.** p. 24. M.R. Tarafdar gives a reason why Muslims of these areas of Bengal were under greater influence of indigenous culture. Besides the fact of conversion of low-caste Hindus to Muslims, the East Indian rulers in the earlier centuries had tried not to establish cultural or political connection with North India and thereby checked the spiritual influence of their **ulama** of the North. This had resulted in creating a secular spirit in Bengal. **Husain Shahi Bengal (1494-1538 A.D.) A socio-political study**, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca, 1965. **Op.Cit.** p.4.

9. Mohammad Salahuddin Khan, **Ahl-i-Hadith Movement in Bengal (1864-1920)**, Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, Dhaka University, 1980), pp. 81, 159, 161, 232-233, 322.

element of the so-called "Little Tradition",¹⁰ like the veneration of **Pirs** (saints) and other indigenous practices mentioned earlier which were considered pantheistic. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement attempted to absorb into the orthodox Islamic tradition the Muslim community which, it believed, had degenerated through non-Muslim practices. **Jihad** (religious war) against indigenous practices in Islam had started in India by the early nineteenth century. In Bengal attempts were made by Enayet Ali (1794-1858) who preached **Ahl-i-Hadith** in Dhaka, Faridpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Maldah and Bogra and by Keramat Ali (1800-1872) who travelled through Chittagong, Noakhali, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Faridpur and Barisal and preached the principles of **Ahl-i-Hadith**.¹¹ Leaders and followers of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** were subjects of suspicion after the 1857 Mutiny and the **Wahhabi** Trials (1863-1870). They felt discredited when the term

10. Robert Redfield, **The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960, 2nd. imp. 1961. Also see, Margaret Park Redfield ed. **Human Nature and the Study of Society. The Papers of Robert Redfield, Vol. 1**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962. pp. 294-330. Robert Redfield, an American anthropologist and social scientist, coined the terms "Little Tradition" and "Great Tradition" in the 1950's to refer to the indigenous and the exogenous culture respectively. "Little Tradition", according to Redfield, is the local, non-urban based culture. It is popular or folk culture whereas "Great Tradition" is a culture of the few literate and urban based. In respect of Bengal, the exogenous Islamic culture has been referred to as the "Great Tradition" while the "Little Tradition" is the syncretic folk culture.

11. Mohammad Salahuddin Khan, **Ahl-i-Hadith Movement in Bengal (1864-1920)** unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, University of Dhaka, November, 1980, P. 81. Also see, Rafiuddin Ahmed, **The Bengal, Muslims, 1871-1906 - A Quest for Identity**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2nd. ed. 1988, p.39.

wahhabi was used to refer to the followers of **Ahl-i-Hadith**.¹² Although the **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers participated in **jihad** (religious war) against the British and the Sikhs in nineteenth century, they began to claim by the 1870's that their movement was not influenced by the **wahhabi** movement of Arabia launched by the Ibn Abdul Wahab of Najd (1703-1792) and they hated to be called **Wahhabis**.¹³ They pointed out that although both the movements were fundamentalist in character they differed on the matter of **taqlid** (blind imitation of **madhab**, i.e. the legal schools of Islam). Those who rejected **taqlid** called themselves **Ahl-i-Hadith** because they believed in the sayings of Prophet Muhammad and, therefore, they also called themselves **Muhammadis** or the followers of the **Tariqah-i Muahamma** -

12. Mujeeb Ashraf, **Muslim Attitudes towards British Rule and western culture in India**, Delhi, 1982. p. 126.

13. W.W. Hunter, **The Indian Musalmans**, 1871, reprint, Lahore, 1964, p. 53. Hunter mentions the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect in Eastern Bengal as the **wahhabis**. Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) in a review on W.W. Hunter's book in the form of a letter to the **Times** in London, November, 1871, attempted to establish that the reformists were loyal to the British and that their movement was only against the Sikhs. Syed Ahmed Khan Bahadur C.S.I, **Review of Dr. Hunter's Indian Musalmans**, Benaras, 1872, Appendix viii pp. xxiii-xxiv. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century the **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement took a new stand of earning British favour and getting equipped to stand successfully against Hindu competition. See, monthly **Tarjumanul Hadith**, 13th. year, 1st. issue, March, 1966.

diyah (the ways of Prophet Muhammad).¹⁴ In 1889 the word **wahhabi** was dropped from all official correspondences throughout India.¹⁵

The popular leaders of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement in Bengal in the first half of the present century were Maulana Abd-al-Samad (1873-1948), Maulana Abdullah-el Baqi (1886-1952), Moulana Abdullah-el Kafi (1900-1960), Moulana Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968) and Moulana Mohammad Husain (1891-1975), known popularly as Moulana Basudebpuri.¹⁶ Both Moulana Basudebpuri and Moulana Abd-al-Samad preached in Rajshahi.¹⁷ Other prominent centres of **Ahl-i-Hadith** were Kumarkhali in Kushtia, Dhanikhola in Mymensingh, Sapura in Rajshahi, Sondabari in Bogra, Gopalpur in Tangail, Jagarpur in Comilla, Bangshal in Dhaka, Patharghata in Khulna and Hahimpur in Jessore.¹⁸

14. T. Pramanik, "The Title of the Indian Wahhabis : A Review", **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh**, Vol. XXIX, No. 2, December, 1984.

15. Barbara Daly Metcalf, **Islamic Revival in British India : Deoband, 1860-1900** : Princeton University Presss, Princeton, New Jersey, 1982, p. 281.

16. Mohammad Salahuddin Khan, **Op. Cit.** pp. 226, 229. Moulana Basudebpur; hailed from Basudebpur, a prominent stronghold of **Ahl-i-Hadith** in Chapai Nawabganj in Rajshahi.

17. **Ibid.** pp. 226, 229.

18. **Ibid.** pp. 232 - 237.

In the first quarter of the present century **Ahl-i-Hadith Samities** (centres) were formed in various parts of Bengal drawing in the Bengali speaking Muslims.¹⁹ Moulana Abdullah-el Kafi took the initiative in forming such **Samities**.²⁰ The Bogra district **Ahl-i-Hadith Samiti** was formed in 1920.²¹ Newspapers were also published to preach **Ahl-i-Hadith** principles and at the same time to discredit the **Hanafi** sect with which it had the greatest conflict on matters of **ijma** (consensus of the **ulama**). The monthly **Ahl-i-Hadith**,²² the **Mohammadi**,²³ the **Tarjumanul Hadith**,²⁴

19. M.K.A Siddiqui, **Muslims of Calcutta**, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 59, 62.

20. Muhammad Salahuddin Khan, **Op.Cit.** p. 242.

21. **Ibid.** pp. 242-244.

22. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** was first published in 1915 as a monthly. It was a religious journal and published from Calcutta. It came out as a weekly in 1927 and ceased to be published in 1939. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Shamaik Patre Jiban O Janamat, 1901-1930** (Public Opinion as Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977, p. 435. Also see, the monthly **Tarjumanul Hadith**, 11th. year, 9th. issue, March 1964, p. 422.

23. The **Mohammadi** was published as a weekly since 1908 and as a monthly since 1927 from Calcutta. It's editor was Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968). Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Op.Cit.** pp. 434, 447-448.

24. The **Tarjumanul Hadith** was first published as a monthly in August-September 1951. It was the mouthpiece of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect in Bengal. It's editor was Abdullah-el Kafi (1900-1960).

the **Satyagrahi** ²⁵ and the **Arafat** ²⁶ expressed strong dislike of the progressive and modernist ideas that were being accepted by the educated Bengali Muslim youths since the early decades of the present century. Besides preaching the basic principles of religious fundamentalism and strict adherence to the rules set in the **Quran** and the **Hadith** these journals spoke strongly against the acceptance of English education and western ways of life by the Muslim youths in Bengal and also opposed female education and the discarding of the **purdah** (veil) by Muslim women in Bengal.

The earlier issues of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** criticized even Mohammad Akram Khan, who was himself a follower of **Ahl-i-Hadith** for his association with the non-Muslims.²⁷ The journal also criticized Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950) for writing against **riba** (prohibition on making profit from money) for supporting the education of

25. The **Satyagrahi** was first published in November 1924 from Calcutta by Maulana Abdullah-el Kafi. Most of the articles in the **Satyagrahi** contained socio-political subject matters relating to the Muslim community in Bengal. It was a monthly journal.

26. The **Arafat** came out as weekly since 1956. It was published by Mohammad Abdul Bari (b. 1930) from Dhaka. The weekly **Arafat** acted as a mouthpiece for the **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement in Bengal.

27. The **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 3rd. year, 7th. issue, 1917.

women and for insisting on rational analysis of religion.²⁸ The **Ahl-i-Hadith** called Islamabadi an "English educated **Maulana**" (religious scholar) and an "enemy of the Mohammadi sect."²⁹ Both Mohammad Akram Khan and Moniruzzaman Islamabadi were considered **la-mazhabi** or **pro-taqlid** (those who believed in the four schools of **Sunni** sect in Islam) and "libertines".³⁰ The **Ahl-i-Hadith** began to preach that putting on European dress like shirts, trousers and coat and shaving beards off were anti-Islam and, therefore, sinful. On the question of cow-slaughter which was a subject of heated controversy between the Hindus and the Muslims and the major cause of communal riots, the **Ahl-i-Hadith** argued that God's creation was eternal and ceaseless and even if Muslims killed thousands of cows a day there would never be scarcity, arguing strongly that cow-slaughter should continue.³¹

From the 1920's onwards the **Ahl-i-Hadith** and the **Mohammadi** directed their criticisms against the progressive movement of the Muslim Literary Society (The **Muslim Sahitya Shamaj**) founded in 1926 against the **Hanafi** sect and against communism. The movement for emancipation of intellect or the **Budhir Mukti Andolon** of the Muslim Literary Society was

28. **Al-Eslam**, 6th. year, 3rd. issue, 1920; Moniruzzaman Islamabadi detested all such anti-Islamic practices like visiting **mazars** and **dargahs** (shrines), worship of saints, **Pirism** (veneration of priests and saints) but he advocated for rational explanation of the **Quran** and the **Hadith**.

29. The **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 1st . year, 4th. issue, 1915. Also see, Mustafa N. Islam, **Ibid.** p. 435.

30. The **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 3rd. year, 7th. issue, 1917.

31. The Monthly **Ahl-i-Hadith** , 5th . year, 11th. issue, 1919.

strongly disapproved of by the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect. The "emancipation of the intellect" movement, led by a group of young educated Muslims of Dhaka in Eastern Bengal expressed their views on rational interpretation of religion, on social reforms as opposed to the orthodox views of the **mullahs** and **maulanas**. They brought out the **Sikha** magazine and made it the mouthpiece of their rational and liberal ideas. Those youths began to adopt western style in dress and encourage their wives and sisters to learn Bengali and English and give up **purdah**. Previously, even in the first decade of the present century, Muslim women in Bengal learnt Arabic and that too, only to read the **Quran** without even understanding its meaning. ^{But} they even took their sisters and wives out to social gatherings and encouraged them to participate in music, song and drama. This trend continued well into the 1940's. The weekly **Ahl-i-Hadith** wrote in 1928 that a group of young men in Bengal had been trying to trample down the traditional customs and beliefs of the Muslims and had been promoting irreligious and indecent practices in the society. It wrote,

"although such disregard of traditional values by you ths is more or less common in every society, the effect of such degeneration is unfortunately the deadliest in the Bengali Muslim society,..... The second instance of their irreligiosity

32. The **Sikha** was published in 1927 and continued for five years. The journal was published as a yearly and contained articles to improve the religious and social life of the Muslims in Bengal. The motto of the journal was "where knowledge is limited, intellect is stagnant and freedom is impossible." Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 447. Also see, Khandkar Sirajul Huq, **Muslim Sahitya Samaj : Samaj Chinta O Sahitya Karma**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1984.

is their preachings against the use of **purdah** by women and the third instance is their view that **riba** is impractical and giving it up would help economic development whereas making profit from money is prohibited in Islam."³³

The **Ahl-i-Hadith** also wrote against the **Saogat**.³⁴ The journal praised female education and the pursuit of music and dance by the younger generation of Bengali Muslims. The **Saogat** supported emancipation of women and strongly opposed **purdah** (the practice of using veil) by Muslim women. As a mark of protest against **purdah** the **Saogat** printed pictures of Bengali Muslim ladies who made distinction in the society in learning and in literary pursuits. The orthodox Muslims considered the practice of music, dance and painting of portraits and even printing pictures of ladies, prohibited in Islam. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** wrote that **Saogat's** support for such un-Islamic activities would lead the Muslim youths in Bengal to

33. The weekly **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 1st year, 46th. issue, November, 1928. Abul Husain (1897-1938), an M.A. in Economics and who taught at the Dhaka University between 1921 and 1928 advocated the need for introducing the system of interest rate on money which he considered essential for the economic development of the Muslim society in Bengal. The taking of interest on money (**riba**) was not allowed in Islam. Although the system is still practiced in several Islamic countries. Abdul Qadir ed. **Abul Husain-er Rachanabali** (The complete works of Abul Husain), Barnamichil, Dhaka, 2nd. ed. 1976, pp. 392-393.

degeneration.³⁵ There was physical assault on the **Saogat** editor as a mark of threat.³⁶

The **Mohammadi** preached **Ahl-i-Hadith** doctrine and most of its criticism was against the **Hanafi** school of thought. The **Hanafi** school recognises analogical deduction and consensus of the **ulama**. It was a moderate school founded by Abu Hanifa (d. 767 A.D.) who drew upon the **Quran**, the **Hadith** (prophetic traditions), **ijma** (consensus of the **ulama**) and **qiyas** (some form of analogical reasoning). Whereas, the **Ahl-i-Hadith** rejected **ijma** and wanted total enforcement of the **Quran** and the **Hadith**. Both Barbara D. Metcalf and M. Mujeeb have pointed out how the **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers hated the **Hanafis** more than they hated the British or the Sikhs or any other school of Islamic jurisprudence.³⁷ The **Ahl-i-Hadith** called a **Hanafi**, **Kafir** (sinner) and felt it legitimate to kill a **Hanafi**.³⁸

35. The weekly **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 2nd. Year, 43rd. issue, October 24, 1929.

36. The weekly **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 1st. year, 43rd. issue, October 11, 1928. p.7. This journal misrepresented the incident of assault. Physical assault was made on Mohammad Nasiruddin about three hundred yards from No. 11 Wellesley Street where the **Saogat** office was situated. See, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, **Atit Diner Smriti** (Reminiscence), Dhaka, 1968, rpt. 1985. pp. 110-111. Also see, Mohammad Nasiruddin, **Bangla Sahitye Saogat Joog** (Contribution of the **Saogat** in Bengali Literature), Dhaka, 1985. pp. 850-851.

37. Barbara D. Metcalf; **Islamic Revival in British India : Deoband 1860-1900**. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1982. p. 281. M. Mujeeb, **The Indian Muslims**, London, 1967, p. 398.

38. Barbara D. Metcalf, ^{ibid.} p. 285.

The **Mohammadi** directed its attack on the **Hanafi** Muslims and was particularly critical of the **Saogat** and the **Sikha** which expressed progressive ideas.³⁹

In the 1920's and the 1930's when the **Sikha** movement took place in Dhaka, a group of progressive Muslim youths began to fight against orthodoxy. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement also became active and critical against them. At the same time the journal expressed fear of the spread of communism taking place in Bengal in the late 1930's. Although very few Bengali Muslim youths were actually influenced by ideas of socialism compared to the Bengali Hindu youths, the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect feared that communism was atheistic and the Muslim youths were getting irreligious because of its influence. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** quite alarmingly expressed its complete negation of communism and preached strict belief on the **Quran** and the **Hadith** with an almost missionary zeal. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** wrote,

"..... if to-day Muslims would have been true followers of Islam and followed the instructions of the holy Quran, the world would have been a happier and peaceful abode. Bolshevism, Socialism and other such false "isms" would have been extinct.⁴⁰

39. Conflict between the **Mohammadi** and the **Saogat** was on ideological grounds and lasted from 1918 to 1932 and with the **Sikha** which lasted between 1927 and 1932. See, Mohammad Nasiruddin, **Bangla Sahitye Saogat Joog**, pp. 830-855. Also see, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, **Atit Diner Smriti**, pp. 129-131.

40. The weekly **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 9th. year, 8th. issue, 9th. July, 1936.

Those who spoke for social equality and humanism were chastised by the conservative section of the Muslim community which also included the **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers in Bengal. Kazi Nazrul Islam also was severely criticized because his poems contained references to Hindu deities and Hindu mythology. He was denounced as an atheist and his works were considered as **shirk** (un-Islamic) during his time and even later.⁴¹ Secular views, opposition to the established power of the **mullahs**, economic development and call for social equality were viewed together as signs of socialism by the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect.⁴² Abdullah-el Kafi remarked that those who believed in socialism and secularism were nothing better than **Kafirs** (infields). To him their philosophy was misleading since they had swayed away from the path of the **Quran** and the **Hadith**.⁴³

The **Ahl-i-Hadith** and the **Mohammadi** particularly, which preached **Ahl-i-Hadith** principles criticized the **Hanafi** sect. The **Hanafis**, most moderate in their approach to the interpretation of the **Quran** and the **Hadith** faced hatred and rivalry from the **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers. To counter their attacks, the **Hanafis** also brought out journals like the **Moslem Hitoishi**⁴⁴ and the **Hanafi**.⁴⁵ The **Mohammadi** and the **Hanafi**

41. The **Tarjumanul Hadith**, (monthly), 5th. year, 6th. issue, 1954.

42. **Ibid.**

43. **Ibid.**

44. **Muslem Hitoishi** (Muslim Welfare), published as a weekly from Calcutta between 1911 and 1921. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 434.

45. The **Hanafi** was published as a weekly from Calcutta between 1926 and 1937. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 446.

controversy over petty issues reflected the extent of rivalry between the two sects.⁴⁶ The **Mohammadis** or the **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers believed that their enemies were neither Christians nor Jews but the **Hanafis**. The British Government had accused the **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers for participating in the great uprising of 1857 and had held trials between 1863 and 1870. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** had repeatedly expressed that their greatest enemies were not the British but the Sikhs. But, in reality, the **Ahl-i-Hadith** considered the **Hanafis** their real enemies.⁴⁷ At least that was the case in Bengal. The question of rivalry with the Sikhs in Bengal did not arise obviously because of their relative absence in the province. Muslims in Bengal are mainly of **Sunni** sect and among them the **Hanafis** are the largest in number. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** or the **Mohammadis** as they preferred to call themselves, directed their rivalry to the **Hanafis** who practised a moderate form of Islam which included syncretic elements.

46. See Mohammad Nasiruddin, **Op.Cit.** p. 830. Also see, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, **Op. Cit.** p. 128. And, the monthly **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 1st. issue, 11th. year, 1925.

47. In the proceedings of the Ambala Trials (1863-1870), the father of an accused man who was to be transported advised his son never to forsake **Amin** and **Raf-i-Yadain** - the two particular practices observed by the **Ahl-i-Hadith**. The man said to his son "keep firm in the faith. It is not Christians and Jews who have destroyed you, but the **Hanafis**". The word **Amin** was pronounced aloud by the **Ahl-i-Hadith**, the **Shafi'is** and the **Hanbalis**. **Raf-i-Yadain** means the raising of hands upto the ears at the beginning and also during prayers. Barbara D. Metcalf, **Op. Cit.** p. 285.

The **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement created great impact in the rural areas of Bengal. The preachings of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** leaders was confined to the villages. **Bahas** (religious debates) were held frequently which greatly contributed to the attempt of Islamization by the religious reformists.⁴⁸ Public debates were held between the **Ahl-i-Hadith mullahs** and the **mullahs** of other religious sects. Face to face debates were held in large gatherings between **mullahs** of rival groups. The rural people, peasants and illiterate, attended these **bahas**. The holding of **bahas** increased religious activity in rural Bengal but did not, however, indicate that Islamization was going on in full swing. On the contrary, religious confrontation increased which confused the illiterate rural masses.⁴⁹ They continued to depend on their local **mullahs** instead of being converted to the reformed Islam preached by the **Ahl-i-Hadith** leaders.

48. Rafiuddin Ahmed, "Islamization in Nineteenth century Bengal", Gopal Krishna ed. **Contributions to South Asian Studies 1**, Oxford University Press, 1979. pp. 88-120. Rafiuddin Ahmed, **The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906- A Quest for Identity**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, rpt. 1988, pp. 74-82.

49. At least this was the image one could gather from the reports on **bahas** in Bengal in the first few decades of the present century. See, the monthly **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 8th. year, 3rd. issue, 1922; 11th. year, 3rd. issue, 1925; the weekly **Ahl-i-Hadith**, 3rd. year, 22nd. issue, 22nd May, 1930; 6th. year, 12th. issue, May, 1933.

The **Ahl-i-Hadith** leaders in northern India, like in Delhi and in the United Provinces, came from the educated and the well-born.⁵⁰ In Bengal too, most of the leaders were educated, like Abdullah-el Baki, Abdullah-el Kafi and Mohammad Akram Khan. Unlike the contemporary political leaders who seldom spoke in Bengali these leaders travelled through rural areas of Bengal and delivered speeches in Bengali, the only medium of communication with the rural people. This was an important reason behind the increased activity of **Ahl-i-Hadith** in rural Bengal. **Bahas** took place in the villages. It was in rural Bengal that Muslims practised folk and indigenous customs and rituals, which meant that Hindu influence was strong among them. Syncretic elements were present in abundance since most Muslims in Bengal were originally converted from Hinduism. **Manat**, visiting **mazars**, attending **pujas** (religious festivals of the Hindus) or **melas** (fairs arranged during **pujas**) were common practices among village Muslims. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** considered these as **shirk** (polytheistic). **Bahas** usually took place in heated and aggressive atmosphere where two opposing groups believed fanatically in their own practices. The **Ahl-i-Hadith bahas** were organized against the **Hanafis** in most cases. The debates were mostly over small issues like whether **amen** should be said aloud or hands to be folded above the navel or crossed over the stomach while praying, or whether **janaza** (prayer during the burial of a dead Muslim) should be performed standing at the head or at the shoulder of the dead body or whether **janaza** could be performed twice over the same body. Violence at **bahas** was a common feature in the villages of Bengal. The

50. Barbara D. Metcalf, *Op. Cit.* p. 268

bahas contributed to creating dissension in the villages between the **Mohammadi** and the **Hanafi** sects.

In the 1930's and the 1940's and later, two **Ahl-i-Hadith** leaders contributed greatly to the movement. Two brothers, Maulana Abdullah-el Baqi (1886-1952) and Maulana Abdullah-el Kafi (1900-1960) were educated leaders, who knew English well and made **Ahl-i-Hadith** popular in Bengal. These leaders were involved both in religious and political movements. Abdullah-el Baqi was a member of the Indian National Congress in his early years of political career. Later, in the mid -1940's he joined the Muslim League. So did Abdullah-el Kafi, who in the 1940's advised the Muslims to stay away from the Congress and agreed that Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) followed a correct decision by being anti-Congress because Congress was a bourgeois party and was completely against the interest of the Muslims.⁵¹ Politically, the **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement was anti-Congress, anti-British and anti-Sikh. Abdullah-el Kafi believed that politics had a close relation with the **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement and it was called a movement because the **Ahl-i-Hadith** had a clear and precise political programme which was not only to achieve political independence through religious inspiration or to assure food, clothing and employment or to get stronger by exploiting other political parties but also to establish the orders of God by obstructing the influence of **kufir** (the sinful).⁵² He preached that Muslims should stand against all kinds of

51. The weekly **Arafat**, 14th. August, 1967.

52. The Monthly **Tarjumanul Hadith**, 9th. year, 9th. issue, December-January, 1960/1961.

ideas, laws, theories, formulae, programmes and isms which were against the **Quran** and the **Hadith** and the followers of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** must protect Islam from all kinds of influences from Hinduism, Communism, atheism, from western cultures and ideas and establish the rule of the **Quran** and the **Sunnah** (precepts of the **Hadith**).⁵³

The weekly **Arafat**, founded by Abdullah-el Kafi attempted to rationalize the **Ahl-i-Hadith** faith. It attempted to give explanation to its beliefs by giving logical arguments and citations from the **Quran** and the **Hadith**. It wrote that saintship was non-existent in Islam and, therefore, it was un-Islamic to treat Prophet Muhammad as a saint. **Milad**, which expressed veneration of the Prophet was, therefore, considered un-Islamic. It maintained that Prophet Muhammad was a human being and none could be permitted to treat him as a saint.⁵⁴ The **Arafat** also attempted to establish that the **Quran** and the **Sunnah** had all the elements essential to maintain a balance of all situations and, therefore, needed no change or revision.⁵⁵ It said that the **Ahl-i-Hadith** was a movement which attempted to bring all Muslims who had moved away from the path of Islam together to the fold of the **Quran** and the **Hadith**.⁵⁶ To them, practice of local rituals and indigenous beliefs was unacceptable.⁵⁷ The **Arafat** expressed that the **Ahl-**

53. **Ibid.**

54. The weekly **Arafat**, 25th. June, 1962.

55. The weekly **Arafat**, 13th. May, 1963.

56. The weekly **Arafat**, 30th. March, 1964.

57. **Ibid.**

i-Hadith movement upheld freedom of the intellect but not without reasoning. This, in fact, did not indicate a democratic principle because no interpretation of the **Quran** and the **Hadith** was allowed. Here lies the contradiction that on the one hand, it declared that it would accept no interpretation of the **Quran** and the **Hadith** without reasoning, while on the other, it completely discarded any reasoning or interpretation.

The **Ahl-i-Hadith** movement made an impact among a section of the educated Muslim youths in urban Bengal who opposed modernism in actual practice. Those who disliked female education and hated to see Muslim women out of **purdah** and detested western style of life which was being followed by fellow Muslim youths, were attracted to the preachings of the **Ahl-i-Hadith**. By the 1930's idea of communism was beginning to spread among youths in Bengal. This phenomenon was countered by the conservative section of the educated Muslim youths. These conservative youths to whom being secular was similar to being an atheist, supported communalism. In Bengal, as one section of educated Muslim youths had been accepting progressive and liberal ideas, another section became increasingly dogmatic in their orthodox views. It is interesting to note that even some western - educated Muslim youths turned to orthodoxy and opposed the introduction of liberal and rational views in the Bengali Muslim society. This was a marked phenomenon in the first few decades of the present century.

Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji (1880-1931)

Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji was born in 1880 in Sirajganj in the district of Pabna.¹ He did not have much formal education but was able to place himself in a front - rank position among the contemporary social and political thinkers in Bengal. He left school and went to Turkey at an early age of fifteen.² A romantic love for the past glory of Islamic culture and the Muslim world led him to go to the seat of the Islamic Caliphate.³ He came back to Sirajganj after staying there for two years and soon turned into a writer, a preacher of Islam and a great orator intending to reform the Muslim society in Bengal.

Shiraji's involvement in politics and social activities began in the backdrop of the 1905 partition of Bengal, the **Swadeshi** and the boycott movement. He had joined the anti-partition movement led by Surendranath

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1. Anisuzzaman, **Muslim Manash O Bangla Shahitya, 1757-1918**, (A Critical Analysis of the Muslim Literateurs in Bengal, 1757-1918), 1st. ed. 1964, Dhaka, (3rd ed.). 1983 p. 347. Badiuzzaman, **Ismail Hossain Shirajee**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1993, p. 9. It was a trend in the early part of the present century to add the place of birth to one's name. Like Shiraji who hailed from Sirajganj, Moniruzzaman also used 'Islamabadi' at the end of his name to indicate his birthplace. Islamabad was the former name of Chittagong.
 2. Anisuzzaman, p. 347. Badiuzzaman, p. 15.
 3. Badiuzzaman, p. 14.

Banerjee.⁴ All through his political career he was very anti-British and at the same time strongly pan-Islamic. He was involved in all movements which were against the British irrespective of parties. He participated in movements led by the Congress, the Muslim League, the Swarajya Party, The **Krishak Samiti** and The **Anjumani Ulama-i Bangala**. Although he lacked formal education he was well-informed about both regional and national politics and could speak for hours on any issue he was asked to talk about. He was deeply attached to the Islamic world but was intellectually very modern. He advocated social enlightenment and female education. He was against child marriage and polygamy, against extravagance and the practice of dowry.⁵ He was one of the earliest social reformers in the Muslim community who advocated liberation of women particularly from the evils of **purdah**.⁶ He made a significant distinction between **aborodh** (seclusion) and **purdah** (use of veil). He was against any kind of seclusion of women from the outside world but he did not think that **purdah** actually prevented

4. See, Anissuzzaman, p. 347. Also see, Muzaffar Ahmad, **Amar Jibon O Bharatiyo Communist Party, 1920-1929**, (My life and the Indian Communist Party, 1920-1929), Dhaka, 1977. p. 7. The above information is also mentioned in Badiuzzaman, **Ismail Hossain Shiraji, Jibon O Shahitya**, (Life and works of Ismail Hossain Shiraji) Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, 1988. p. 34.

5. Anisuzzaman, p. 391.

6. **Ibid.**, pp. 349 - 350.

women from advancement.⁷ He cited the example in Turkey, another Islamic state, where women put on veil but compared to Bengal or to the whole of India they were far advanced in education, occupation and in modern thinking.⁸ After coming back from Turkey he explained in his book **Turki Nari Jibon** (Life of Turkish Women) that Turkish women used veil but did not lag behind because they had come out of seclusion. Turkish women had advanced in respect of education, in jobs and even in politics because they had come out of seclusion. **Purdah**, according to Ismail Hossain Shiraji, was not, of course, the only reason for their backwardness. The greatest barrier to advancement of the womenfolk, he believed, was their strict seclusion which had made them ignorant about health and sanitation, child-rearing and conservativeness.⁸ He believed that both the Hindu and Muslim women in Bengal should follow the instance in Turkey.⁹

Ismail Hossain Shiraji was a follower of Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) and poet Mohammad Iqbal (1876-1938). Iqbal and Nomani retained their inclination to Islamic tradition, but at the same time felt that a co-ordination between religious and secular thought was necessary to stop the growing rift in the Indian Muslim community.¹⁰ They were influenced by modern

7. **Ibid.** p. 349. Ismail Hossain Shiraji made this clear in his article, "Turosko Bhraman" (Visit to Turkey) published in 1913. See, Badiuzzaman, **Ismail Hossain Shirajee**, Bangla Academy, pp. 90-91.

8. **Anisuzzaman**, p. 350.

9. **Badiuzzaman, Ismail Hossain Shirajee**, Bangla Academy, p.91.

10. See, Ziya - ul - Hasan Faruqi, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in India", in Mushirul Hasan (ed.) **Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India**, New Delhi, 1981. pp. 334-335.

education and ideas but were emotionally attached to religion. Both Iqbal and Nomani were religious thinkers but were not opposed to modern thought. They represented the dual trend of orthodoxy and heterodoxy which prevailed in the Indian Muslims.¹¹ Shiraji, too, in his actions, in his numerous writings and speeches revealed that he was strongly sensitive to Islamic thought and culture and at the same time preached modern ideas in respect to social reform. He believed that Muslims should hold the Quran in one hand and Science in the other. He wrote in the contemporary journals like, the *Al-Eslam*, the *Islam Pracharak*, the *Prabashi*, the *P[~]racharak*, the *Kohinoor*, the *Soltan*, the *Weekly Mohammadi*, the *Saogat*, the *Nabajug*^{and} the *Nabanur*¹² All his writings exposed him as a thinker who was very modern in the western sense of the term but who clung passionately to the past glory of Islam and believed in the regeneration of the faith. Both Ismail Hossain Shiraji and Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1874-1950) were modern intellectually but emotionally they upheld Islamic tradition. On the one hand, they glorified Islamic culture and heritage, advocated the use of Arabic language and remained firm believers of Pan-Islamism. On the other, they spoke for female education and wanted the society to be free from ignorance, all kinds of superstitions and conservativeness prevailing in the backward Muslim community in Bengal. He stressed that Bengali should be the mother tongue of Muslims in Bengal¹³. Shiraji mentioned this repeatedly in the *Islam Pracharak*, the

11. See, Anisuzzaman, pp. 347-352.

12. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Samayikpatre Jiban O Janamat 1901-1930* (Public Opinion as Reflected in The Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977. pp. 90, 127, 145-146, 150-151, 153.

13. Anisuzzaman, pp. 349-350, 352-c.

Mihir O Sudhakar, *The Soltan* and in the *Naba Nur*.¹⁴ He had earlier believed that Muslims of the whole world should make Arabic their national language. He wanted Arabic to be the language of the Muslim **ummah**. Later, he spoke in favour of Bengali.¹⁵ He was, in this respect, an upholder of a trend that can be termed Bengali Muslim nationalism. Maulana Moniruzzaman Islamabadi belonged to this category as well. Both of them believed in communal harmony, stressed the need for social upliftment through modern education and scientific knowledge but at the same time adhered to Pan-Islamism and to the strict **Shariah** of Islam.

Ismail Hossain Shiraji had left for Turkey in 1895 at the age of fifteen but came back after two years. He got himself admitted to school again in 1897 but left school before he could take his matriculation examination.¹⁶ There ended his formal education. His father, Abdul Karim Khandkar (1856-1924) who practiced **unani** or herbal medicine, was not financially well-off. Shiraji started to write at an early age.¹⁷ His first verse book was **Anar Prabaha** (Streams of Fire), published in 1899 by Munshi Mohammad Meherullah (1861-1907).¹⁸ In this book he urged the Muslims to re-invoke the past glory of Islam. He pointed out the need for Muslims to wake up

14. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 292-293 for Moniruzzaman Islamabadi's opinions in respect to Bengali Language.

15. *Ibid.* p. 352c.

16. Badiuzzaman, *Ismail Hossain Shirajee*, Bangla Academy, p. 14.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 69. The English title of the book given here, is mine. Also see, Badiuzzaman, *Ismail Hossain Shiraji*, *Jiban O Shahitya*, Islamic Foundation, pp. 224, 225 -226.

again as a strong and superior community. He thought of a Muslim renaissance. He wanted that Muslims of India should reincarnate into a strong community; regain their lost glory and invigorate their faith in Islam.¹⁹ In **Anal Prabaha**, Shiraji also pointed out that India was being exploited under colonial rule and it was essential for the Muslims to act unitedly and strongly to make India free.²⁰ This was undoubtedly a very bold stand against the British in the first decade of the twentieth century because most Muslim leaders in Bengal projected their loyalty to the British in those days. Considering the political situation of Bengal his book had made a great impact. **Swadeshi** and anti - partition movement was going on during that time. The extremists were also very active in Bengal and there were instances of communal riots in many places.²¹ Shiraji's book expressed strong anti-British feeling and was considered to incite communal discord. When the second edition of the book was brought out in 1908, it was banned and the author was arrested by the British government.²² He was released from prison in 1912 after which he left for Turkey, this time he

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19. Badiuzzaman, **Ismail Hossain Shiraji, Jiban O Shahitya**, Islamic Foundation, pp. 224, 225 -226.
 20. **Ibid.** pp. 228 - 229.
 21. See, Sumit Sarkar, **Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908**, New Delhi, 1973. pp. 447 - 449.
 22. Badiuzzaman, **Ibid.** Islamic Foundation, p. 69. The author mentions that he got arrested in 1910. The second edition of **Anal Prabaha** was printed in 1908. pp. 220-221.

accompanied the medical team led by Dr. Ansari.²³ Ismail Hossain Shiraji's anti-British attitude was deep -rooted in him which lasted till the end of his life. All his writings reveal his anti-colonial feeling on the one hand and love for the motherland on the other. These attitudes worked deep in him and he urged the Muslims to take an active role in the nationalist movement. He was, in this respect, a sort of Muslim counterpart to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1844-1894). Bankim Chandra preached a Bengali Hindu nationalism, Shiraji preached Bengali Muslim nationalism but he was not communal. In his poem **Naba Uddipana** (Re-invigoration), 1905 he mentioned that Hindu and the Muslim communities were "twin children of Mother India".²⁴ He urged the Muslim to unite together for the advancement of this motherland and to free their country from British rule. He believed that the urgent need of the time was to make India free first. Religious intolerance or communalism, he believed, was the result of political friction and for the contest of gaining political power. He wrote in his poem, **Akangkha** (Desire), 1906 that India was for the Indians, not for the outsiders.²⁵ Although in his novels, **Ray Nandini** (1915), **Tara Bai** (1916), **Feroza Begum** (1918), **Nooruddin** (1919) he exposed Hindu - Muslim conflict existing in the contemporary society, he also depicted the harmonious relation between the two communities existing for centuries in India. Shiraji did not incite communalism in his writings. It was believed that Shiraji wrote in retaliation to Bankim Chandra's **Durgesh Nandini** (1865)

23. Anisuzzaman, **Op. Cit.** p. 349.

24. Badiuzzaman, **Ismail Hossain Shirajee**, Islamic Foundation, p. 237.

25. **Ibid.** p. 240.

and **Anandamath** (1882) but all his writings were meant to glorify the Muslims, rejuvenate them, and at the same time to uphold the tradition of Hindu-Muslim co-existence. There existed in Bengali literature in the early part of the twentieth century, two distinct trends among Muslim writers -- one simply attempting to express Muslim heritage and culture following the contemporary literary style.²⁶ They wrote not to emphasize Muslim separatism but to portray in literature Bengali Muslim life and society. Writers like Mosharraf Hossain (1848-1911), Kaikobad (1857-1952) and Mozammel Huq belonged to this group.²⁷ The other trend, popularly known as the **Shudhakar** group, imitated the creation of a purely Islamic literature. This group imitated the style of the contemporary Hindu writers and at the same time wrote in order to glorify the Muslim heritage and culture. During anti-partition and **Swadeshi** movement, particularly, they came to realize that as in politics, so in literature they should have a different path. To exist politically and as a separate community in a country dominated by the Hindu majority, they needed to proceed on their own.²⁸ This group wrote in response to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's anti-Muslim literature, where he identified the Muslims as outsiders who attacked and conquered India.²⁹ Bankim Chandra believed that Muslims were alien and

26. See, Muhammad Abdul Hai and Syed Ali Ahsan, **Bangla Shahityer Itibritto** (History of Bengali Literature) Modern Period, Dhaka, 1964. p.202.

27. **Ibid.** p. 202.

28. **Ibid.** p. 202.

29. Anisuzzaman, **Op. Cit.** p. 270.

that the country should be made free of the Muslims.³⁰ Muslim writers like Abdur Rahim (1859-1931), Reazuddin Ahmad Mashadi (1859-1918), Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmad (1862-1933) believed that India also belonged to the Muslims and at the same time glorified their heritage and culture.³¹ They claimed that Islamic culture was much superior to that of the Hindus and that they were ignorant and in darkness because they still worshipped idols.³²

Ismail Hossain Shiraj's writings were very similar to those of the **Sudhakar** group, but Shiraji was more anti-British than anti-Hindu. Most of Shiraji's contemporary writers of the Muslim community had attempted to earn sympathy and favour of the British. The Muslims had earned the disfavour of the British from the time of the **Wahhabi** trials (1871).³³ Muslim writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had attempted to earn the favour of the British and to remove anti-British feeling from the minds of the Muslims. They also evoked the past glory of the Muslims and urged them to rise up again with strength and confidence.

30. **Ibid.** p. 270. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee called the Muslims **Jabons** in his novel **Anandanmath** which was meant to derogate them. The Muslims felt insulted.

31. **Ibid.** pp. 264, 270 - 271, 278 - 280, 285.

32. **Ibid.** p. 270.

33. **Ibid.** p. 276.

Shiraji did similarly follow this trend but he was different on one point and that was, he could never accept British rule in India. Most of his writings, mainly poems, expressed anti-British feeling on the one hand and urged the Muslims to regain their lost glory on the other. In this respect he was very much like the radical poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1975). Shiraji was also non-communal. Most of his writings, in fact, preached inter-communal harmony. His novels were set on the background of love and marriage between Hindu women and Muslim men. But, Nazrul's language, images, style of writing were much more bold and fiery. Besides, he was much more humanistic, liberal and syncretic in his writings and also in personal life. Shiraji, however, was conservative in the sense that he never accepted cultural syncretism and strongly upheld religious purity. He preached against **manats**, visiting of **mazars** and tombs, veneration of **pirs** and performing **pujas** by the Muslims. He was a follower of the **Wahhabis** in this respect.³⁴ But, he criticized the illiterate and half literate **mullahs** who, he believed, wasted their precious time and energy by unnecessary arguments between the **Hanafi** and the **La-mazhabi**.³⁵ He was also very pan-Islamic. He even believed that very soon the **Amir** (Islamic ruler) of Kabul would conquer India and he hoped that Muslims would rule the country again. It is interesting to note the thought process of Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji that

34. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *op. cit.* pp. 127 - 128. Shiraji wrote against this syncretic tradition in the **Soltan**, 8th year, 17th issue, 7th September, 1923.

35. *Ibid.* pp. 145 - 146.

even in the mid - 1920's he believed that the **Amir** of Afghanistan would come to India "within six months" to establish Islamic rule. Therefore, **Swaraj** Party or the Swarajist movement was unnecessary. He even believed that there was no need for Hindu - Muslim Pact.³⁶ This he conveyed to Abul Mansur Ahmad in the mid - 1920's when the Muslim failed to gain any practical favour from the Bengal Pact (1923) and the communal relation in Bengal was getting worsened. However, to be a pro-Muslim did not mean that Shiraji was anti-Hindu or communal. He was conservative in the sense that he believed in the following of strict religious **shariah**, which in a way meant religious separatism in a multi-racial, multi-religious country. Attempt to uphold the idea of pan-Islamism seemed unrealistic and conservative to those who believed in modernism. But to be a conservative does not mean to be communal. One can be very religious and at the same time tolerant to other religions. Shiraji never expressed hatred for Hinduism or for the Hindus and he never incited communalism. He has been often represented as

36. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar** (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It), Dhaka, 1988, Vol. I, p. 41. Shiraji told Abul Mansur Ahmad that he had dreamt of this and the dream of a "Syed" always happened to come true. **Ibid.** pp. 39 - 41.

a very liberal minded Muslim leader and writer.³⁷ He had participated in the nationalist movement led by the Congress, in the anti-partition and **Swadeshi** movement.

Shiraji's political activities in the 1920's superseded his literary pursuits. He was deeply concerned at the failure of the Bengal Pact. Even before the death of C.R. Das in June 1925, Shiraji observed that the pact gave only a placebo to the Muslims. When Khan Bahadur Musharraf Hossain (1871 - 1966) and other loyalists including other Swarajist Muslims proposed in March 1924 that the Bengal Pact be put to immediate effect, C.R. Das replied that the pact could be implemented only after Swaraj was attained.³⁸ From this incident C.R. Das was dubbed a hypocrite and most Muslim leaders in Bengal became anti-Congress and anti-Swarajist although for political gains many contested to the Bengal Legislative Council elections as Swarajists in 1923.³⁹ The Swarajya Party which included several Muslim leaders also won a great victory in the

37. Pradip Kumar Lahiri, **Bengali Muslim Thought, 1818 - 1947, Its Liberal and Rational Trends**, New Delhi, 1991. p. 75.

38. See, Partha Chatterjee, **Bengal, 1920 -1947 : The Land Question, Vol. 1**, Calcutta, 1984. p. 67. Also See, J.H. Broomfield, **Elite Conflict in a Plural Society : Twentieth Century Bengal**, University of California Press, 1968. pp. 159 - 161. The author explained why Das was not willing to make immediate commitment. Most of the Congress leaders were very critical of the Bengal Pact and the Hindu revivalists too, opposed the pact strongly. C.R. Das did not want to go against the Hindu sentiment.

39. Harun - or - Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh, 1936-1947**, Dhaka, 1987. p. 22.

Calcutta Corporation elections, held in March 1924.⁴⁰

Sirajganj, the sub-division where Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji belonged to, was a centre of peasant uprising throughout the period under British rule.⁴¹ In the early 1920's this trend took a communal turn. Failure of the Bengal Pact to make the nationalist Muslim or the Muslim community happy, was a major factor that led to communal disturbances in many places, including Pabna. Shiraji was involved in mobilizing the peasants in this region. Civil disobedience, **Satyagraha** and non-co-operation led by the Congress, was going on but it made little impact on the peasantry.⁴² In June 1924 two conferences were held at Sirajganj. One was the Bengal Provincial Conference led by C.R. Das, Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan and other Swarajist Party leaders. The other was called the Muslim Conference which was led by Ismail Hossain Shiraji, Musharraf Hossain and others.⁴³ Shiraji's Conference drew large number of Muslims, particularly from Pabna district, whose main demand was drastic tenancy

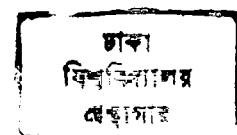
382335

40. **Ibid.** p. 23.

41. Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, "The Communalisation of Class Struggle : East Bengal Peasantry, 1923-29", **The Indian Economic and Social History Review** , Vol. XXV, No. 2. April - June 1988, Delhi, 1988. p. 195. In fact, the whole of north-western region of Eastern Bengal, including Pabna, Dinajpur, Bogra was a strong centre of peasant unrest. Also see, Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, **Peasant Utopia, The Communalisation of Class Politics In East Bengal, 1920 - 1947**, Dhaka, 1994. p. 133.

42. Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, " The Communalisation of Class Struggle : East Bengal Peasantry, 1923 -1929 ," **Ibid** . p.139.

43. **Ibid.** p. 184.



reforms.⁴⁴ Shiraji mobilized the agrarian sector, which he did on anti-**Zaminder**, anti-Swarajist and anti-Hindu lines.⁴⁵ For this reason the Sirajganj meeting led by Ismail Hossain Shiraji was dubbed anti - Hindu and he was marked as a communal person. In early 1924 landless peasants, mostly **bargadars** of local Hindu landlords boycotted them in Chatmohar, a village in Sirajganj sub-division.⁴⁶ Appeals were made by **mullahs** to boycott Hindu festivals and **pujas** throughout eastern Bengal in the years 1925-26.⁴⁷

In Pabna, particularly, Muslim with middle - class background and the **mullahs** gave leadership to this anti-Hindu and anti-**zamindar** movement. In 1926 Muslim peasants attacked Hindu houses, destroyed properties belonging to the Marwari moneylenders and Hindu **jotedars**.⁴⁸

44. **Ibid.** p. 184.

45. **Ibid.** pp. 184 - 185. The resolution adopted at the conference urged the Muslims to keep themselves away from joining with the Hindus in the Swaraj Movement and advised them to fight unitedly for their self-determination.

46. Taj ul- Islam Hashmi, **Ibid.** p. 195.

47. **Ibid.** pp. 197-198. Also see, Taj ul- Islam Hashmi, **Peasant Utopia, Op. Cit.** p. 109.

48. Taj ul- Islam Hashmi, "The Communalisation of Class Struggle : East Bengal Peasantry, 1923 - 29", pp. 197-198.

Peasants were also motivated to boycott union board elections and **ryots** were involved in no-rent campaigns.⁴⁹ **Satyagraha** and non-co-operation was strong in Pabna and Shiraji was an active participant in the movement, particularly in Sirajganj. Because these movements took anti-Hindu turn Shiraji was held responsible for communal antagonism in the region. Swarajist opposition to the Tenancy Amendment Bill in December 1925, consolidation of the revivalist Muslim association, like the **Anjumans**, the **Ulama** and the **Tanzim** committees, and the retaliation by the Hindu community through strengthening the **Shuddhi** and **Sangathan** movements worsened communal relation to a great extent and there were riots in Calcutta and other places.⁵⁰ Slump in jute price and severe trade recession in the 1920's was also a major reason behind anti-**zamindar** feeling of the peasants. Shiraji was actively involved in peasant movement and attended several meetings where he demanded safeguards for the interest of the **ryots**. A large meeting was held at Salimpur, Mymensingh in January, 1926 where

49. Taj ul- Islam Hashmi, **Peasant Utopia** , p. 133.

50. Taj ul- Islam Hashmi, "The Communalisation of Class Struggle : East Bengal Peasantry, 1923-29", **Ibid.** p. 183. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** . p. 27. J.H. Broomfield, **Op. Cit.** pp. 276 - 277. There were riots in Calcutta and in many parts of eastern Bengal, mainly in Dacca, Pabna, Faridpur. Death of C.R. Das in June 1925 also meant that any outward restraint from both the communities was lost.

about 15,000 **ryots**, cultivators, **ulama**, doctors and lawyers gathered to form a resolution on Tenancy Bill. ⁵¹ The meeting was presided over by Ismail Hossain Shiraji. Demands made at the meeting were, 1) the **ryot** must have **kaimi** and permanent rights in his arable and homestead land at fixed **jama** , 2) they must have unlimited and unqualified right for transfer of their land and that the landlord will have no right to dispossess the purchaser thereof, 3) **zamindars** should not be permitted to have **khas** possession of land sold after payment of compensation to purchaser, 4) right of **zamindars** for **khas** possession or transfer of whole **jama** must be stopped, 5) provision of increment of rent after lapse of every fifteen years must be declared null and void, 6) the **ryot** must have right to valuable trees grown on his land, 7) the **ryot** must have complete right to excavate tank, sink **pakka** well or erect building in their own land without giving any **nazar**, etc.⁵²

Shiraji was credited in his time for his dedication to the cause of the peasants. To take up any issue in favour of the peasants meant a collision with the established system of the role of the **zamindars**, the chain of **jotedars** and the money - lending groups who were mainly Hindus. Shiraji's speeches, therefore, were anti-Hindu. But, he was never communal and he never meant to be communal. Two other factors worked behind the allegation that he was communal. First, Pabna, particularly, did not have

51. **The Mussalman**, Friday, January 8, 1926.

52. **Ibid.**

large number of **namasudras** compared to other provinces. Anti-**zamindar** agitation in Pabna was on the whole led by Muslim **ryots** and peasants. Second, the **Wahhabi ulama** were quite influential here. Shiraji's involvement in politics under these circumstances made one believe that he was communal. Although he was not so, it is essential to note that however enlightened he was, he was strongly against the syncretic trend existing in Bengali Muslim society. He was a liberal - minded writer and politician but not without contradictions. He was socially conscious and was concerned about the welfare of the Muslims in India, particularly Bengal. Although he supported the partition of Bengal in 1905, at times he spoke against it. In the 1920's he spoke in favour of the Caliphate. He supported the Khilafat movement, never questioning the justification of its extra - Indian aspect. He wanted communal harmony but never attempted sincerely to make the Bengal Pact workable. He was, in many respects, closer to the **ulama** in thought rather than to the English - educated, western - influenced leaders of the time. He was not just a politician. He was a writer as well. He is the author of several books; he wrote poems and novels. He was primarily known in his time as a literateur and a social reformer. His involvement in politics, particularly in peasant movement reveal another facet of his conscious effort to improve the conditions of the Bengali Muslims.

Mohammad Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950)

Mohammad Moniruzzaman Islamabadi was one of the earliest Bengali Muslim nationalist leaders. He was contemporary of Moulana Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968), Maulana Abdullah-el Baqi (1886-1952) and his brother, Maulana Abdullah-el Kafi (1900-1960) who had made great impact on the social, political and religious thought of the Muslim community in Bengal in the early decades of the present century.¹ But Islamabadi followed a different trend from the rest of them. Although educated at **madrassah** (religious schools) he did not come out as an orthodox or a dogmatic person.

Moniruzzaman Islamabadi was born in 1875 at Potia, a police station of the village of Aralia in Chittagong district.² Islamabadi was not his surname. He was called so because of his birth in the district of Chittagong which was previously known Islamabad.³ Islamabadi learnt Arabic and Persian and for a brief period learnt Bengali in his childhood. In 1889 he was admitted to Hooghly **madrassah** where he learnt Arabic and Persian.⁴

1. Abul Kalam Shamshuddin, **Ottit Diner Smriti** (Reminiscence), Dhaka, 1985, 2nd. ed. p. 119.

2. Shamsuzzaman Khan, **Moniruzzaman Islamabadi Jibani Granthamala**, (A series of literary biographies), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1988, p. 9.

3. **Ibid**, p. 34.

4. **Ibid**. pp. 15-20.

He passed the "title" examination, i.e. **madrassah** school final in 1895 with distinction. He was placed first in the first division.⁵ Islamabadi had to choose a profession but he detested the job and life style of the **mullahs** and **maulvis** (religious preachers). He believed that they lived on the charity from others and were involved in useless religious debates depending on exaggerated and inaccurate views of religion. From an early age he believed that the **mullahs** and **maulvis** created confusion among the rural people by their limited knowledge of both religion and practical life. He was determined to depart from the traditional profession of the **mullahs**. As a child he probably had come across **bahas** meetings which involved acrimonious debates relating to religion and had developed a dislike for the **mullahs**. **Bahas** or religious debates were very common in the late nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries in Bengal.⁶ The debates took place between the **Hanafi**⁷ and the reformist Muslims, particularly the

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5. **Biography**, p. 22. Shamsuzzaman goes into detailed account of early life of Islamabadi. Much of his account is based on the autobiography of Mohammad Moniruzzaman Islamabadi. Islamabadi started writing his autobiography in October, 1931. The work is still unpublished. **Biography**, I p. 118.
 6. Rafiuddin Ahmed, "Islamization in nineteenth century Bengal", Gopal Krishna (ed.) **Contributions to South Asian Studies 1**, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 90-92.
 7. **Hanafi** - a follower of the **Hanafi** school of Islamic jurisprudence which recognises analogical deduction and consensus among jurists. It is a moderate school of Islamic jurisprudence founded by Abu Hanifa (d. 767 A.D.) and draw upon the **Quran**, the **Hadith** (prophet's sayings.) **ijma** (consensus of the **ulama**) and **qiyas** (analogical reasoning).

Ahl-i-Hadith ⁸ and the **Mohammadi** ⁹ sects of Islam. After much hesitation he took up teaching at **madrassahs**.¹⁰ Islamabadi could not get better job other than teaching at **madrassahs** because his own education at **madrassah** was incomplete and impractical. Islamabadi himself realized this fact as he wrote in his autobiography that during his education at the **madrassah** no knowledge was given on the political and social conditions he lived in. The **madrassah** students did not know anything about Geopgraphy or History. Islamabadi doubted ^{whether} the teachers knew anything about the above subjects.¹¹ The **madrassahs** did not have any arrangement for physical education. Islamabadi pointed out the limitation of **madrassah** education which did not match with the needs of the time.¹² In practical life Islamabadi felt the need to know Bengali. He knew the collolquial Bengali of Chittagong region.¹³ Later he learnt the language so that he could write in that medium. He had also learnt Urdu. Islamabadi was largely self-taught. From 1896 onwards he started teaching at **madrassahs** in Rangpur and Chittagong.¹⁴ He introduced the teaching of Geography,

8. **Ahl-i-Hadith** - reformist Muslims who rejected **ijma** and wanted total enforcement of the **shariah** (laws in the Quran and the **Hadith**. They were close to Hanbalis, i.e. followers of Ibn Hanbal (d. 855 A.D.)

9. **Mohammadi**- this sect is similar to **Ahl-i-Hadith**. The name is derived from their strict following of Prophet Mohammad's sayings or the **Hadith**.

10. Shamsuzzaman Khan, **Biography**, p. 23.

11. **Ibid.** p. 20.

12. **Ibid.** pp. 20-22.

13. **Ibid.** p. 29.

14. **Ibid.** p. 32.

History, Politics, Sociology, Theology and Bengali. He also stressed the need to learn Urdu.¹⁵ At the same time he continued to expand his knowledge on various subjects, particularly politics, Sociology and Theology. The years from 1901 to 1903 acted as the formative period for the development of his later political and social ideas. He read works of various scholars and thinkers like Socrates (470 B.C. - 399 B.C.), Omar Khayyam (1050-1123 A.D.), Abu Hamid Ghazali (1058-1111 A.D.), Ibn-Arabi (1165-1240) and also the lives of Luther (1483-1546), George Washington (1732-1799), Syed Ahmed Barelvi (1786-1831), Mazzini (1805-1872) Garibaldi (1807-1882), Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Jamaluddin Afgani (1838-1897) and other political and social reformers of both the East and the West.¹⁶ He formed a liberal and progressive view about society and religion. He believed in secularism and in nationalist politics. He was orthodox in religious matters but that did not prevent him from having a rationalistic approach to the social and political issues of his time.

Moniruzzaman Islamabadi started his political career in 1914 by attending the All Bengal **Proja** Conference in Mymensingh. The conference was one of the earliest attempts to start a secular movement with the peasants, based on economic programme and directed mainly against the **zamindars**.¹⁷ Most of its leaders were landlords and **talukdars** (lesser

15. **Ibid.** p. 34.

16. **Ibid.** p. 35.

17. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar**, (Fifty years of Politics As I saw it) Dhaka, 1975. 3rd. ed. p. 23. Kamruddin Ahmad, **A Socio-Political History of Bengal and the Birth of Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1975. 4th. ed. pp. 10-11.

landlords) and, therefore, it could not become too radical in its programme. It limited its attempts to achieve the peasants' demand for the abolition of **abwabs** (illegal exactions), the transfer fee (payable to the landlord during each sale or transfer of the **raiya** holding), **zamindar's** right to eviction and enhancement of rent, etc.¹⁸ The programme of the All Bengal **Proja** Conference could not be followed up because of the First World War.¹⁹

Islamabadi then joined the khilafat and non-co-operation movement in 1920 and had attended the Khilafat Conference earlier in 1914 at Lucknow. In that conference Islamabadi spoke in Bengali.²⁰ He had learnt Bengali realizing that this was the most popular medium if he had to make an impact on the masses. Most Muslim leaders in Bengal preferred to speak at gatherings in Urdu. This had so long acted as a barrier in communicating with the masses. Islamabadi was in the Khilafat Committee. He started

18. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Fifty Years of Politics as I saw it.** p. 23.

19. Kamruddin Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** p. 10. The conference included men like Sir Abdur Rahim (1867-1952), Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin) A.K. Fazlul Huq (1873-1962) and Moulana Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968).

20. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** p. 34. It can be noted here that Akram Khan was the other leader who preferred to speak in Bengali at various conferences.

working in the **Soltan** ²¹ as an editor from 1923 onwards and campaigned for support for the Khilafat and Non-co-operation movement. Islamabadi attended the special conference of the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Hind** (Association of the **ulama** of India) in Delhi in September, 1923. At this conference, the **ulama** who were in a disorganized state, were urged to unite and deal with the various political and social problems of India. According to the decision of the **ulama** in Delhi, the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Bangla** (Association of the **ulama** of Bengal) took up programmes to boycott the peace celebration (after the 1914-1919 war). Moniruzzaman Islamabadi was the Assistant Secretary of the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Bangla** around this time.²² He was a pan-Islamist and a follower of the Deoband school.²³ Islamabadi had a combination of both fundamentalist belief in religious matters and a very practical approach to political affairs. All through his life he believed in

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21. The **Soltan** was a weekly, published from Calcutta. It first came out as a weekly in 1903. Then it ceased to come out. It was published again from 1923 onwards as a weekly. From August, 1930 the **Soltan** came out as a daily for a brief period. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, **Reminiscence, Op. Cit.** p. 116.
 22. The **Soltan**. 8th. year, 21st. issue, 1923. Also see, Sunil Kanti Dey, **Anjumane Olamae Bangala, 1913-1919**, Calcutta, 1992. The book contains elaborate information on Islamabadi's involvement in the association.
 23. The Deoband school derived inspiration from Shah Waliullah (1703-1762). The **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Hind** was under the leadership of the Deobandi **ulama** and emerged in the late nineteenth century in India.

accommodating with the Hindu community of India. Like the Deobandis he was strongly anti-British and had showed sympathy with the Caliphate of Turkey. He supported the struggle for national independence and at the same time campaigned for the preservation of the Caliphate. Pan-Islamism was an extra-territorial movement which went paradoxical with the demand for national independence. From the years 1919 to 1924 the Khilafat Movement in India represented such a struggle. It failed to achieve its demand but contributed greatly to the mobilization of masses by introducing mass participation in politics.

Islamabadi preached that the Caliphate must be protected from dishonour. He wrote that the Caliphate was the backbone of the Muslim world. The British had fought against Turkey, had occupied most of its territory and had tarnished the prestige of the Caliph. Seventy million Muslims of India had for the past few years urged the British government to protect the Caliphate. Two Hundred and thirty million Hindus had also joined the Muslims supporting their demand but to no avail. The Muslims had no other alternative than to adopt non-co-operation with the Government.²⁴ The *Soltan*, of which Islamabadi was the editor from 1923 onwards, was an independent weekly and expressed Muslim public opinion.

24. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Non-co-operation and our duty", *Al-Eslam*, 6th. year, 10th issue, 1920, M.N. Islam, *Shamaik Patre Jiban O Janamat, 1901-1930* (Public opinion as Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977, pp. 214-215.

It acted as a mouthpiece for the Khilafat movement. Islamabadi wrote articles in the **Soltan** and the **Al-Eslam** in favour of the non-co-operation and the Khilafat movement.²⁵ In 1924 when the Caliphate in Turkey was abolished the movement died out. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi then got involved in nationalist politics. He believed in secularism and supported C.R. Das (1870-1925) in forming the Bengal Pact in April, 1923. He had also joined the Swaraj Party in January, 1923.²⁶ He did not believe in separatist politics of the Muslim League. To Islamabadi the demand for Pakistan was self-destructive for the Muslims in India. Once partition took place, he told, the Muslim community would be divided into three groups, one in India, one in the North-West and the other in the North-East. Partition would disintegrate the Muslim community in India.²⁷ Moniruzzaman Islamabadi never believed in parliamentary politics but quite surprisingly, he contested election in 1937 as **Krishak Proja Party** candidate from Southern Chittagong constituency and was elected a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly.²⁸ Later, he again contested from Chittagong in 1946 to enter the

25. **Al-Eslam** was a monthly journal, brought out from 1915 onwards. It was the mouthpiece of the **Anjuman-i-Ulama-i-Bangla**; published from Calcutta and continued to be published for six years. Its editor was Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968) and later during the khilafat movement its editor was Moniruzzaman Islamabadi.

26. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Ibid.* pp. 49-51.

27. Mohammad Waliullah, **Jug-Bichitra** (A Reminiscence of Life), Dhaka, 1967. p. 275.

28. Islamabadi had joined the Congress in 1906. He had also joined the nationalist Muslims under Barrister A. Rasul in the anti-partition (of Bengal) agitation in 1905. See, **Biography**, p. 106. For his participation in the 1937 elections as a K.P.P. member see, **Biography**, p. 107.

Bengal Legislative Assembly. He was defeated.²⁹ There was doubt about his connection with the terrorists in Bengal. He had read Mazzini and Garibaldi in his formative years and had joined Subhas Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauz formed in 1943.³⁰ He supported Bose's idea of taking up arms against the British and even talked of supplying arms for that purpose. The British government had suspected him of having connections with the Japanese in order to procure arms and had arrested him for a brief period in 1944.³¹

One can see a strange mixture of beliefs in Moniruzzaman Islamabadi. On the one hand he believed in extra-parliamentary politics, on the other, he participated in parliamentary politics. He was a Deobandi and a secular nationalist and at the same time, had leanings towards extremist politics. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi's view on improving the Muslim society in Bengal was progressive in his time. He stressed the need for Muslims to learn English and Bengali. He wrote that education at **madrassah** was incomplete and its curriculum must include English, Bengali, History, Philosophy, Chemistry, Geography, Sociology and Anthropology.³² Even in 1926, Bengali had not been introduced in the Calcutta **Madrassah**.³³

29. See, Mohammad Waliullah, **Ibid.** p. 275.

30. See, **Biography**, p. 107.

31. **Ibid.** p. 107. Also see, Mohammad Waliullah, **Ibid.** 275.

32. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Arabic University", **Al-Eslam**, 6th. year, 3rd. issue, 1920. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 13 .

33. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 15.

Ever since Islamabadi had been pressing for the introduction of these subjects he was criticized by the orthodox Muslims who said that Islamabadi was introducing an irreligious education. They objected to his suggestions as "un-Islamic" and condemned him. They called him "an atheist, very much similar to the Europeans whose aim is to achieve worldly gains. It is doubtful whether he believes in the life hereafter."³⁴

Islamabadi was very much against the extremities in the preachings of the reformist Muslims and the fundamentalists. He wrote in the *Soltan* in 1923 that the conflict between the **Hanafi** and the **Mohammadi** sects had reached to the point of fanaticism. He strongly opposed the religious debates between the **Ahl-i-Hadith** and the **Mohammadi** sects on one side and the **Hanafis** on the other. He wrote that the leaders of the **Anjuman-i-ulama** had attempted to establish communal harmony in Bengal but the petty quarrels on religious practices and rites had created confusion among the illiterate masses. It also contributed to communal discord.³⁵

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34. **Islam-Pracharak**, 8th. year, 1st. issue, 1906; M.N. Islam, *Ibid.* p. 30 **Islam-Pracharak** was brought out by Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmad (1862-1933) first in 1891 for two years. Then in 1899 until 1908. It acted as a mouthpiece for the orthodox Muslims in Bengal. M.N. Islam, *Op. Cit.* p. 430.
35. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Hanafi and Mohammadi", the *Soltan*, 8th. year, 9th. issue, 1923. M.N. Islam, *Op. Cit.* p. 110.

Islamabadi was also against **pirs** (saints) and **mullahs** (priests). As early as 1903 he wrote that the Muslim society in Bengal was full of half-educated and illiterate **mullahs** and **maulvis** (priests), about forty to fifty thousands of them, engaged in preaching conservativeness rather than giving proper religious education.³⁶ He wrote, "if the present society could be made free from the grips of the **maulvis**, **mullahs** and **pirs** it would have developed long ago. The **maulvis** and **mullahs** have pushed the development of the society a century backwards."³⁷ Islamabadi was against **pirs** and **pirism**. He strongly objected to the practice of visiting **dargahs** and **mazars** (tombs of saints), **manats** (promising sacrifice of animals or wealth in return for good luck) and other practices considered **shirk** (un-Islamic).³⁸ He preached that the Muslims must be brought out of their ignorance and conservativeness. This he believed, was the pre-requisite for the community's development. He hated social divisions amongst the Muslims particularly the **ashraf-atrap** distinction, which he believed, had been taken to the extreme point where the **atraps** (Muslims of lower strata) were not even allowed to pray in the same mosque.³⁹ Islamabadi advised the Muslims to give up extravagancy in their spending. He noted that the Muslims foolishly got involved in litigations for petty reasons thus spending

36. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Islam and its mission", **Islam-Pracharak**, 5th. year, 9th. - 10th. issue, 1903, M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** pp. 117-118.

37. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 117.

38. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Social Reform", **Al-Eslam**, 4th. year, 10th. issue, 1918, M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 127.

39. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Social Reform", **Al-Ealam**, 5th. year, 8th issue, 1919. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** p. 62.

hard-earned money which otherwise could have been saved. He pointed out that the practice among Muslims to spend too much at weddings and circumcision, food, music, dance and fireworks contributed to their economic distress. What had worsened their condition further was that they spend the money they often borrow with interest.⁴⁰ He suggested that Muslims should try to accumulate capital and get involved in trades. A supporting income from trade would save them from distress during famine and bad harvest. He wrote that there were few blacksmiths, goldsmiths, milkmen or fish merchants among Muslims. They had considered these jobs degrading. A false pride^{had} worked in them because of their past glory which even after decades had remained in them in a form of complexity.⁴¹

In short, Moniruzzaman Islamabadi can be considered one of the leading Muslims in Bengal who upheld the cause of the Muslims and at the same time pointed out to the Muslim community the necessity to improve and develop both in economy and in education. He was tolerant of the Hindu community and at the same time was conscious of the reasons behind communalism. He understood that competition for jobs and services between the Hindu and the rising Muslim middle class had intensified communal

40. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Social Reform", *Al-Eslam*, 5th. year, 6th. issue, 1326 B.S./1919. M.N. Islam, pp. 83-84. M. Islamabadi, "Anjuman-i-ulama and Social Reform", *Al-Eslam*, 5th. year, 3rd. issue, 1326 B.S./1919. M.N. Islam, *Op. Cit.* pp. 295-296.

41. Islamabadi, "Social Reform", *Al-Eslam*, 5th. year, 8th. issue, 1326 B.S./1919. M.N. Islam. *Op. Cit.* p. 297.

ill-feeling in Bengal. Islamabadi believed that economic development, literacy and enlightenment would gradually remove such complexities. He was a secularist in politics and had to face severe criticism from the orthodox Muslims. They even called him un-patriotic and an enemy of the Muslim community.⁴² Islamabadi was a nationalist Muslim who believed in maintaining a united India where religion could not act as an obstruction to communal harmony. He never believed in two-nation theory of the Muslim League and was opposed to Pakistan because he felt that would fail to solve the minority problem.

42. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** pp. 323, 397.

Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968)

With an exceptional life span of a century Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan had a wide and varied career in politics and profession. He was born on 7 June, 1868 in Hakimpur, a district of the 24 Parganas in West Bengal.¹ Born only after a decade of the sepoy Mutiny (1857) his life was foreshadowed by it and the Wahabi Trials (1863-1870)². Akram Khan's father, Maulana Abdul Bari participated in the Mutiny and was a follower of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** religious sect of Islam³ Akram Khan inherited religious belief from his father.⁴ Akram Khan followed **Ahl-i-Hadith** and strictly advocated the purging of all un-Islamic practices which he believed had "corrupted" the purity of Islam. He believed in maintaining the pristine quality of Islam as set by the rules of the **Hadith** (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Quran. He discarded any interpretation of Islamic laws other than the **Shariah** (the law of Islam).

It is mentioned that Akram Khan's ancestors came from Jessore-Khulna region of Eastern Bengal and were converted from Hinduism.⁵ This must have been a psychological factor that directed him to a strong

1. Muhammad Jahangir, **Mohammad Akram Khan** (Jibani Granthamala: A Series of Literary Biographies), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1987, p.9.

2. The use of the term "mutiny" is controversial. Some Indian nationalist historians also refer to it as the "war of independence".

3. Muhammad Jahangir, **Op.cit**, p.9.

4. **Ibid**, p.10.

5. **Ibid**, p.10.

opposition to all indigenous elements and Hindu religious practices which were followed widely by the Muslims in Bengal. Mohammad Akram Khan was at times dogmatic about his belief and made it a mission of his life to purge Islam of all influences of Hinduism, **Sufi-ism**, **Pir-ism** and other practices considered un-Islamic. Throughout his long career as a journalist, essayist, translator and a politician Akram Khan was resolute to protect Islam and to safeguard the interests of the Muslims.

After completing primary education Mohammad Akram Khan went to a **madrassah** (religious school) in Burdwan and then to an English medium school at Calcutta. He disliked English education and left the school. He preferred to learn Arabic and got himself admitted to the Calcutta **Madrassah** in 1896. There he studied till 1901. While studying at the Calcutta **Madrassah** he pointed out to the **madrassah** authority that Bengali must be taught at the institution. He made an organised effort with the students of the **madrassah** to demand that Bengali must be included in the **madrassah** curriculum. The **madrassah** authority did, however, introduce Bengali at the primary level.⁶

While still a student at the Calcutta **Madrassah** Akram Khan got involved in journalism. Journalism in those days was limited to writing of articles and translating news from different newspapers and journals from abroad or from the different provinces of India. In Bengal the Muslims did not yet have a daily newspaper and those involved in journalism were not

6. *Ibid*, pp. 11-12.

yet used to reporting of news. Akram Khan first worked with the **Ahl-i-Hadith**,⁷ and then he joined the **Mohammadi Akbar**⁸ in which his translated versions of Urdu and Bengali articles and pieces of news were published. His articles in the **Mohammadi Akbar** expressed anti-Christian feelings which was strong among the orthodox Muslims of the time. Preachings of Christian missionaries in Bengal had increased in the later half of the nineteenth century. Attempts were made by them to convert both Muslims and Hindus. Anti-Christian feeling among Muslims in Bengal can be traced from the works of Mohammad Meherullah (1861-1907).

7. A confusion of dates arises in respect of the publication of the **Ahl-i-Hadith**. Muhammad Jahangir, in his life-sketch of Mohammad Akram Khan says that the **Ahl-i-Hadith** was a weekly at this time but does not give the exact date. While Mustafa Nurul Islam mentioned that the **Ahl-i-Hadith** was initially brought out as a monthly. Later it came out as a weekly. According to him it was first published in September, 1915. See, M.N. Islam, **Shamayik Patre Jiban O Janamat, 1901-1930** (Public Opinion as Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977, p. 435.

8. The **Mohammadi Akbar** was a bi-lingual Urdu and Bengali journal first published as a bi-weekly and then a weekly. It was first published from June 1877 from Calcutta. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *op. cit.* p. 427. Mustafa Nurul Islam writes that the journal continued to be published for two years. While Muhammad Jahangir, in the **Biography**, p.13, writes that Akram Khan wrote in the **Mohammadi Akbar** while he was a student of the Calcutta **Madrassah**. He got admitted there in 1896 and studied till 1901. Confusion remains as to the authenticity of information regarding dates.

Muslims getting converted to Christianity also existed.⁹ From 1903 onwards, Akram Khan began to work as the editor of the **Mohammadi**.¹⁰ Around 1908 he bought the proprietorship of the journal and then on got permanently involved in editing and publishing journals.¹¹ Akram Khan also edited the **Al-Eslam**, a monthly religious journal, published between 1915 and 1921.¹² He brought out the **Zamana**¹³ and the **Sebak**¹⁴ in the 1920's. Later, from October 1936 he began to publish the **Azad**, the only Bengali daily during that time which contributed greatly to generate a mass support for the Muslim League in Bengal in the 1930's and the 1940's.

9. Anisuzzaman, **Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya, 1757-1918** (A Critical Analysis of the Muslim Literateurs in Bengal, 1757-1918), Dhaka, 1983 3rd.ed. pp.303, 309-311.

10. The **Mohammadi**, a monthly in 1903, a weekly from 1908 and a monthly again from 1927. The journal was published from Calcutta and aimed at preaching a rational view to religious and social issues. Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Op.cit.**, pp. 447-448.

11. Muhammad Jahangir, **Op.Cit**, pp. 14-15.

12. **Ibid.** p.18.

13. The **Zamana**, a weekly journal in Urdu, first brought out in May, 1920 from Calcutta and was published until 1924. The journal acted as a mouthpiece for the Khilafat and non-co-operation movement. **Ibid**, pp.18-19.

14. The **Sebak** a daily in Bengali, brought out between 1921 and 1922 from Calcutta. The paper supported the non-co-operation and the Swadeshi movement. The **Sebak** was banned and Akram Khan was arrested for writing an anti-government editorial.

Mohammad Akram Khan's political career started with his participation in the anti-partition agitation in Bengal in 1905. He was one of the few Muslims in Bengal who opposed the partition of Bengal.¹⁵ Although in the early phase of his political life Mohammad Akram Khan supported the Indian National Congress his prime concern was the safeguard of the interests and rights of the Muslims in Bengal. He, therefore, actively participated in the formation of the Muslim League in 1906.¹⁶ Later, in 1914 he attended the Peasants' Conference at Kamariar Char in Jamalpur sub-division in Mymensingh where he spoke against the oppressions of **Zamindars** over the peasants.¹⁷ There was, however, little ideological reason behind this. Majority of the Muslims in Bengal were peasants. Muslim politicians in Bengal were beginning to take up the peasant's grievances as political issues which they believed would give them popularity and a broad support. From 1918 to 1924, Akram Khan was involved in the Khilafat movement. He was present at the Khilafat Conference at Ahsan Manzil in Dhaka in 1920. The conference was attended among others by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1885-1958), Maulana Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950) and Maulana Mujibur Rahman (1873-1924).¹⁸ Akram Khan was associated with them during the Khilafat and the non-co-operation movement. He was elected Secretary of the

15. Muhammad Jahangir, *Op. Cit.*, p.26. Also see Amalendu De, **Bangali, Buddhijibi O Bichinnatabad** (Bengali Intelligentsia and Separatism), Calcutta, 1974, p. 331.

16. Muhammad Jahangir, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

17. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar** (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It), Dhaka, 1975, 3rd ed. pp. 23-24.

18. *Ibid*, pp. 33-34.

Khilafat Committee and was given the responsibility to collect funds for the Ottoman Caliphate in Turkey. Although these attempts proved unrealistic and impractical, religious belief in the Caliphate and in Pan-Islamism made Akram Khan an enthusiastic supporter of the Khilafat and the non-co-operation movement. He organized large meetings in different parts of Bengal. The *Al-Eslam* and the *Mohammadi*, both edited by Mohammad Akram Khan propagated the cause of the Khilafat and the non-co-operation movement during 1920-23.¹⁹ He had been the secretary of the *Anjuman-i-Ulama* in Bengal and used the association to gear up the Khilafat movement.²⁰ Akram Khan was imprisoned in 1922 for about a year for writing an editorial in the *Sebak* in favour of the non-co-operation movement.²¹

Around this time, in December, 1922 C.R. Das formed the Swaraj Party in Calcutta and declared his preference for Council entry. Akram Khan was in the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. He supported C.R. Das in this respect. He also co-operated with him to form the Bengal Pact in

19. Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, New Delhi, 1976, p.50.

20. Ibid. p. 49. Also see Biography, pp. 17-18. The *Anjuman-i-Ulama*, formed in 1913, was a religious association of the *ulama* in Bengal.

21. Muhammad Jahangir, *Op.Cit.* p.19. *Ibid.* M. Haider Appendix 1, *The Morning News*, June 15, 1969.

1923. Under this pact the Muslims would get jobs according to the percentage of their population in Bengal. The pact also provided 80% of the new jobs for Muslims in government offices and self-governed bodies like the Calcutta Corporation, municipalities and district and Local Boards until they got 54% of the jobs.²² In 1924 Akram Khan was elected Chairman of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Sirajganj where he spoke in favour of the Pact. In a well-written speech he advocated Hindu-Muslim unity and succeeded in convincing those present at the conference. The pact was accepted almost unanimously.²³

Communal riot in Calcutta and Dhaka in 1926-1927 shook Akram Khan's faith in such a unity. C.R. Das, the working spirit behind the pact had died in June 1925. Akram Khan gave up the hope for Hindu-Muslim unity but was still then a member of the Congress. It was around December 1928 that he left the party over the issue of the Nehru Report. The Nehru Report had discarded the provisions for separate communal electorates and demanded Dominion Status for India. It was on the question of share of jobs for Muslims that Akram Khan broke up with the Congress.²⁴ In 1929

22. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Op.Cit.*, p.51.

23. *Ibid.* p.57.

24. Amalendu De, p.62. It is mentioned that Muslim leaders came out of the Congress around 1928. See, Bazlur Rahman Khan, **Politics in Bengal, 1927-1936**, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987, p.37. But the life-sketch of Mohammad Akram Khan in **The Morning News**, June 15, 1969 says that Akram Khan left the Congress in 1927. See Mohiuddin Haider, "A Sociological Study on Moulana Akram Khan" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Sociololgy, University of Dhaka), 1968-69, Appendix 1.

Akram Khan, together with Sir Abdur Rahim (1867-1952) formed the **Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti** (All-Bengal Tenants' Association). Akram Khan was the secretary of this first non-communal and completely regional party formed by the Muslim leaders in Bengal. The party constituted mostly of the upper-middle class who intended to safeguard particularly the interests of the well-off and the rich peasants. Behind this was, however, the political intention to create a power base in rural Bengal. Although non-communal, majority of its members were Muslims. Some of the members of the Congress with anti-**zaminder** feeling did not join the **Praja Samiti**; they joined the **Krishak Sabha** and the **Kishan Sabha**. It so happened in Bengal that the Muslim leaders stood in favour of the landlords.²⁵ Coming out of the Congress, Akram Khan joined the party whose interest went against ^{the} wishes of many Congress leaders. But, taking up peasants' demands on a political platform did not mean that Akram Khan was inclined to socialistic ideas or communism. In fact, he was opposed to communism and with a background of religious fundamentalism it was natural for him to be so.

During the years between 1929 and 1936 Akram Khan's association with A.K. Fazlul Huq (1873-1962), Abdul Karim (1861-1943), Shamsuddin Ahmed (1889-1969) and Tamizuddin Khan (1889-1963) was a marked shift in his political career. But by 1934 there was a rift between Akram Khan and these leaders over the contest for the post of presidentship of the party.

25. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op.Cit.**, pp. 63, 66.

Fazlul Huq was elected president. Shamsuddin Ahmed replaced Akram Khan as Secretary. Fazlul Huq changed the name of the party to **Krishak Praja Party** (Peasants' and Tenants' Party) to make it more popular with the peasants. The party now demanded abolition of the **zamindari** and came up with slogans like "Land to the tillers" and "**Dal-Bhat**"²⁶ for everyone. These were in fact the slogans of the more radical members of the **Krishak Praja Party**. The leadership did not actually intend to introduce these but did not object to such slogans because they served well as pre-election gestures. The peasantry of Bengal thus came under the leadership of Fazlul Huq. Akram Khan predicted that the above commitments of the **Krishak Praja Party** would never be materialized. While in the **Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti** Akram Khan had supported with other members of the party the abolition of the landlord's fee on transfers of land, reduction of rent, relief from indebtedness, abolition of illegal exactions from peasants etc. Clash with Fazlul Huq on the question of leadership and ideology led him to join the Muslim League in June, 1936.

The greatest contribution Akram Khan made to the Muslim League was by bringing out the **Azad** in October, 1936. The paper was brought out as a daily and in Bengali and acted as a mouthpiece of the Muslim League. It was on the eve of the election (to be held in February, 1937) and the **Azad** created an upsurge of emotion in favour of the Muslim League in Bengal. It came out with the sole intention to speak in favour of the Muslim League

26. "**Dal-Bhat**" is an ordinary meal of rice and pulses in Bengal.

and the Muslims of Bengal. In its first issue it declared that its purpose was to serve the community. It wrote that the **Azad** would free the Muslims of Bengal from all kinds of evils encompassing them and act as a "fearless guide" in their struggle for independence.²⁷ The **Azad**, contributed greatly to the making of a consensus among Muslims in Bengal in favour the Muslim League. Akram Khan was now the Vice-President of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. He spoke in the **Azad** in favour of the Calcutta-based leadership and, therefore, supported Khwaja Nazimuddin as against Fazlul Huq who was more popular as a leader from Eastern Bengal. Anti-Huq and anti-**Krishak Praja Party** feeling was strong in Akram Khan. In 1941-1942 Akram Khan with Khwaja Nazimuddin, H.S. Suhrawardy and Tamizuddin Khan mobilized Muslim opinion in order to bring the downfall of Huq ministry.²⁸ Akram Khan supported Khawja Nazimuddin's ministry as it did not include any member of the **Krishak Praja Party**. In fact, Akram Khan had always supported Khwaja Nazimuddin. Although Akram Khan was strongly anti-British he was cautious neither to go too far to earn disfavour of the British nor to go beyond the wishes of the All-India Muslim League leadership. Akram Khan believed that the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims of India was justified. When in 1946 the elections for the Central Legislature were held on the issue of creation of a separate sovereign state called "Pakistan", Akram Khan gave full support to it. His poems **Hum Larke Lenge Pakistan** and **Pakistan Nama** composed

27. The **Azad**, 31 October, 1936. p.6.

28. Shila Sen, **Op.cit.** p. 164.

around 1946 became very popular among the Muslims.²⁹ The **Azad** was now dedicated to support the crusade for Pakistan.³⁰ Although himself a Bengali Muslim he did not believe in the idea of a separate regional and linguistic identity of the Bengali Muslims. He considered himself a Muslim first and was determined to establish the communal identity of the Muslims of India and the **raison d'etre** behind the demand for Pakistan was his desire to preserve Islamic values.³¹ He, however, hated to see Bengal divided. During May-June, 1947 Akram Khan strongly opposed any move for an independent sovereign Bengal but at the same time he opposed the partition of the province. He wanted the whole of Bengal to be included in Pakistan. He had, however, in 1905, objected to the partition of Bengal and had joined the anti-partition agitation.³² After the partition of Bengal in 1947 he came to live in Dhaka.

The shift from Akram Khan's early political career to his later allegiance to the Muslim League exposes a contradiction and an inconsistency in him. All through his life he had been a staunch supporter of religious fundamentalism. In the early phase he wanted to accommodate with the Hindus. He was a member of the Indian National Congress and had

29. **The Morning News**, 15 June, 1969 in M. Haider, Appendix 1. "Larke Lenge Pakistan" was a popular slogan of the Indian Muslims before partition of India.

30. **Ibid.**

31. **The Azad**, 31 October, 1936. Also see Mohiuddin Haider, p.110.

32. Shila Sen, **Op.cit.** P. 236.

operated with C.R.Das in the formation of the Bengal Pact in 1923. He was then a prominent leader among those Muslims in Bengal who supported the Congress. During those years Akram Khan followed the principles of the **Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind**³³ (Association of the Indian **ulama**) to protect Islam and the Muslim community but at the same time to maintain a good relation with the non-Muslims. Being a member of the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Hind** he followed the Deoband school which maintained a strict fundamentalism in religious matters but a flexible approach to politics. Following such principles Akram Khan had supported the Congress, the Khilafat movement, the **Swaraj** and the non-co-operation movement. Like the Deoband followers he was strongly anti-British. The paradox in the Deoband principle was present in him in the early phase of his political career; he was a fundamentalist but non-communal. But the 1926-1927 communal riots had disillusioned him about a communal amity between the Hindus and the Muslims. The demands of the rising Muslim middle class and the consequent clash of interests with the Hindus had made such a rapprochement impossible. By 1928 he was further confirmed that Congress attitude towards Muslim community was unjust in the sense that the Nehru Report had discarded the constitutional safeguards for Muslims like the provisions of separate electorates, reservation of seats and the fixed share of jobs for Muslims in Bengal. From a secular stand in politics in the earlier years he got involved in communal politics in the later years.

33. The **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Hind** was formed in 1919 by the Deoband **ulama** on the eve of the Khilafat movement. Its object was to guide the Muslims in both political and non-political matters from a religious point of view.

Unlike those of the Aligarh followers, the Deobandis were strongly anti-British and had opposed the demand for Pakistan. They did not support the arguments behind the two-nation theory of the Muslim League leaders. Most of the leaders of the Muslim League were English-educated, generally non-fundamentalists in religious matters and secular. They were closer to the Aligarh school of thought. Mohammad Akram Khan hated English education and did not have western education. He was also anti-modernist both in religious and social matters. Although a Pan-Islamist and a follower of the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Hind** Akram Khan was unlike other Pan-Islamists and Deobandis like Husain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957) and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) on the question of the partition of India. Madani and Abul Kalam Azad believed that India was a united and an "indivisible whole". They believed that the goal of the Muslims in India was to achieve "complete independence along with the protection of their religious and communal rights".³⁴ They believed that cultural and religious differences did not interfere with their association with homeland just as personal traits, colour and stature did not affect their common humanness.³⁵ They, therefore, opposed the "two-nation" theory. They argued that partition of India would split the Muslim community in three regions and make them a smaller and weaker minority. However, the Deoband **ulama** failed to convince the Muslims of India to accept their idea of secular nationalism because the separatist sentiment was too strong in them. From the mid-nineteen thirties, Akram Khan supported the Muslim League demands and

34. M.S. Agwani, **Islamic Fundamentalism in India**, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 24-25.

35. *Ibid.* p. 25.

believed that the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims of India was justifiable. Mohammad Akram Khan supported the separatist movement from an extra-territorial feeling which he retained from his earlier involvement in the Khilafat movement. The Deobandis and the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Hind** had also joined the Khilafat movement and had supported the cause of the Caliphate but after 1924, when the Caliphate was abolished they took a more realistic approach to defend the interests of the Indian Muslims.³⁶ They stressed on the spirit of humanism and tolerance and kept open the possibility of Muslims living as citizens in a non-Muslim state.³⁷ Although the creation of Pakistan signified the triumph of the modern idea of territorial nationalism it was based on religion which proved unrealistic in the long run. The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 repudiated such religion-based nationalism.

On other political and social issues Akram Khan's opinions were expressed in the **Mohammadi** and the **Azad**, both edited by him. In a long article in the **Mohammadi** in 1931 he expressed his views against separate electorates in Bengal.³⁸ He believed that since Muslims were a majority in

36. Gopal Krishna, "Piety and Politics in Indian Islam", T.N. Madan ed. **Muslim Communities of South Asia : Culture and Society**, New Delhi, 1976, p. 152.

37. *Ibid.* p. 152.

38. Maulana Akram Khan, "Joint and Separate Electorates", **The monthly Mohammadi**, 4th Year, 10th Issue, 1931 (1338 B.S.).

Bengal joint electorates was good for their interest. In Akram Khan's opinion separate electorates in Bengal was not only "unnecessary" but also "extremely harmful".³⁹ Akram Khan had previously supported the provisions made by the Lucknow Pact in 1916 regarding separate electorates and weightage.⁴⁰ By the 1930's, however, Akram Khan wrote that it was foolish on the part of the Muslims of Bengal to accept separate electorates and weightage. The Bengal Provincial Muslim League had also demanded joint electorates around 1932. Akram Khan was one of those who demanded that the electorate for the Bengal Legislative Assembly was to be based on adult franchise.⁴¹ Akram Khan pointed out in the same article that factionalism among the political leaders in Bengal had increased on the issue of separate versus joint electorates.⁴² Besides, he wrote that it was hoped that the introduction of separate electorates would lure those Muslim politicians who had joined the Congress but commented at the same time that leaders like Syed Jalaluddin Hashemy(1890-1947) or Syed Nausher Ali

39. *Ibid.* p. 722.

40. Bazlur Rahman Khan, **Politics in Bengal, 1927-1936**, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987. p. 15.

41. Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh** (Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1936-1947), Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987, p. 38.

42. Bazlur Rahman Khan, "Joint Electorates versus Separate Electorates : A Dilemma for the Bengali politicians in the 1920's and the 1930's", **The Journal of the Institute of Bangladesh Studies**, Vol. 111, Annual, Dhaka, 1978.

(1890-1972) would never be lured by such provisions.⁴³ Akram Khan warned the Muslims of Bengal that separate electorate was a temporary arrangement and they must not depend on it. They must not lose the spirit of self-reliance and competition.⁴⁴

The monthly **Mohammadi** also expressed Akram Khan's views on the pursuit of music and painting by Muslims and on the acceptance of "riba" (interests on savings in banks).⁴⁵ His views on these issues showed an attempt to combine basic principles of Islam with a certain extent of modernization. It had been common in the Muslim society to look at fine arts from a negative point of view. But, Akram Khan attempted to ease such inhibitions by pointing out that the pursuit of music and painting was never prohibited in the Quran or the Islamic **shariah**.⁴⁶ He, however, objected to the excess of music practised by the **Sufis** and the mystics.⁴⁷

43. Akram Khan, **The Monthly Mohammadi**, 4th. year, 10th. issue, 1931 (1338 B.S.)

44. **Ibid.**

45. Muhammad Jahangir, **Biography**, pp. 30 - 31.

46. Akram Khan, "Problems and their solutions", **The Monthly Mohammad**, 1st. year, 12th. issue, 1928 (1335 B.S.) "Problems and their solution", **The Monthly Mohammadi**, 2nd. year, 1st. issue, 1928. (1335 B.S.). **Ibid** , 2nd. year, 2nd. issue, 1928 (1335 B.S.).

47. Akram Khan, "Problems and their solutions", **The Monthly Mohammadi**, 1st. year, 12th. issue, 1928 (1335 B.S.), p. 716.

On the issue of the use of Bengali language as the mother tongue of the Bengalis Akram Khan had always supported it. While a student of the Calcutta **Madrassah** Akram Khan had persuaded the **Madrassah** authority to introduce Bengali in its curriculum.⁴⁸ In his speech at the Third Conference of the **Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity** (Bengali Muslim Literary Association) in 1918 he said,

There are many strange questions in the world. The strangest of all is to ask "what would be the mother-tongue of the Bengali Muslims ? Urdu or Bengali ?..."
From the earliest time of Muslim history in Bengal, Bengali has been used in writing and in speaking as the mother-tongue and it will continue to be so in future.⁴⁹

The **Azad** was published in Bengali to serve the Muslim community in Bengal by upholding its political interests. Bengal was the centre of the largest Muslim population in India. The 30 million Muslims of Bengal and Assam had numerous social and economic problems and political demands. Akram Khan felt that in the midst of continuous process of change, the

48. Muhammad Jahangir, **Op. cit.** pp. 11 - 12.

49. Mohammad Akram Khan, "What is our mother-tongue?" speech at the Third Conference of the Bengali Muslim Literary Association, **The Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika**, 1st. year, 4th. issue, 1918 (1325 B.S.) p. 302.

Note that in the same speech/^{he}stressed on Bengali as the mother-tongue of Bengali Muslims. But he pointed out that Bengali could not be their national language. He said that their national language was Arabic. **Ibid.** p.308. (This is translation from the original Bengali done by me.)

Muslims of Bengal needed to express their views and grievances.⁵⁰ The **Azad** expressed views against the Communal Award (1932), against the **Krishak Praja Party**, against Huq ministry (1937-1943) and fostered the idea of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India.

In respect of social thought Akram Khan was strongly opposed to the un-Islamic practices prevalent for centuries among Muslims in Bengal. His book, **Muslim Banglar Shamajik Itihas** gives an idea of his religious and social views.⁵¹ Being a product of the **Wahabi**, **Faraizi** and the **Tariquah-i-Muhammadiyah** movements he was a religious reformist and stressed on maintaining a separate cultural identity of the Muslims in India.⁵² Islam was never in pure form in India and particularly in Bengal

50. The **Azad** , 31 October, 1936, p.6.

51. Mohammad Akram Khan, **Moslem Banglar Shamajik Itihas** (Social History of Muslim Bengal), Dhaka, 1965.

52. These reform movements took place in India in the eighteenth century and carried on till mid-nineteenth century. The **Wahabi** movement was led by Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1791) who took up the ideas of Ahmad Ibn Taimiya (1236-1328). Taimiya had rejected the tradition of the mystic **Sufi** thought and had stressed that politics was inseparable with religion. The **Faraizi** movement took place in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was led by Hazi Shariatullah (1781-1840). He emphasized on the **faraid** i.e. the religious duties of the Muslims and fought against practices that were influenced by Hindu custom. The movement was led to eradicate all **shirk** and **bidat** (un-Islamic practices) in Islam. The **Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah** (the way of the Prophet Muhammad) was introduced by Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareli (1786-1831) and more militant in its attempt to reform Islam.

Islamic customs and rituals blended with those of the Hindus since the thirteenth century. Influences of **Sufi** and Hindu mysticism also mingled with Islamic practices. This syncretism took place in Bengal particularly because of the conversion of local people to Islam. Local customs, practices and rituals continued to be practiced by them. As a result a form of folk or indigenous Islam emerged in Bengal. The reform movements took place with attempts to eradicate Islam from those indigenous practices which were considered **shirk**.

According to Akram Khan Bengal came in contact with Islam politically with the invasion of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1201 A.D.⁵³ Akram Khan divided the years from 1201 A.D. to 1767 A.D. into three phases. The first phase was from 1202 A.D. to 1340 A.D., the second from 1340 A.D. to 1576 A.D. and the third from 1576 A.D. to 1767 A.D. He commented that except the first phase the later two contributed to the downfall of the Muslims in Bengal.⁵⁴ He believed that during those years Muslim society in Bengal was in danger from within itself. There was not a single translation of the Quran and not a single emperor in the Islamic

53. Mohammad Akram Khan, **Moslem Banglar Shamajik Itihas**, p. 73. The first Muslims had come to India in the first century after the Hijra (579 A.D.)

54. **Ibid.** pp. 73-74.

world to guide and inspire the Muslims. Moreover, the influence of the Turks, Tartars, Afgans and Iranians on the one hand, and of the **Buddhists** and low-caste Hindus on the other, contributed to the problem for the Muslims of Bengal of choosing a language of their own.⁵⁵ The Muslims in Bengal faced a crisis of a linguistic identity in the later years. Persian became popular in Bengal and Akram Khan wrote that this had a negative impact on the Muslim society in Bengal.⁵⁶ Popularity of Persian language prevented the Muslims from learning Bengali. He pointed out that there was not a single ruler in the Muslim world who in ideology or in religious belief was a true Muslim. When the Hindus had been experiencing a revival of their religion and culture no Muslim ruler patronized or took the initiative for a similar revival among Muslims in Bengal. Muslims in this region were in the midst of un-Islamic influences of the Hindus and the Buddhists.⁵⁷ The Muslims used to participate in various **pujas** (worship of Hindu dieties and saints) and observed other pagan and mythical rituals. Most literature during this period was influenced by **Hindu** and **Sufi** mysticism.⁵⁸ Akram Khan

55. **Ibid.** p. 75.

56. **Ibid.** p. 75.

57. **Ibid.** p. 83.

58. Asim Roy, **The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal**, Princeton, 1983. Asim Roy concentrates on the process of Islamization in Bengal. Roy has used a mass of folk literature and showed how Islamic tradition in Bengal was syncretistic.

also mentioned the negative effect of the **puthi**⁵⁹ literature which portrayed Hindu gods and goddesses as Muslim saints and had misguided the Muslims of Bengal.⁶⁰

Akram Khan was critical of Husain Shah, the ruler of Bengal in the years 1494 to 1538, for his sympathies with **Chaitanya-ism**.⁶¹ He wrote that during Husain Shah's reign there was the growth of the cult of **pir** (religious saint).⁶² Akram Khan made Husain Shah responsible for the introduction of the practice of worshipping **Satyapir**.⁶³ Numerous poems

59. **Puthi** or **dobhasi** literature emerged in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Bengal containing a mixture of Arabic, Persian and Bengali words and reflecting a syncretic culture prevalent in the region since the thirteenth century.

60. Akram Khan, **Moslem Banglar Shamajik Itihas**, pp.83-86.

61. Sri Chaitanya (1486-1533) a Hindu mystic saint of Bengal who denounced castes and believed in monotheism. The cult was similar to Sufi mysticism.

62. Mohammad Akram Khan, "Husain Shah and Sri Chaitanya", **Moslem Banglar Shamajik Itihas**, pp. 98 - 110.

63. **Satyapir** was a Muslim saint. Poems were written on him in the eighteenth century but it is presumed that the cult of **Satyapir** originated earlier. See, M.R. Tarafdar, **Husain Shahi Bengal (1494-1538 A.D.) : A Socio-Political Study**, Dhaka, 1965. pp. 17-18, 165. Tarafdar discards the notion that Hussain Shah introduced the cult of **Satyapur** in Bengal. Akram Khan's source was Dinesh Chandra Sen's **History of Bengali Language and Literature**, Calcutta, 1949. Tarafdar considers this source unreliable, although he does not deny the popularity of **Satyapir** among Muslims in Bengal.

and **puthis** were written on the cult of **Satyapir** and other Hindu and Muslim saints. Medieval Bengal was influenced by both **Sufi-ism** and **Chaitanya-ism**. Akram Khan was of opinion that Sri Chaitanya actually hated the contemporary Muslim society. He quoted a verse where Sri Chaitanya referred to the Muslims as **jabon** which was a derogatory term used for Muslims by the Hindus.⁶⁴ Akram Khan was convinced that it was a conspiracy on the part of Husain Shah to make Bengal free from Islamic influences.⁶⁵ As a result, he pointed out that a reaction against those un-Islamic influences had also started during this period by the reformist Muslims.⁶⁶

Recapitulating the history of the past glory of the Muslims in India in "Muslim Banglar Charam Biparjoykal" Akram Khan pointed out how they had fallen into degeneration.⁶⁷ He noted that the assassination of the third Caliph, Hazrat Osman (644-655 A.D.) was the symbolic act indicating the process of degeneration of the Muslims. Later, the killings at the battle of Karbala (680 A.D.) confirmed such degeneration which reached an extreme state in India during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605).⁶⁸

64. Mohammad Akram Khan, **Moslem Banglar Shamajik Itihas**, p. 101.

65. **Ibid.** p. 104.

66. **Ibid.** p. 104.

67. **Ibid.** pp.127- 141.

68. **Ibid.** p. 127. Akbar was born in 1543; he became ruler at the age of thirteen.

Akram Khan believed that Akbar gave recognition to the un-Islamic practices that were prevalent among Muslims in India.⁶⁹ Akram Khan was aware of the fact that Akbar was credited for his syncretic approach in an attempt to unite all religions and cultures in India but he pointed out that this appreciation came mostly from non-Muslim historians. He did not agree with those scholars who praised Akbar.⁷⁰ Akram Khan criticized Akbar's **Din-i-Ilahi**, promulgated in 1582, and the principle of religious eclecticism behind it. In fact, he held the opinion that Akbar introduced a perilous "sin" in the Muslim society in India which completed the process of degeneration.⁷¹ Hinduism and Islam merged syncretically in Akbar's **Din-i-Ilahi**. Akbar wanted to earn the favour of both the Hindus and the Muslims in India. But Akram Khan saw it as an attempt to move away from Islam. Akram Khan believed that Akbar's religious policy was aimed at ruining Islam in India. Akram Khan was equally critical of Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) who, too, upheld syncretism and even translated the **Upanishad** in Persian around (1656-1657). To Akram Khan such pursuit of the syncretistic trend was also a threat to Islam.⁷²

69. *Ibid.* pp. 128-129.

70. V.A. Smith, **Akbar, the Great Mogul**, Oxford, 1917; M. Titus, **Islam in India and Pakistan**, Calcutta, 1959; P.Spear, **India, A Modern History**.

71. Mohammad Akram Khan, **Moslem Banglar Shamajik Itihas**, p.128. It is interesting to note that S.Wajed Ali (1890-1951), a contemporary of Akram Khan praised Akbar for his syncretism. See, S. Wajed Ali, "Akbarer Rashtra Shadhana" (Akbar's State Policy), Akram Khan ed. **S.Wajed Ali Rachanabali** (Complete Works of S.Wajed Ali), Vol. 2, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1985, pp. 1-99.

72. Mohammad Akram Khan, **Moslem Banglar Shamajik Itihas**, p. 158.

Akram Khan was a believer of fundamentalist Islam. He believed in the rule of the **shariah**. He, therefore, praised Aurangzeb (1618-1707) who believed in conformist orthodoxy and led a crusade against the syncretistic trend of Akbar and Dara Shikoh. Aurangzeb did not hesitate to execute his elder brother Dara Shikoh for his heterodoxical ideas.

The legacies of Akbar and Aurangzeb have remained as two permanent and conflicting trends in the social and religious thought of the Muslims in Bengal since the sixteenth century. Both trends had been integral parts of Indian Islam. Akram Khan, fundamentalist and non-syncretic in his socio-religious belief, looked upon the Muslims as a separate identity. It was from this attitude that he supported the partition of India. Separatist trend in Indian politics developed originally from the anti-syncretic attitude of the fundamentalist Muslims. Of course, not all fundamentalists were separatists but they were anti-syncretic in their attitude to non-Islamic religious cultures and practices. Akram Khan did not believe in secularism in his later life. He stressed that Muslims in India should maintain a separate cultural entity.

Akram Khan was a controversial personality during his time. His religious intolerance and demand for Pakistan branded him as a communalist. Inconsistencies in political beliefs and social ideas earned him criticisms both from the **ulama**, the modernists and those who believed in progressive ideas.

Abul Mansur Ahmad (1898-1979)

Abul Mansur Ahmad was born in 1898 in the village of Dhanikhola in Mymensingh district. His ancestors were poor peasants who accepted Islam when Maulana Enayet Ali (1800-1872) had come to Dhanikhola around 1827-28.¹ Some of the members of his family had joined the fundamentalist movement around the second quarter of the nineteenth century but they were not the followers of Hazi Shariatullah (1781-1840) or his son Dudu Miah (1819-1862).² Although they had participated in the religious reform movement, they hated to be called **Wahhabis** or **Faraizis** because they belonged to none of these groups.³ Abul Mansur Ahmad's ancestors got the title **Farazi**, as they claimed, by their conversion to Islam through which they had accepted the **Farz**, i.e. the rules of the **Quran**.⁴ Like his ancestors, Abul Mansur Ahmad was a believer of reformist Islam. He was a

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1. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Atmakatha** (Autobiography), Dhaka, 1978. pp. 17-18.
 2. **Ibid.** p. 18.
 3. **Ibid.** p.18. The followers of the fundamentalist leader Ibn Abdul Wahab (1703-1792) of Arabia were known as the **Wahhabis**. The **Faraizis** were those who joined the reform movement in Bengal led by Hazi Shariatullah and his son, Dudu Miah.
 4. Abul Mansur Ahmad clarified the distinction between **Faraizi** and **Farazi** in pages 18-21 of his autobiography, **Atmakatha**.

follower of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect.⁵ Like the reformist Muslims he disliked the non-Islamic practices so prevalent among Muslims in rural Bengal. Owing to influence of **Sufi**-ism and the **Bhakti** movement, Islam, in rural Bengal, could not retain its pristine quality. Syncretism of Islamic mysticism and indigenous cultural and religious elements among the Muslim masses in Bengal was, therefore, a prominent phenomenon since the medieval period. Muslims in urban Bengal, who were very few in number and who claimed to be of foreign descent, considered themselves **ashrafs**, i.e. the nobility or

5. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect came into existence in the early nineteenth century and was an offshoot of the mainstream reform movement. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers denied the four established schools of thought in **Sunni** Islam. They refused to accept the interpretations of the **Quran** and the **Hadith** by those four schools the **Hanafi**, **Shafi**, **Maliki** and **Hanbali**. The **Hanafi**, followers of Abu Hanifa (d. 767 A.D.), was the most moderate of the four. It recognized the analogical deduction and the consensus of the **Ulama**. The **Shafi** follower of **Al-Shafi'i** more fully, Muhammad Ibn Idris (767-820 A.D.) accepted a limited deduction of the **Quranic** premises. The **Maliki** follower of Malik Ibn Anas (d. 795 A.D.) regarded the tradition of Prophet Mohammad having first claim after the **Quran**, while the **Hanbali** follower of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855 A.D.) was the orthodox of all. They rejected all interpretations and followed the **Quran** and the **Hadith** in the strictest manner. The **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers were closest to the **Hanbalis**.

the upper castes. Caste distinction is prohibited in Islam but in practice the Muslim society was divided into two broad categories, — the **ashraf** and the **atrap**. The **atrap**s were rural Muslims, who spoke Bengali and were originally converted from Hinduism. The **ashrafs** guarded against the intrusion of un-Islamic or indigenous elements in their culture. They prided in speaking Persian and Urdu and shunned Bengali, while the so-called **atrap**s spoke Bengali and practiced a culture which was folk in every respect. These were strong features of the Muslim society in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Abul Mansur Ahmad was brought up in this atmosphere. Family links with the Islamic reformist movements had strongly implanted in him a hatred for syncretism. Folk culture in Bengal was characteristically syncretic of Hindu rituals, pagan practices and **Sufi** and **Bhakti** mysticism. Abul Mansur Ahmad was vehemently against such practices in Islam. At the same time a very strong awareness of being a Muslim worked in him. He, therefore, progressed quite naturally, towards his belief of Muslims as a separate identity. His political ideology was guided by this particular feeling. He believed Muslims had separate culture and a distinctive linguistic identity. But, it must be pointed out that Abul Mansur Ahmad was not free from contradictions or inconsistencies.

The very first inconsistency can be evidenced from the fact that he received both Islamic and English education. Born in a family of fundamentalists who were essentially anti-British, it was unusual for Abul

Mansur Ahmad to receive English education.⁶ In his childhood he experienced cultural segregation and a clear expression of exclusiveness from the Hindus.⁷ He passed the Matriculation in 1917 and got admitted to Jagannath College in Dhaka. In 1919 he passed the Intermediate Examinations and studied Philosophy at Dhaka College. Only a few months before his Bachelors examination he got involved in the Khilafat and the non-co-operation movement and decided to give up college. However, he took the Bachelors examination and studied Law at Ripon College, Calcutta from 1926 to 1929.⁸ He stayed in Mymensingh from 1929 to 1938 and practised as a lawyer.⁹ But, soon he gave up his practice and began to work as a journalist. Abul Mansur Ahmad was known as a journalist and as a politician. From 1938 until 1950 he stayed in Calcutta and worked as a

6. Ghulam Murshid, "Oscillating Muslim Identity : Cases of Abul Mansur Ahmad and Abdul Huq", Rafiuddin Ahmed, ed. **Islam in Bangladesh (Society, Culture and Politics)**, Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, Dhaka, 1983. p. 137.
7. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 108-109. Communal relation in most schools was such that the Muslim students were scared to sit on the same bench with the Hindus because of an inferiority complex while it was a matter of humiliation and hatred for the Hindu students to sit with the Muslims because of their superiority complex and also because the Muslims were considered untouchables by the Hindus. **Ibid.** p. 109.
8. **Ibid.** p. 145-146.
9. **Ibid.** p. 282.

journalist.¹⁰ During these years he worked in the **Krishak**,¹¹ the **Navajoog**¹² and the **Ittehad**.¹³ Earlier, he had worked in the **Soltan**¹⁴ and the **Mohammadi**.¹⁵ At the same time he was whole-heartedly involved

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10. **Ibid.** p. 282.
 11. The **Krishak** was published from Calcutta as a daily from December 1938 and continued until the early 1940's. It acted as the mouthpiece for the **Krishak Proja Samiti** (The Peasants' and Tenants' Association), **Ibid.** p.345.
 12. The **Navajoog** was first published in 1920 for a short while. It continued to be published again from October 1941. In the 1920's it was edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) and Muzaffar Ahmed (1889-1973). In the 1940's the **Navajoog** spoke for the Muslim League but particularly concentrated on the opinions and policies of A.K. Fazlul Huq (1873-1962). **Ibid.** p. 354. Also see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Samayik-Patre Jiban O Janamat, 1901-1930** (Public Opinion As Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930) Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977. pp.438-439.
 13. The **Ittehad** was a daily and was first published in January 1947. It spoke for the Muslim League, particularly of the H.S. Suhrawardy (1892-1963) faction. The **Ittehad** came out until 1950. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 372, 386.
 14. The **Soltan** was brought out first in 1901 as a monthly and then again from April 1923 as a weekly. It was edited by Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950) and advocated for the **Swaraj** and the Khilafat movement. It preached Hindu-Muslim unity. M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** pp. 433, 441.
 15. The **Mohammadi** was published as a monthly for a short period in 1903. Then it came out again in 1908 as a weekly. In 1922 it was brought out as a daily. It was published as a monthly from November 1927. The **Mohammadi** was edited by Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968). M.N. Islam, **Op. Cit.** pp. 433, 434, 447-448.

in politics. He had joined the Khilafat movement in 1919 but not without doubts about the practicality of the movement in India. He also questioned whether **Swaraj** could be obtained through non-co-operation or whether the Caliphate could be protected by the Khilafat movement.¹⁶ He was unhappy about Gandhi's idea of **Swaraj** and his strategy of non-co-operation. At this stage **Swaraj** meant similar to a state of Dominion Status for India. Abul Mansur Ahmad was not happy either about dyarchy which was introduced by the Government of India Act of 1919.¹⁷

The years between 1915 and 1920 was the formative period of Abul Mansur Ahmad's social and political ideas. He had read Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore's writings and had also read Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Michael Madhushudan Dutt, Saratchandra Chatterjee, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, Tolstoy, Victor Hugo, Turganov, Dostoevosky and others.¹⁸ He disliked the writings of Bankimchandra Chatterjee for being anti-Muslim¹⁹ and criticized Rabindranath Tagore for not being very

16. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dehka Rajnitir Panchash Bachar** (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It), Dhaka, 2nd. ed. 1970. p. 44.

17. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Atmakatha**, pp. 269.

18. **Ibid.** pp. 265-266.

19. **Ibid.** p. 254.

didactic.²⁰ By 1922 he formed his own opinion that art should not be just for art's sake.²¹ His **Aina** (1936-1937) and **Food Conference** (1944) were satiric works expressing sharp criticisms of the Muslim society in Bengal.

After the end of the Khilafat fervour around 1923, Abul Mansur Ahmad got involved in Congress politics. Further inconsistency can be noticed from the fact that ideologically he supported the so-called "no-Changers" but in practice he supported C.R. Das (1870-1925) and the Swarjists, as he himself admitted, only because he was then working in the **Soltan** in association with Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950) who was a staunch supporter of C.R. Das.²² Abul Mansur Ahmad, however, supported the provisions of the Bengal Pact, 1923 and criticized the Congress leaders who opposed C.R. Das in his attempt to forge a Hindu-Muslim unity through the Pact.²³

By the end of 1928 most Muslim members had left the Congress on the controversy over Nehru Report (September, 1928) which had rejected separate electorates and discarded reservation of seats in Muslim majority provinces. Abul Mansur Ahmad joined the All-Bengal **Proja Samiti** in

20. **Ibid.** p. 267.

21. **Ibid.** p. 266.

22. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dehka Rajnitir Panchash Bachar**, p. 48.

23. **Ibid.** p. 50.

1929 and concentrated on organizing the branch of the **Samiti** in Mymensingh but did not leave Congress. He was Vice-President of the Mymensingh district Congress around 1932-33.²⁴ He was credited as an efficient organizer of the **Proja Samiti**. Since he did not leave Congress it was suspected that he was an agent of the left-wing in the Congress and was acting behind disturbances which took place between the peasants and the **zamindars**.²⁵ But he denied such allegations and admitted that the **Kishan Sabhas** and **Kishan Samitis** organized by the left-wing in the Congress were ultra-leftists and were inappropriate in respect of the peasants' demands in Bengal. While the Congress left-wingers criticized the **Proja Samiti** of being a **jotedar** (petty landlord or a **kulak**) movement, the **Proja Samiti** criticized the leaders of the **Kishan Sabhas** and **Kishan Samitis** of obstructing the anti-**zamindar** movement.²⁶ During these years Abul Mansur Ahmad was in the Congress, in the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and in the **Proja Samiti**. When in 1935 Jinnah came to Bengal to revive the Muslim League Party, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League was under the leadership of the Congress Muslims.²⁷ The **Proja Samiti** had gained popularity in Bengal and Fazlul Huq (1873-1962) had exploited its popularity for his victory in the elections of 1937. Fazlul Huq had changed the name of **Proja Samiti** to **Krishak Proja Party** in 1936. Abul Mansur

24. **Ibid.** p. 73.

25. **Ibid.** pp. 73-74.

26. **Ibid.** pp. 64-65.

27. **Ibid.** p. 114.

Ahmad was serious about **Krishak Proja Party** victory in the 1937 elections. It was when the Congress declined to form coalition with the **Krishak Proja Party** in 1937 on the question of the release of political prisoners and as a result coalition had to be formed with the Muslim League that Abul Mansur Ahmad broke up with the Congress.

By 1940, Muslim League had passed a resolution at Lahore in March, 1940 which put up the demand for the creation of Pakistan. The Muslim League government had already become popular among Muslims in Bengal by passing the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act (1938), The Agricultural Debtor's Act (1938) and the Money Lender's Act (1940). The peasants were more or less happy with the abolition of landlord's transfer fee, the right of pre-emption, the right to realize rent by certificate procedure and the realization of **abwabs** (illegal exactions) on tenants. The rate of interest on arrears of rent was reduced from 12½ % to 6¼ % and the enhancement of rents of tenure holders and **ryots** by the landlords was also suspended for ten years. Debt Settlement Boards were set up throughout the province under the Agricultural Debtors' Act. The Money Lenders Bill (1940) had made it obligatory for all **mahajans** (money lenders) to obtain trade licences. The Act also fixed the rate of interest.²⁸ It seemed now that these demands were met, there remained little justification for the existence of the **Krishak Proja Party**. Muslim League became popular in Bengal

28. Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh**, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987, pp. 110-111.

since the Huq ministry had in reality become a Muslim League ministry.²⁹ This was the period of groping for Abul Mansur Ahmad.³⁰ He could not agree completely either with the Muslim League or the Congress ideology. He had worked for the **Krishak Proja Party** but now that the party had lost its former popularity Abul Mansur Ahmad had only one trump card left to renew its lost credibility and that was to demand for the abolition of **zamindari** without compensation.³¹ He, therefore, began to maintain liaison in this respect with the Congress Socialists, the **Kishan Sabha** and the Communists.³² It must be mentioned here that Abul Mansur Ahmad did not believe in communist ideologically. Besides, he was himself much aware of his identity as a Muslim. This awareness of a separate Muslim identity had always worked strongly in him. He gradually got inclined to Muslim League.³³ But, he was still a nationalist Muslim at this stage.³⁴ Soon he was convinced with the proposals of the Lahore Resolution (March, 1940) and by 1943 he had started to support the demand for Pakistan.³⁵ He joined the East Pakistan Renaissance Society in 1942 and advocated in favour of the creation of Pakistan. At the conference of the society in May

29. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar, Op.**

Cit. pp. 190-191.

30. **Ibid.** p. 191.

31. **Ibid.** p. 191.

32. **Ibid.** p. 191.

33. **Ibid.** pp. 192-193.

34. **Ibid.** p. 194.

35. **Ibid.** p. 238.

1944 he said that Pakistan was a demand for cultural autonomy and stressed that cultural autonomy was far more essential than national independence. The demand for Pakistan was not just a communal demand of the Muslims but also a demand of a cultural minority of India.³⁶ He stressed that the Muslims of India were definitely a separate nation from the Hindus. But, he pointed out at the same time, that the Muslims of Bengal were a separate nation from the Muslims of the North western provinces of India and that religion could not be the ^s basis for nationalist movement.³⁷ This idea justified the name of their society. The East Pakistan Renaissance Society viewed Pakistan as two independent Muslim states on the basis of the Lahore Resolution.

Until 1944 Abul Mansur Ahmad believed that Congress was the only ally of the **Krishak Proja Party** but under the persuasion of H.S. Suhrawardy (1892-1963) he agreed to organize a united front of the Muslim League and the **Krishak Proja Party** on condition that the interests of the **Krishak Proja Party** would be safeguarded.³⁸ This marked the formal

36. *Ibid.* p. 241.

37. *Ibid.* p. 241. Also see Shila Sen, **Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947**, New Delhi, 1976. p. 179 and Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 180-181.

38. It was agreed that 40% of the seats for the **Krishak Proja Party** in the Provincial Legislative Council and Provincial Assembly would be considered as selected candidates of the Muslim League. Besides, more than half (the rest 60% of the Muslim League) candidates would also be from **Krishak Proja** supporters. Maulana Abdullah-el Baqi (1886-1952) was the President of the **Krishak Proja Party** at this time. He, too, joined the Muslim League after this incident. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar**, p. 243.

joining of Abul Mansur Ahmad with the Muslim League by 1945.³⁹ In May 1946, when the Cabinet Mission Plan was declared he rejoiced at the news because the provisions of the Plan matched with those of the Lahore Resolution (March, 1940).⁴⁰ The Lahore Resolution had proposed federation of eleven provinces of India having autonomous and residuary powers. Of the eleven provinces five were Muslim majority and if three of those five provinces chose to secede from the Indian federation they could do so.⁴¹ What the Cabinet Mission Plan proposed was a three-tier federation of the provinces grouped in three sections of which each of the two sections including Muslim majority provinces would have the opportunity to frame a group constitution. Opportunity was also given for each group to frame constitution for its member provinces.⁴² Abul Mansur Ahmad saw a possibility of the realization of Lahore Resolution if the Cabinet Mission Plan was accepted. The Plan was rejected by the Congress. The Muslim League withdrew its acceptance of the Plan and retaliated by taking recourse to "Direct Action" to achieve Pakistan. The Great Calcutta Killing on August 16, 1946 and the massacre on the next few days left no scope for any arrangement other than partition. During 1946-1947 Abul Mansur Ahmad supported H.S. Suhrawardy, first in his move for a united independent Bengal and later, in his demand for including Calcutta in the territory of Eastern Bengal.⁴³

39. Shila Sen, *Op. Cit.* p. 195.

40. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar*, p. 249.

41. *Ibid.* p. 197.

42. Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Cit.* p. 255.

43. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dehka Rajnitir Panchash Bachar*, Vol.1 (5th. ed.), Dhaka, 1988. pp. 216-217.

After partition in June 1947, Khwaja Nazimuddin (1894-1961) defeated H.S. Suhrawardy and became the leader of the Muslim League and the Chief Minister of East Pakistan. Abul Mansur Ahmad stayed out of politics from 1947 to 1950. During these years he worked in the **Daily Ittehad**.⁴⁴ He was closer to A.K. Fazlul Huq in the 1930's and in the early 1940's and later to H.S. Suhrawardy. He was one of the founding leaders with H.S. Suhrawardy of the Awami League in 1949. In 1954 he was minister of Health under United Front ministry formed by A.K. Fazlul Huq from the **Krishak Proja Party**, H.S. Suhrawardy and Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani (1880-1976), both from the Awami League. He was minister for Education in 1956 under the ministry of Awami League and minister for Commerce and trade in 1956-1957. Martial law was declared and he was in prison between the years 1958 and 1962. After getting released he gave up politics but was vocal against martial law government and the disparity between the two wings of Pakistan.

Abul Mansur Ahmad's political ideology matched with his fundamentalist upbringing. Although he had inconsistencies in his opinions and stands on various issues, the basis of his belief in Islamic fundamentalism remained firm. He held this belief to the last that the Muslims of India were a separate nation. Although around the mid - 1940's

44. The **Ittehad** was edited by Abul Mansur Ahmad. It came out as a daily aimed at uniting the Muslims and making the Muslim League stronger under the leadership of Jinnah. **Daily Ittehad**, 1st. year, 1st. issue, Friday, January 17, 1947. p. 1.

he pointed out that the Muslims of Bengal were different culturally from those of North Western India, he was one of those who believed that Bengali was the language of the Hindus. Abundance of Sanskrit words in Bengali was the primary reason behind his dislike for Bengali. He preferred to accept a Bengali language which contained Persian and Arabic (words) rather than Sanskrit words.⁴⁵ He even advocated in the 1940's in favour of introducing alphabets which would create a distinctive linguistic identity for the Muslims in Bengal. By the 1960's however, the language movement and the demand for autonomy for East Pakistan had taken a stronger shape. Abul Mansur Ahmad no longer demanded different set of alphabets for Bengali language to be used by the Muslims of the then East Pakistan but maintained that there could be such introduction only for phonetic needs.⁴⁶ In the 1960's he wrote that cultural identity could not be negated for the sake or religious identity.⁴⁷ In his opinion religion could 'strengthen' national unity but could never "create" such unity and that language-based nationalism was far more practical than religion-based nationalism.⁴⁸

45. Ghulam Murshid, **Op. Cit.** p. 138. Also see, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p.180.

46. Ghulam Murshid, **Op. Cit.** p. 139. Abul Mansur Ahmad stressed on the importance of the colloquial language spoken in Eastern Bengal. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Atmakatha**, pp. 315-316.

47. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Sher-e-Bangla hoite Bangabandhu** (From Sher-e-Bangla to Bangabandhu), Dhaka, 2nd. ed. 1981. p. 93. A.K.Fazlul Huq is popularly known in Bengal as **Sher-e-Bangla** which means "tiger of Bengal" and Shaikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975) is known as **Bangabandhu** meaning "friend of Bengal".

48. **Ibid.** p. 93.

There had been a great transformation in the ideas of Abul Mansur Ahmad but he remained fundamentalist and non-secular in his approach to religion and politics. However, he was not openly communal or intolerant to other religions. In the 1940's he had supported the demand for Pakistan which was to be a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. But, in the 1960's he expressed his dislike for religion-based nationalism.⁴⁹ He admitted that he could never accept the then East Pakistan as a part of Pakistan or a part of India. To him Eastern Bengal was different from the both in respect of culture, language and literature.⁵⁰ He preferred to name such geographical unit "Pak-Bangla", associating the word "Pak" with Pakistan which also indicated an Islamic feeling and "Bangla" with Bengal.⁵¹ This "Pak-Bangla" was to be autonomous and a homeland for the Muslims of Bengal.⁵² Regionalism was prominent in his views in respect of religion, culture and language. He viewed himself as a Bengali and a Muslim but a Muslim who did not belong to West Pakistan.⁵³ Such a view was then considered as a mark of inconsistency and "splitmindedness" in him.

After Bangladesh came into being in 1971 Abul Mansur Ahmad began to shift from his former views. He stated that the Bengali nation included both the Muslims and the non-Muslims but, at the same time he

49. **Ibid.** pp. 93-94.

50. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Atmakatha**, pp. 315 - 317.

51. Ghulam Murshid, **Op. Cit.** p. 140.

52. **Ibid.** p. 140.

53. **Ibid.** p. 140.

maintained that the state should be Islamic with provisions for minority rights.⁵⁴ This view, however, originated in him from his belief that Bangladesh was the outcome of the Lahore Resolution of 1940 which had recommended the creation of independent Muslim states. The idea of creating two independent Muslim majority states was conceived, in Abul Mansur Ahmad's words, from the "political potentiality, geographical possibility, territorial feasibility and economic viability" of those two zones.⁵⁵ The Lahore Resolution had indicated the creation of independent states and the Cabinet Mission Plan had strengthened the idea.⁵⁶

Major works of Abul Mansur Ahmad include his satiric writings, like the **Aina** (Mirror), 1936-1937, **Food Conference**, 1944, his novels, **Satya Mithya** (Truth and Falsehood), 1953, **Jiban Khuda** (Thirst for Life), 1955, **Ab-e-Hayat** (water of Heaven), 1968, his essays, **Pak-Banglar Culture** (Culture of Pak-Bangla), 1964, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar** (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It), 1969, **Sher-e-Bangla hoite Bangabandhu** (From Sher-e-Bangla to Bangabandhu), 1972, and his autobiography, **Atmakatha**, 1978. He has also several works for children. Abul Mansur Ahmad died in 1979.

Abul Mansur Ahmad earned fame in his days as a satirist. His **Aina**, published in 1936-1937 and the **Food Conference**, 1944 reflect the

54. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Sher-e-Bangla hoite Bangabandhu**, p.94.

55. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **End of Betrayal and Restoration of Lahore Resolution**, Dhaka, 1975, p. 61.

56. **Ibid.** p. 61.

corruptions and pretensions existing in various levels of people, the dogmatism of the **mullahs** and **maulvis** (Muslim priests), the ignorance of the masses and the shortsightedness and hypocrisy of the politicians. Both **Aina** and **Food Conference** are satiric expositions of the contemporary Muslim society in Bengal. **Aina** is more a criticism of the social vices while **Food Conference** exposes the role of the politicians, traders and the bureaucracy during the famine in Bengal in 1942-43.

The **Aina** includes satiric pieces of stories criticizing particularly the **mullahs**, **maulvis** and the **Pirs** (religious sage or a mystic). In the first story, "Huzur Kebla" (Sacred Lord) Abul Mansur Ahmad criticized the leaders of the Khilafat movement, 1919-1924. He came to realize after the failure of the Khilafat and the non-co-operation movement that it had been unrealistic and a futile attempt on the part of the leaders to fight for a cause which was extra-territorial. The non-co-operation movement which brought the Hindus and the Muslims together for a short period had also ended in fiasco by 1922. He believed that boycott of British goods, jobs and educational institutions were impractical having negative results particularly for the Muslims. In the story, Emdad, a Muslim youth who had been studying Philosophy at B.A. Honours and had joined the Khilafat and non-co-operation movement, left college and at the same time gave up the use of foreign goods. As a mark of protest against the British this youth burnt all his possessions made in Britain. The author narrated humourously how Emdad burnt his silk shirts, cut his shoes into pieces, broke his wrist watch and glasses, threw his razor, shaving stick and brush into the river. Then he started wearing **Khadi** (hand-spun cotton cloth) and put on long **Kurta** (full-sleeved, under knee-length shirt) and **lungi** (ankle-length loincloth) and

tupi (cap made of cloth). After the end of the Khilafat movement in 1924, Emdad got inclined to religion. As a student of Philosophy in the past he had studied Hume, Mill, Spencer and Comte and had little faith in religion. He even denied the existence of God. But, after joining the Khilafat movement he had developed a faith in God and religion. He went to a **Pir Shaheb*** to be his **murid** (follower). He attempted to attain the ascetic quality of **Pirs** and **Sufis** (mystics). But to his surprise, he observed that the **Pir Shaheb** led a sensuous life and exploited the illiterate and ignorant rural people. The **Pir Shaheb** made the villagers believe that he could do miracles but what he did were mere pretensions which the ignorant villagers did not dare to doubt. Emdad protested against the false practices of the **Pir** but the result was, the villagers assaulted Emdad and drove him out of the village.

Abul Mansur Ahmad attempted to point out three main issues through the above story. First, he was critical of the educated youths who left college in the early 1920's to join the Khilafat movement. The author, himself a student of Bachelors, had left college and joined the Khilafat movement in 1920.⁵⁷ Most Muslim students had given up education and joined the Khilafat movement. After about a decade the author realized that it was foolish of the youths, particularly of the educated youths, to join a movement which was extra-territorial and had no connection with the practical interests

* **Shaheb** is a mark of respect similar to "Mister" in English.

57. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar**, p. 35. Also see , **Atmakatha**, p. 145.

of the Muslims in India. The idea of Pan-Islamism which infused enthusiasm among Muslims proved impractical in the context of the Khilafat movement in India. Secondly, the author indirectly criticized the shortsightedness of the leaders who called for such a movement. Although the non-co-operation movement had brought the Hindus and the Muslims of India together for a brief period and had speeded up the process of mass participation in politics, the declared purpose to save the Caliphate could not be achieved. Besides, the Muslim leaders had by 1920, began to feel half-hearted about continuing non-co-operation programme of Gandhi.⁵⁸ The Muslims in India no longer felt by 1920 that it was wise to follow Gandhi's programme. The apparent harmonious relation between the Hindus and Muslims during the Khilafat movement also died out by 1923-1924. Thirdly, the author criticized the so-called **Pirs** who played a dominant role in moulding the minds of the rural Muslims in Bengal and creating fundamentalism.

In the story "Nayeb-e-Nabi: (Servant of the Prophet) Abul Mansur Ahmad criticized the dogmatism of the **mullahs** and the **maulvis**. The **mullahs** and **maulvis** had contributed to the conservatism of the illiterate rural Muslims. The educated Muslim youths were critical of the **mullahs**. Anti-**mullah** feeling was strong among them. The youths of the **Muslim Sahitya Shamaj** (Muslim Literary Society) in the 1920's and the early 1930's were particularly critical of the **mullahs**. Religious bigotry was so strong among the **mullahs** that they introduced intolerance and fanaticism among Muslims particularly in rural Bengal. The **mullahs** and **maulvis**

58. Judith M. Brown, **Gandhi's Rise to Power : Indian Politics, 1915-1922**, Cambridge University Press, London, 1972, p. 334.

held debates which exposed their ignorance and narrow-mindedness. Abul Mansur Ahmad was brought up in an atmosphere where conflict between the **Ahl-i-Hadith** (or the **Mohammadi** sect as they preferred to be called) and the **Hanafi** sect was strong.⁵⁹ A follower of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect, he had come across incidents of verbal and physical assaults between these rival religious sects.⁶⁰ In Bengal, conflict between the **Hanafi** and the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect was the most serious example of religious bigotry. Debates took place between them over minor religious issues and over the authenticity of interpretations of the **Quran** and the **Hadith** (sayings of Prophet Mohammad). The **maulvis** of the **Ahl-i-Hadith** sect stressed that the **Quran** and the **Hadith** be strictly followed but unfortunately they themselves lacked knowledge of the same. As a result they took resort to petty quarrels and vile languages against the rival group.⁶¹ The **maulvis** of the **Hanafi** sect on the other hand, believed in **ijma** (consensus of scholars about the lawfulness of certain religious rites) which was strongly opposed by the **Ahl-i-Hadith** followers.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was critical of the religious debates known as the **bahas** which took place in rural Bengal from the late nineteenth century and continued frequently till the 1930's. These rival religious groups, both of the **Sunni** sect of Islam confronted each other in debates on such insignificant issues like should the **maulvis** stand to offer **janaza** (prayer at

59. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Atmakatha*, pp. 160-173.

60. *Ibid.* pp. 162-164.

61. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Aina*, Mymensingh, 1936-1937, pp. 70-74.

burials) at the shoulder or at the head of the dead body or whether two burial services could be held of the same dead body, should **Eid** prayers be held in India which was considered by them a **Dar-ul-Harb** (land of the infidels).⁶² Often the debates turned out violent as rival groups attempted to out-manoeuvre each other. In rural Bengal, the illiterate Muslims hardly got any authentic knowledge about the **Quran** or the **Sunnah** (ways of the Prophet Mohammad).

In "Leader-e-Kawm" (Leader of the Community) Abul Mansur Ahmad exposed the hypocrisy of the so-called nationalist leaders who instead of being anti-British contributed ^{to} inter-communal and to intra-communal feuds. The author was critical of those politicians who claimed to be nationalist leaders but in fact made anti-Hindu and anti-**Hanafi** propaganda and contributed to religious dogmatism and sectarian feuds.

In the story, "Mujahidin" (Warrior of Islam) Abul Mansur Ahmad exposed the rivalry between the **Mohammadi** or the **Ahl-i-Hadith** and the **Hanafi** sects. The author has drawn attention to the spread of religious

62. **Ibid.** pp. 74. Also see, Rafiuddin Ahmed, "Islamization in Nineteenth Century Bengal", Gopal Krishna ed. **Contributions to South Asian Studies**, No. 1, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1979, p. 92.

intolerance and dogmatism by the **mullahs** and the **maulvis** through **bahas** in the villages.⁶³

In the "Bidrohi Shanga" (Association of the Rebels) Abul Mansur Ahmad was critical of the so-called radicals who felt proud of doing something out of the way but, in fact, lacked a revolutionary spirit. A group of educated Muslim youths in Bengal in the 1930's were acquainted with the radical and progressive ideas but lacked the courage and initiative to make any practical effort to materialize those. The author is of opinion that these youths had a lot of potential in them to bring changes in society but they were timid and had preferred an unhazardous life. **Bidrohi Shanga** depicts an image of those youths who were educated but made little or no contribution either to the nationalist movement or to the Bengali Muslim society.

The **Dharma-Rajya** (Religious State) is a critical exposition of the communalists. The author held that the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs and even the British contributed to communal ill-feeling. The author was more

63. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Aina**, pp. 104-124. In spite of the negative aspects of the **bahas**, it is relevant to mention here that **bahas** in the rural areas of Bengal were considered a popular medium of Islamization. They represented a new pattern of religious activity in rural Bengal and reflected the growing interest of the illiterate people in religious matters. See, Rafiuddin Ahmed, **Op. Cit.** pp. 88-120. Also see, Rafiuddin Ahmed, **The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906. A Quest for Identity**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2nd. ed. 1988. pp. 74-75.

critical of those who incited the riots. He was particularly critical of the editors of newspapers like the **Daily Azad** ⁶⁴ or the **Ananda Bazar Patrika** ⁶⁵ which acted as protectors of the Muslims and the Hindu community respectively. The author is tongue-in-cheek when he made the narrator in the story say that he was happy to see the Muslims of Calcutta so inspired to protect the sanctity of Islam ⁶⁶. The author also indicated the inertia of the policemen during communal riots which proved the indifferent attitude of the British Government in dealing with the communal riots in India. The author considered this attitude an indirect support of the British government to communal riots and thus materialize their policy of "divide and rule". The author's purpose behind writing this satiric piece was to make the British Government and the politicians of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities aware that communal riots could have been prevented through proper handling of the issue.

In another satiric piece, "**Go-Dewta Ki-Desh**" (Land of the Sacred cow) Abul Mansur Ahmad pointed out a major problem in the society and that was the annual conflict over cow-slaughter. Hindu-Muslim riots took place almost every year until partition in 1947 during **Qurbani** (Islamic festival of animal sacrifice during **Bakr-Eids**). Communal riots over

64. The **Daily Azad** was brought out from October 1936 which spoke for the interests of the Muslim community in Bengal. The paper was edited by Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968).

65. The **Ananda Bazar Patrika**, First published in 1921/1922 from Calcutta.

66. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Aina**, p. 157.

cow-killing are also heard of occasionally in India. Conflict over this issue took an aggressive shape since the last quarter of the nineteenth century when tensions increased between a rising Muslim middle class and the Hindus who had already been firmly placed in the society.

Cow is a sacred animal to the Hindus and cow-slaughter is considered a sin by them. It was from about the fourth century A.D. that sanctity of the cow became a "firmly fixed dogma" and cow slaughter was strictly prohibited.⁶⁷ During Muslim rule in India since the thirteenth century, cow became a political symbol both of harmony and hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. During the Mughal rule Akbar (1556-1605) had prohibited slaughter of cows in order to make conciliation with the Hindus whereas Aurangzeb (1618-1707) disregarded Hindu feeling about cow. The **Arya Shamaj** (1875) and the Cow Protection Society (1882) were formed by the Hindus to prevent cow slaughter by the Muslims. Shivaji (1627-1680) was among the first to use cow as a political symbol. From his time protection of cows became a synonym for protection of the Hindu community. Cow symbol was closely associated with Hindu nationalism. Dayananda (1824-1883) and Tilak (1856-1920) had stressed on cow protection. They had evoked Hindu nationalism by using the symbol of the cow. The cow protection movement turned into an aggressive one as nationalistic feeling got stronger in the respective communities. Nationalism in India developed on communal lines and religion, therefore, was an

67. Anthony Parel, "The Political Symbolism of the Cow in India", **Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies**, Vol. V11, No.3, Leicester University Press, Leicester, November 1969. p. 181.

integral part of it. To the Hindus protection of the cow meant protection of their religion. To the Muslims cow-killing was a sacred part of their religion. Both the communities were unwilling to compromise on this issue.

Gandhi (1869-1948) had sought a compromise over cow-killing in order to maintain communal harmony during the Khilafat movement (1919-1924).⁶⁸ He told the Hindus to save Khilafat if they wanted to save cows and he tried to persuade the Muslim leaders to accept the cow-Khilafat formula which meant that in return for Hindu support for the Khilafat movement, the Muslims would stop killing cows.⁶⁹ However, Gandhi's attempt to use the cow symbol for Hindu-Muslim unity backfired; it increased communal separatism. Gandhi needed a more neutral and secular foundation to his approach.⁷⁰ Besides, Gandhi had himself sounded uncompromising on the issue of cow-killing.⁷¹ But, he had, no doubt, attempted to soften the conflict by forming the **Go Seva Sangh** (1924) because he felt that the **Gorakshini Sabha**, (Cow Protection Society)

68. **Ibid.** p. 186. Also see, Judith M. Brown, p. 329 where it is mentioned that in 1921 when a dispute took place over cow-killing, Gandhi had urged the local leaders to stop public discussion of cow-killing. In Bengal, the Muslims were ready to forgo **Qurbani** but were not ready to see Gandhi being worshipped as Lord Krishna. In an incident in Bengal, reported in the **Navajoog**, April 16, 1921, Gandhi's picture was drawn as Krishna above a Muslim flag.

69. Judith M. Brown, **Op. Cit.** p. 329.

70. Anthony Parel, **Op. Cit.** p. 186.

71. **Ibid.** p. 186.

founded in 1882, sounded too aggressive.⁷² The Muslims, however, were not prepared to give up cow-killing. They criticized the **Gorakshini Sabhas** as anti-Muslim and a threat to their religion.

In the story **Go-Dewta Ki-Desh**, Abul Mansur Ahmad imagined that he was in a dreamland which was flooded by cow-milk. The author could see no human being there. The cows spoke to him in Hindi. One of the cows asked him whether he was from the land of **Ananda Bazar**, i.e. Bengal.⁷³ The cows reminded him that the **Ananda Bazar Patrika** had campaigned hard to save the lives of the cows in Bengal.⁷⁴ The cows were shocked to see a non-Aryan, a **Mleccha** (derogatory term used by the Hindus to refer to a Muslim) in their midst. The author came to know from the cows that during riot over cow-killing the **Arya Samaj** took the cows to a safer place and in this case, to the Benaras Hindu University boarding and Kashi, which were flooded with cow's milk because except the **Arya Samaj** there was none to drink the milk.⁷⁵

72. **Ibid.** p. 187.

73. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Aina** , p. 38.

74. **Ibid.** p. 38.

75. **Ibid.** pp. 46-47. The **Arya Samaj** (Society of honourable ones), a modern Hindu reform movement founded in Bombay, India in 1875, advocating Hindu revival by a return to Vedic religion. Mircea Eliade ed. -in-Chief, **The Encyclopedia of Religion**, Macmillan, New York, 1987. Vol. 1, P. 432.

In fact, cow-killing was not prohibited among Hindus in ancient times. There are evidences that sacrifice of cows was prevalent among them. The **Rigveda** (c. 1200 B.C.) affirms that the Hindus used to slaughter cows to entertain their guests.⁷⁶ The **Rigveda** even described the process of slaughtering a cow by the Hindus.⁷⁷

The author pointed out that both the Christians and the Muslims slaughtered cows but the Hindus attacked and accused only the Muslims. Communal riots over cow-killing took place on almost every **Bakr-Eid** since the first decade of this century. One riot over cow-killing sparked off communal riots in other places. The author was critical of the fact that Christians eat beef too and cows are slaughtered for that purpose but it was only when the Muslims slaughtered cows that communal riots occurred.⁷⁸ Cow-killing during **Qurbani** was used as a political symbol for periodic communal riots. The author was mainly critical of the fact that manipulations and plans were made to instigate riots on occasions of cow-killing by Muslims.

76. Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, "**Korbanir Darshanik Byakha**" (The philosophical explanation behind **Qurbani**), Shamsuzzaman Khan, **Moniruzzaman Islamabadi** (Jibani Granthamala : A Series of Literary Biographies), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1988. pp. 92-93, 95.

77. **Ibid.** pp. 93-94.

78. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Aina** , p. 43.

Abul Mansur Ahmad's **Food Conference** is another satiric work on the situation in Bengal during the famine of 1942-43. He exposed the negligence and indifference of the politicians to procure and distribute food to the famine-stricken people. When millions went hungry the political leaders in Bengal were busy strengthening the coalition that was formed between A.K. Fazlul Huq of the **Krishak Proja Party**, the Subhas Bose (1897-1945 ?) faction of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha from December 1941 to March 1943. The political leaders concentrated on their gains for the present and the future. Neither Fazlul Huq nor Khwaja Nazimuddin (1894-1961) did genuinely try to solve food problem during the famine. According to the government report 1.5 million people died during famine in 1943 but according to contemporary estimate 3.5 million people died and out of 60 million people in Bengal 20 million were severely affected.⁷⁹ In the famine-stricken area 10% of the people i.e. an estimated 1.2 million to 1.5 million people (men, women and children) became beggars.⁸⁰ Besides, 6 million people, including 2.7 million land-labourers, 1.5 million poor peasants, 1.5 million country-industrial workers and 25,000 poor school teachers were reduced to a very distressed condition.⁸¹ The 1942-1943 harvest was not so bad. The **aush** and **aman** rice production was 6,900,000 tons while the need was 7,821,000 tons a year.⁸² The 1941-

79. Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 173.

80. **Ibid.** p. 173.

81. **Ibid.** pp. 173-174.

82. **Telegram No. XX From Viceroy to the Secretary of State**, October 7, 1943, **Government of Bengal, Confidential File No.2, Collection No. 1X, 1943-1944. R-3-2-49**, India Office Library and Records, London.

1942 harvest was a good one and a good deal of it was exported.⁸³ Compared to the need, production was not so bad in 1943. Food shortage of rice in 1943 was 5 crore maunds which was not such a big shortfall as to cause a famine of such disastrous effect.⁸⁴ Neither the Fazlul Huq ministry during the Progressive Coalition nor the Muslim League ministry under Khwaja Nazimuddin created the conditions for famine but each held the other responsible. Reports from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State said that loss of the "Burma Ukraine", bad harvest, cyclone and flood, boat denial policy of the army, pressure on railways for military traffic, greed of the traders, panic hoarding by cultivators, failure to control prices, lack of accurate knowledge of what the real shortage was, were mainly the causes of famine.⁸⁵ Wartime removal of rice from the coastal areas and stocking for military were other major causes.⁸⁶ Some big Muslim merchants had been involved in hoarding grains.⁸⁷ Appointment of M.A.H. Ispahani as the sole purchasing agent during the ministry of Khwaja Nazimuddin gave opportunity for making trouble.⁸⁸ Cases of forged permits for drawing wheat and **atta** (grinded wheat) from Government stocks by Muslim officials appointed by Fazlul Huq were also reported.⁸⁹ Requisition of grain

83. **Ibid.** Telegram No. XX.

84. Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 174.

85. Government's Secretariat, Bengal, Confidential File No.2, Collection No. 1X, 1943-1944. R-3-2-49, India Office Library and Records, London.

86. Shila Sen, **Op. it.** p. 174.

87. **Government's Secretariat, Bengal, Confidential File No. 2, Collection No. IX, 1943-1944. R-3-2-49, India Office Library and Records, London.**

88. **Ibid.** Telegram No. XX. **From Viceroy to the Secretary of State.**

89. **Ibid.**

was also insufficient.⁹⁰ Grain trade was largely in the hands of the Hindus and the big cultivators who would have surplus grain stocks were also Hindus who did not co-operate with the Muslim League ministry.⁹¹ Mismanagement of the government, weak and over-burdened ministry and the corrupt officials and local people worsened the situation of food shortage. It was the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (1901-1953) and Fazlul Huq ministry in Bengal until March 1943. Fazlul Huq was forced to resign and Muslim League ministry was installed under Nazimuddin in April 1943. H.S. Suhrawardy was the Minister for Civil Supplies in the Nazimuddin ministry.

The famine was used as political pawn. When Nazimuddin accepted office in April 1943 he had a secured position compared to the previous ministry of Fazlul Huq and Shyama Prasad. Both the Governor of Bengal and the European members in the ministry supported Nazimuddin but he could not meet the situation properly. In November 1943, an opinion was put forward that considering "the crucial realities of the Bengal famine" it was not practical to divide "India into two or more nations."⁹² Nazimuddin, however, contradicted this view and said that Bengal could solve its problem by only being independent.⁹³ He alleged that the severity of the famine was

90. **Ibid.**

91. **Ibid.**

92. Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 179. Also see, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar**, p. 236.

93. Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 179.

caused by the central government failing to "induce autonomous provinces to part with surplus foodstuffs for Bengal."⁹⁴ He argued that an independent Bengal would have full control over its economy and transport and would be free from the central authority thereby giving him the necessary conditions to solve such a problem.⁹⁵ H.S. Suhrawardy was made responsible for the famine by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. Mukherjee noted that the Civil Supplies Department under H.S. Suhrawardy was responsible for the famine.⁹⁶ While Fazlul Huq held the opinion that the method of procuring grain through monopolists by the Nazimuddin ministry was responsible for famine. One group alleged the other for causing the severity of the famine. But, both Fazlul Huq and Nazimuddin ministry were responsible due to their negligence and lack of proper vigilance over lower officials. They did neither warn the people nor prepare themselves for the famine.

In the satiric pieces like "Langarkhana" (Free Gruel Kitchen) and "Relief Work" Abul Mansur Ahmad exposed how the rice dealers, volunteers, village headmen and the local politicians got involved in profitable dealings during famine. Free gruel kitchens were opened in 1943 for the hungry as an attempt to tackle the famine. H.S. Suhrawardy had served during famine by running gruel kitchens.⁹⁷ But traders were

94. *Ibid. Op Cit.* p.179.

95. *Ibid. Op. Cit.* p. 179.

96. Shila Sen, *Op. Cit.* p. 174. See footnote where Shila Sen refers to the book *Panchaser Manantar* (Fifty's Famine) by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, published from Calcutta in 1350 B.S. /1943 A.D.

97. Mohammad H. R. Talukdar, *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, Dhaka, 1987. pp. 18-19.

involved in blackmarketing of rice and they did so with the privilege of their allegiance to the ministers and politicians. Businessmen and politicians manipulated famine conditions for their respective gains. During relief work volunteers and village headmen kept a major share of relief goods for their own consumption or for sale in the blackmarket. The inspectors of police were blind to such ^afruds. Government's negligence to control the mishandling of relief goods and at the same time its inadequate supply were pointed out in "Relief Work".

In "Grow More Food" the author pointed out the half-hearted attempts of the bureaucracy to materialize the campaign for growing more food. India was a fertile country but her people suffered from food shortage. Besides natural calamities and population problem, blackmarketing and mal-distribution of grains were clearly the other main reasons behind food shortage. The author pointed out that the government was given the responsibility to teach the ignorant cultivators how to grow more food by taking proper steps like cultivating the right type of crops in the right type of soil, about the proper use of fertilizer and about intensive cultivation. But the government officials deliberately managed to delay the process by not employing experts on this subject. Instead, they wanted that grain imports should continue so that they could make money through permits and licenses for trading. Blackmarketing and trading through illegal permits were rampant. Government spent huge sum of money on campaigning but the officials limited their attempts to printing of leaflets and advertisements in few newspapers circulated mostly in cities which was no place for cultivators. Besides the language of those leaflets and advertisements was English which the peasants could not read. The author's opinion was that the

government officials lacked genuine wish to improve the condition of agriculture and made no attempt to solve the food problem.

Another satiric piece, "Scientific Business" is a criticism of the system of education in Bengal where youths were never specialized in a particular subject. Even after getting Bachelors and Masters degrees they were glad to do clerical jobs. They were not inclined to go for trade and commerce and if they did so, their only object was to make profit. Abul Mansur Ahmad also pointed out a phenomenon in Bengali society that the Bengalees had a tendency to mix up patriotism and religion with business. The author, of course, meant here the boycott of British goods and the enforced sale of **swadeshi** (home-made) during the Swadeshi movement particularly in the first two decades of the present century. **Khadi** (hand-woven coarse cloth) and the **Charka** (spinning wheel) were made popular signs of patriotism but, in fact, those were a camouflage; real interest behind those was business and profit, the author believed.⁹⁸ The real motive behind the preaching of **Swadeshi** goods was to augment the sale of textile products of India which actually benefited the industrialists. The satiric piece, "A.I.C.C." by Abul Mansur Ahmad was a criticism of educated youths who went to politics because they were unemployed. In Bengal, the field of politics was the one area open to them where those unemployed youths could get involved without any sort of training. The author's point in this story was that in Bengal very few went to politics out of a belief in certain ideology. Most university graduates, unable to get suitable jobs, went into

98. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Food Conference**, Dhaka, 3rd. ed. 1971. p. 22.

politics and aspired to achieve the highest rank of a minister or leader of a party. In most cases, they were quick to create factions in the party and often formed their own party with a handful of supporters. In the story "A.I.C.C." which meant "All India Condolence Committee" was the party formed by Shahid, an educated but unemployed youth, who being disappointed to see the shortcomings of both the Muslim League and the Congress formed his own party. But the reason why he formed a Condolence Committee was that all the issues like nationalism, communalism, demand for Pakistan and also demand for a united India had already been taken up by the existing political parties. The author was satiric and wanted to point out that Shahid's real intention was to form a party of his own rather than join a party to establish his own ideology. The point made by the author was Shahid lacked belief in any particular ideology. With the title of the story the author puns the All India Congress Committee for which the abbreviation "A.I.C.C." was used.

The purpose behind discussing the satiric works of Abul Mansur Ahmad is to highlight his observation on the social vices existing in the Bengali Muslim society in the 1930's and the 1940's. His **Aina** and **Food Conference** remain unique works of satire written by a Bengali Muslim and particularly by one who lived in the midst of such conditions. Some permanent features of the Bengali Muslim society like the influence of degenerated **Pirs** and **mullahs**, who in most cases dominated rural life and politics, illiteracy and ignorance of the masses, lack^{of} ideological beliefs among Bengali Muslim youths, the hypocrisy of the politicians, corruption of the officials etc. are also depicted in these works. Abul Mansur Ahmad was a didactic writer. He attempted to point out the shortcomings of the Bengali Muslims and make them aware of their faults.

CHAPTER -2 : MODERATE -LIBERAL

Abul Husain (1897-1934)

Abul Husain was one of leading progressive thinkers of the 1920's and the 1930's. He was the pioneer of a literary movement whose declared objective was the "emancipation of the intellect" (**Buddhir mukti**). At the initiative of Abul Husain, a literary society named, the **Muslim Sahitya Samaj** was established in Dhaka in January, 1926. Its members were some of the young intellectuals associated with the Dhaka University (established in 1921). These enlightened and progressive-minded youths sought to bring about a renaissance among the Bengal Muslims.¹ Their aim was to shake off the age-old ideas of the Bengali Muslims which had kept them in a state of social and intellectual stagnation. They advocated the supremacy of reason and freedom of intellect so that the Muslim society could be regenerated.

Abul Husain felt the need to awaken the Muslims of Bengal who, compared to the Hindus, were economically backward and socially downtrodden. For two decades, in the 1920's and the 1930's Abul Husain

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1. In this respect they seemed to follow in the footsteps of the proponents of the intellectual movement of the early nineteenth century which was known as the "Bengal renaissance". The leading figures of this renaissance movement were Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), Derozio (1809-1831) and his followers who were known as "Young Bengal", Akshoy Kumar Dutta (1820-1886) and others. They were deeply influenced by European liberal and humanistic thought. Their movement produced great commotion in the Hindu Society.

wrote ceaselessly to evoke in the minds of Bengali Muslims the need for self-awareness, using the twin powers of reason and intellect rather than remaining blindly attached to age-old traditions and social taboos. During his short life-span of forty-one years, he spent almost half of it trying to uplift the social condition of the Bengali Muslims. Abul Husain was born in January, 1897 at the village of Panisara in the district of Jessore, under Khulna Division. He obtained his Master's degree in Economics from the University of Calcutta in 1920 and joined the department of Economics and Commerce as Assistant Lecturer at the University of Dhaka in 1921. Meanwhile, he had passed the Bachelor of Law Examination. In 1927, he resigned from the Dhaka University and took up legal profession. In 1931 he obtained the Master of Law degree, which was a rare achievement in those days. He practised first at the Judge's Court, Dhaka and later at the Calcutta High Court.²

In his writings Abul Husain was strongly critical of social conservatism and religious orthodoxy of the Bengali Muslims. He opposed

2. Abdur Qadir (ed.) **Abul Husainer Rachanabali** (Barnamichil, Dhaka, 1976) gives a comprehensive introduction which is informative about the life and works of Abul Husain. Also see, Muhammad Abdul Mazid, **Abul Husain** (Jibani Granthamala : A series of literary biographies), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1988). A chapter at the end of the book gives a list of Abul Husain's works, published and unpublished, which is also very useful.

any sort of blind faith in religion and preached the need for rational thinking and intellectual analysis of religious scriptures for their use in practical life. As a child, he saw his paternal grandfather, Moulvi Mohammad Hashim attempting to reform the Muslim community of his locality. He chastised any form of practice which were to him, un-Islamic. Abul Husain was strongly influenced by him.³ By the time he was in his early twenties and still a student, he began writing.⁴ His articles were published in various journals and magazines of the time, such as **Naoroze**, **Tarun Patra**, **Sikha**,

3. It was the mission of Abul Husain's grandfather to prevent the villagers from going to the **Pirs** (saints), **mazars** and **dargahs** (shrines of saints) blindly, seeking relief from illness or ill-luck. He tried to remove the conservatism of the Muslims in order to make them follow Islam by means of a rational analysis of the Quran. Abdul Qadir (ed.). **Rachanabali** (Complete works of Abul Husain), pp. 11-12. Also see, Muhammad Abdul Mazid, **Abul Husain**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1988, p. 11.
4. **Op. Cit.** p. 9. Abul Husain's first published work was **Banglar Bolshi (The Bolsheviks of Bengal)** published from Dhaka in 1925, which included four articles written by him around 1921 and 1922.

Saogat, Abhijan, Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Patrika, Jagaran, Jayoti and Bulbul.⁵

Abul Husain was much concerned with the worsening of communal relations between the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. In his article, "Atiter Moho" (Blind love for the Past), he analysed the reasons behind existing distrust between the two communities.⁶ According to him uncritical

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5. **Tarun Patra, Sikha** and **Jagaran** were for some time edited by Abul Husain. See, Muhammad Abdul Mazid, **Abul Husain**, pp. 28-34. **Naoroze** (Monthly literary magazine) first published in 1927 from Calcutta. **Tarun Patra** (monthly) first published in 1925 from Dhaka. **Sikha** (yearly magazine), first published in 1927 from Dhaka, as the mouthpiece of the "Muslim Literary Society." Its last issue was brought out in 1932. **Saogat** (a monthly literary magazine) first published in 1918. A leading journal which published the writings of the enlightened Muslim youths in Bengal to encourage them. Its editor was Mohammad Nasiruddin. **Abhijan** (monthly), first published in 1926 from Dhaka. **Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Patrika** (a quarterly literary magazine), first published in 1918 from Calcutta. The magazine preached Hindu-Muslim unity. **Jagaran** (a monthly), first published in April, 1928 from Dhaka, continued for only a few months. **Jayoti** (a monthly literary magazine), first published in April, 1930, edited by Abdul Qadir, continued to be published for two years : **Bulbul** (a quarterly literary magazine), first published in 1933. This magazine was edited by Mohammad Habibullah Bahar and Shamsunnahar Mahmud (the two were brother and sister). Mustafa Nurul Islam gives a list of the journals published between 1901 - 1930 at the end of the book edited by him, **Samayik Patre Jiban O Jonomat** (1901-1930). (Public Opinion as reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977.
6. **Rachanabali**, pp. 39-46. The article was published in 1927 in the **Shahityik** (Literature), a monthly magazine published for only a year. The magazine was the mouthpiece of the "Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samiti" (Bengali Muslim Literary Society).

admiration for past glory had prevented them from understanding their real problems and had made them blind to their faults. He pointed out that a sense of false pride had existed in both the communities. The Hindus had dreamt of establishing Aryan rule that had existed in India two thousand years earlier. The Muslims, on the other hand, had jealously hoped for a revival of Muslim rule. A great many Hindus seemed to believe that India was land of the Hindus and that the Muslims were aliens. The Muslims, on the other hand, seemed to emphasise their Islamic religious identity rather than their Indian identity and this prevented them from collaborating with the Hindus in any major issue. Abul Husain held that the dream of the Hindus to establish Hindu rule in India led the Muslims to look upto Iran, Iraq and Turkey for support. As a minority community in India, they felt insecure. Abul Husain thought that it was not fair on the part of the Hindus to regard that the Muslims were unpatriotic just because they looked up to the Muslim countries outside India.⁷ He urged the Hindus to give up their chauvinistic attitude and also exhorted the Muslims to be patriotic and not waste their time seeking identity with the Muslim world outside India. He criticised the Muslims for their carelessness and inertia towards any improvement of their distressing condition. Their economic backwardness had contributed initially to communal unrest. As the Muslims began to lag behind in education, they fell behind in jobs and professions. As a result, clash of interest gave vent to communalism. Regarding involvement in extremist politics, for instance, during the Swadeshi Movement (1905-1908),

7. **Rachanabali** (Complete works), Vol. 1. p. 41.

Muslim youths generally kept away from participating in it. The Hindus had taken a leading part in the movement and had also formed terrorist organisations like the **Anushilan** and the **Jugantar**.⁸ Abul Husain discarded extremist politics. He disliked their association with Hindu religious symbols. This he considered to be the main reason which had kept the Muslims away from such politics. Because of their non-cooperation with the extremist politics of the Hindus, they were considered unpatriotic. It became a common belief among the Hindus that none but they loved India and that they were the only true Indians.⁹ This attitude contributed greatly to the growth of communal ill-feeling.

Abul Husain believed that all the diverse communities of India should form a united India. He pointed out that the Muslims had blindly adhered to their traditions and religious customs and had failed to realise their practical problems. They were little interested to learn English and accept western ideas of liberalism and rational thinking. Abul Husain felt that India needed more enlightened thinkers and social reformers in order to change the attitude of both the Hindus and the Muslims.¹⁰ He believed that mutual

8. The "Anushilan" and the "Jugantar" groups were founded in 1902 and in 1906 respectively, in Bengal. Suprakash Roy, **Bharater Baiplabik Sangramer Itihas** (History of the Indian Revolutionary Struggle), Vol. 1, 2nd. ed. (Calcutta, 1980), pp. 153-156.

9. **Rachanabali** (Complete works) Vol. 1, p. 43.

10. Abul Husain, "Taruner Sadhana" (Endeavour of the Youth), **Saogat**, 1929, **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1, p. 163.

love and the principle of "Tawheed" (true relationship with God) could contribute greatly to unite the religious communities. He wrote that the attempts of the Sufi saints of the earlier centuries like Kabir (1398-1448), Nanak (1469-1539), Hindu Vaishnava saint, Sri Chaitanya (1486-1534) were directed towards the unity of the two communities. But, Abul Husain lamented that neither community had accepted their preachings.¹¹ Abul Husain stressed the need for synthesis of the various cultures and religions as was evident in the life and work of Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976). He felt the need for unity and harmony among the different communities living in India and was opposed to any kind of separatist movement. To achieve these two goals, he believed, education and rational thinking were the most essential pre-requisites. He wrote,

আব্লাহতায়াল্লা ভারতের উপর এক বড় Experiment এর
ভার দিয়েছেন, সেটি হচ্ছে হিন্দু - মুসলিম-খ্রীষ্টান প্রভৃতি
জাতির সমন্বয় সাধন । সমস্ত জগতের কাজ এক ভারতের
করতে হবে । 12

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11. **Rachanabali, Op. Cit.** p. 163.
12. **Ibid.** p. 163. A contemporary of Abul Husain, another noted Muslim social thinker, S.Wajed Ali (1890-1951) however, could not accept the view that a synthesis of various religious and cultures was possible but he appreciated the secular aspect underlying such an attempt. He cited the example of the Mughal emperor Akbar who introduced his religion **Din-i-Ilahi** in the sixteenth century, in an attempt to bring a synthesis of all religions in order to run a vast and populous country, diversified in castes, customs and creeds. But his attempts failed. See, S.Wajed Ali, "Blangali Musلمانer Sahitya Sadhanar Path" (The Path of the practice of Culture by the Bengali Muslims), **Monthly Mohammadi**, 1929, Syed Akram Hossain (ed.) **S.Wajed Ali Rachanabali** (Complete Works of S. Wajed Ali), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1985. Vol. 1. pp. 506-508. Also see, S. Wajed Ali, "Akbarer Rashtra Sadhana" (Akbar's State Policy), Syed Akram Hossain, (ed.) **Rachanabali**, Vol. 11. pp. 98-99.

(God has entrusted India to undertake a great experiment, that is, to bring about unity and synthesis between Hindu, Muslim, Christian and other communities. India has to do the work of the entire world.)

Abul Husain was aware that cultural and religious barriers acted as practical obstacles to Indian unity. He, therefore, believed that only a synthesis of various cultures and religions could keep India united.

On the question of Muslim demand for reservation of seats in the Legislative Council and reservation of jobs Abul Husain held the view that such considerations had paralysed the Muslim community in Bengal. He maintained that provisions for separate electorates, weightage and reservation of seats through Government Reform Acts contributed greatly to the backwardness of the Muslim community in their long-term effects.¹³ Under the Montague-Chelmsford Reform Scheme of 1919, the Muslims of Bengal were given forty-five percent representation in the provincial legislative council. The Muslims of the province demanded fifty percent seats as they comprised over fifty percent of the population. The political

13. Abul Husain's speech, "Shotkara Poitallish" (Forty-five Percent) at the second general meeting of the Muslim Literary Society on 21 February, 1926. Abdul Qadir (ed.) **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. p. 132. Also see, Abul Husain, "Amader Rajniti" (Our Politics). **Ibid.** pp. 187-190.

movement of the Muslims in Bengal in the 1920's was centered around their demand for greater reservation of seats in the legislative council.¹⁴ Abul Husain believed that Muslims in Bengal had been much backward in education and the provision for reservation of jobs and seats further made them devoid of all ambitions and had also made them selfish, narrow-minded and static.¹⁵ Competition for jobs with the Hindu community, which had in the last century progressed in education and had been well placed in government jobs, was essential in order to make the Muslims hard-working, persevering and dynamic, Abul Husain believed.¹⁶ He held the

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14. Previously in 1916, when the Lucknow Pact was made between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, the Muslims of Bengal felt betrayed, since they got forty percent reservation of seats in the Bengal Legislative Council where they expected to have a far greater number of seats in proportion to their population, comprising 52.6% of the total. A political crisis ensued as a result of this among the Muslim leaders in Bengal. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal (1757-1947)*, Dhaka, 1978. pp. 226-228. Also see, Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, Delhi, 1976. p. 47. In 1923, the Bengal Pact had provided fifty-five percent of government posts to be reserved for the Muslims and until that percentage was reached, Muslims could supply upto eighty percent of all recruits. But, this arrangement did not last after 1925.
 15. Abul Husain, "Shotkara Poitallish" (Forty-five percent), Muhammad Abdul Mazid, *Abul Husain*, p. 55.
 16. See, Abdul Qadir (ed.) *Abul Husain-er Rachanabali, Vol.1*. pp. 189-190. Abul Husain expressed repeatedly that separate representation and safeguards would ruin the Muslim community. He believed that such protection would actually bring destruction. He also pointed out that fair competition would gradually bring the two communities on equal footing and would remove the complexes inherent in them. *Ibid.* p. 190.

view that provisions for safeguards and separate representation on the basis of religion had acted as a paralysing force on the Muslims. He stated that what was urgently needed in the Bengali Muslim society was the spread of English education and the dissemination of European knowledge and ideas.¹⁷ This was the only way, he believed, that the Muslim community should be brought to equal grounds of competition both in respects of profession and politics with their Hindu counterparts.¹⁸ While advocating the benefits of English education, Abul Husain believed that Indians were lucky to have the British ruling over their country.¹⁹ He meant to say that foreign rule was not always a misfortune for a particular country. It was through the British that India came into contact with the liberal ideas of the West and their advancement in modern science. In this respect Abul Husain merely repeated what Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) and Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) had advocated in the previous century.²⁰ Syed Ahmed Khan, however, limited his attempts to spread English education to the Muslims of upper India only. Abul Husain also pointed out that both Ram Mohan Roy and Syed Ahmed Khan based their preachings on their respective religious faiths.²¹ As a result, he said, Indians remained blindly faithful to religion

17. *Ibid.* p. 154.

18. *Ibid.* p. 154.

19. *Ibid.* p. 154.

20. Abul Husain, "Sir Syed Ahmed Khan", *Ibid.* pp. 263-277. Also see, *The Sikha*, 3rd. issue, Dhaka, 1929.

21. Abdul Qadir (ed.) *Rachanabali*, Vol. 1. p. 266.

even though they had learnt English and had accepted western dress, fashion and lifestyle.²² Because of their strict adherence to their respective religions, communal differences rather than communal harmony became more prominent.²³ While interpreting the causes of communal conflict, Abul Husain analysed the intellectual trends and preachings of social reformers of India in the past. He feared that indoctrination of any kind based on religion would surely lead to communalism and would lead to the development of a separatist movement in India.²⁴

Abul Husain also considered the demand for **Swaraj** (self-rule) unrealistic. He wrote,

লম্বা লম্বা গলায় বলা হচ্ছে - “ স্বরাজ হলেই কিন্না ফতে
করব । “ কিন্তু বলি, একটি জাতির মুক্তি হাসিল করা কি এতই
সহজ ? আর কাগজে কলমে Constitution - এ লিখে
দিলেই কি মুক্তি ভোগ করতে পারা যায় ? আসহায় শিশুকে
তাড়াতাড়ি বড় করার জন্য অল্প অল্প দুধ না দিয়ে যদি মাংস
খাওয়াবার ব্যবস্থা করা যায়, তাহলে সে শিশুর যে অবস্থা
হয় তা আপনারা সহজেই অনুমান করতে পারেন । 25

(It is being declared loudly, 'after getting **Swaraj**, we
will achieve everything.' Is it so easy to make a nation
free ? And can freedom be enjoyed just by writing down

22. **Ibid.** p. 266.

23. **Ibid.** pp. 269-270.

24. **Ibid.** p. 266.

25. **Ibid.** p. 153.

the Constitution on paper ? One can easily understand the consequence if instead of giving milk at intervals to a small and helpless baby, it is given meat to eat for its fast growth.)

Abul Husain was critical of the nationalist leaders who encouraged boycott of foreign goods, giving up of government jobs, staying away from schools and colleges and used these as instruments of political agitation. He considered this a destructive means to achieve self-rule or **Swaraj**. He advocated for a constructive approach which included eradication of illiteracy, religious conservatism, social taboos and poverty.²⁶

Commenting on the politics in India in the 1930's Abul Husain pointed out that provisions for separate electorates had negated the prospect for democracy and had heightened communal tension. He believed in secularism and the existence of a united India. In his opinion,

.... একই রাষ্ট্রের মধ্যে ভিন্ন ভিন্ন সমাজ গঠিত হতে
পারে কিন্তু ভিন্ন ভিন্ন রাষ্ট্র হতে পারে কি না; এ -সব
ভাবনার বিষয়। 27.

26. **Ibid.** p. 153 .

27. Abul Husain, "Amader Rajniti", **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. p. 179.

(.....there can be several societies formed in a state, but whether several states could exist in the framework of one single state, is a matter for serious thought.)

Abul Husain defined state as a territory comprising different societies. Different communities in a country comprised a larger entity, which he called a nation.²⁸ India, he said, could not be considered a fragmented state. It comprised people of several religions, cultures, castes and creeds which could not be considered a divided state.²⁹

Abul Husain felt concerned about the economic condition of Bengal and stressed the need for introducing technical know-how, particularly in the field of agriculture to solve the problem of scarcity of food.³⁰ At the same

28. *Ibid.* p. 180.

29. *Ibid.* p. 180. It is interesting to point out in this respect that Abul Husain's contemporary, S. Wajed Ali, wrote that in India, where diverse races and religions existed, language-based nationalism was the best. Hence Bengal, according to him, was to be a self-governing state and India to be a federation of states. See, S. Wajed Ali, "Hindu-Musalman", **Bhabishwater Bangali** (The Future Bengalis), Syed Akram Hossain (ed.) **S. Wajed Ali Rachanabali, Vol. 1. Op. Cit.** p. 315 .

30. Abul Husain, "Industrialism - Jantra Shilpa ba Koler Karkhana" (Industrialism - Mechanization or Manufacturing Industries), See, **Rachanabali, Vol. 1.** pp. 208-213. The article was first published in **The Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Patrika** (Bengali Muslim Literary Magazine), Calcutta, 1921. *Ibid.* 219.

time, he stressed the need for industrialization at a faster speed. He pointed out the necessity for better marketing system, competition, monopoly of trade and effective tariff system.³¹ He felt that India needed to participate in such economic activities in order to free herself from economic exploitation. He also encouraged the need for production of home-manufactured goods at a cheaper rate so that the great majority of the population, comprising mostly poor peasants, could afford to buy such goods.³² Unlike Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948) who were opposed to large-scale industrialization in India, Abul Husain felt the need for quick introduction of modern scientific knowledge and technology in the country.³³ He also stressed the need to restore indigenous crafts which were gradually getting extinct for lack of capital and sufficient patronage.³⁴ He pointed out the need for expanding cottage industries which, he believed, would remove some of the distress of the peasantry in the country.³⁵

31. Abul Husain, "Shilpa- Baniye O-Bharatiyo Muslaman" (Non-Muslims in Trade and Commerce), *Ibid.* pp. 245-247.

32. *Ibid.* p. 209.

33. *Ibid.* p. 208.

34. *Ibid.* pp. 206-207.

35. See, Muhammad Abdul Mazid, *Abul Husain, Op. Cit.* p. 42.

Abul Husain talked of the merits of socialism, collectivism and Bolshevism.³⁶ He did not preach directly that Bolshevism was the best means to achieve economic emancipation but urged the workers that they should be conscious of their needs and, if necessary, should form associations like those in the industrialized countries of Europe in order to realize their demands.³⁷ He pointed out to the workers and labourers the need to have better education, housing, medical treatment and sanitation.³⁸

As a social reformist, Abul Husain felt concerned at the extreme stagnation in the Bengali Muslim community because of its total dependence on religious orthodoxy and social conservatism.³⁹ Bengali Muslims had

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36. Abdul Qadir (ed.) **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 213-219. Also see, Muhammad Abdul Mazid, **Abul Husain**, pp. 39-40. The Communist Party of India was not formed until 1922. Abul Husain was not a member of the Communist Party but was influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and believed collectivisation could improve the conditions of the peasants in Bengal. His book **Banglar Bolshi** (The Bolsheviks of Bengal) was published from Dhaka in 1925. It contained four articles, namely "Banglar Bolshi" (The Bolsheviks of Bengal), "Krishaker Artanad" (The Cries of the Peasants), "Krishaker Durdasha" (The Miseries of the Peasants) and "Krishi Biplaber Suchana" (The Beginning of the Agrarian Revolution), written by him around 1921 and 1922.
37. Abdul Qadir (ed.) **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 218-219.
38. **Ibid.** p. 218.
39. Abul Husain, "Muslim Culture O Uhar Darshonik Bhatti" (Muslim Culture and its Philosophical Base), **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 104-108.

disregarded scientific and rational approach to religious and social issues and had felt alarmed at the introduction of reforms. In the eyes of the **mullahs** (orthodox Muslim priests), those who did not strictly adhere to the **shariah** (Scriptures of the Quran) were not good Muslims. They criticized the English-educated and liberal-minded Muslims for abandoning the ways of the **shariah**. To them those who learnt English and had accepted western ideas, rational thought and the spirit of enlightenment were **kafirs** or infidels.⁴⁰ Abul Husain believed that Islam, as a religion, was based on a rationalistic and humanistic approach to life which taught one to accept new ideas through reason and logic. In this respect, he was a follower of the **Mutazillites** of the ninth century A.D. who believed in freeing Islam from all dogmas. He stressed the need for the Muslims to give up religious fanaticism and advised the youths not to be indoctrinated by the orthodox teachings of the older generation.⁴¹ He wanted the younger generation to take full advantage of modern education and ideas. He noted that **madrassah** education had started in the 1780's for the Muslims in Bengal but the system was so impractical that not a single scholar of repute had come out of these institutions since then.⁴² The reason, of course, was that the **mullahs** and the **maulvis** had taught them to learn Arabic alphabets and the Quran by heart even without knowing the meaning of the verses.⁴³ Abul Husain stressed that **madrassah** education needed to include subjects

40. **Ibid.** p. 104.

41. Abul Husain, "Tarun Muslim" (Muslim Youths), **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 48-49.

42. **Ibid.** p. 51.

43. **Ibid.** p. 52.

like science, philosophy, art and literature, which would introduce young Muslims to modern thought.⁴⁴

Abul Husain and a group of progressive-minded Bengali Muslims like Kazi Anwarul Kadir (1887-1948), Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894-1970), Kazi Motahar Hossain (1897-1981), Abul Fazl (1903-1983), Motahar Hossain Chowdhury (1903-1956) and Abdul Qadir (1906-1984) who formed the **Muslim Shahitya Shamaj** (The Muslim Literary Society) in Dhaka in 1926, came to be known as the "Neo-Mutazillites" because of the rational approach they took to every aspect of life.⁴⁵ They preached economic, political and intellectual emancipation. Their motto was "emancipation of the intellect".⁴⁶ They were against all kinds of fanaticism and conservatism.

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44. **Ibid.** pp. 52-53. Also see, Abul Husain, "Bangali Musalmaner Shiksha Samashya" (The problem of Education faced by the Bengali Muslims), **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp.142-144. **Bangali Musalmaner Shiksha Shamashya** was first published as a book from Dhaka in 1928 (1335 B.S.). See, Muhammad Abdul Mazid, **Abul Husain**, p.43.
45. See, Khondkar Sirajul Huq, **Muslim Shahitya-Shamaj : Shamaj Chinta O Shahitya Karma** (Muslim Literary Society : Social Thought and Literary Works), Dhaka, 1984.
46. **Ibid.** pp. 4-5. They were influenced by Goethe (1749-1832), Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), Derozio (1809-1831), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Mustafa Kamal (1881-1938) and Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) but most significantly by Al-Mamun (786-833 A.D.), the Caliph of Baghdad between 812-833 A.D. who gave a rational interpretation to the Quran. See, Abul Husain, "Al-Mamun", **Joyoti**, 1930 compiled in the **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 251-262.

They formed the "Anti-Purdah League" in Dhaka around 1927 as a protest against the use of veil (**purdah**) by Muslim women. Abul Husain urged the Muslim women to give up **purdah** and to receive both Bengali and English education.⁴⁷ He wrote that **purdah** had made them narrow-minded, dull-headed, illiterate and ignorant in all matters.⁴⁸ In contrast, contemporary women of the Hindu community in Bengal had been receiving education of all kinds, learning music, arts and crafts since the last quarter of the previous century. Abul Husain and the members of the **Muslim Shahitya Shamaj** strongly and outspokenly criticized the vices existing in the Bengali Muslim society which, they observed, was more interested to follow the rituals of Islam rather than analysing the sayings in the **Quran** or the **Hadith** (sayings of Prophet Muhammad).⁴⁹ This group of social reformers pointed out that the Muslim society had sunk to the lowest stage of moral degradation being disrespectful to womenfolk, practising polygamy and living unchaste lives and being lazy and extravagant.⁵⁰ Abul Husain suggested that the Muslims should stop the practice of going to mosques for offering prayers. Because they were so much in sin it was pointless to go to mosques for offering prayers.⁵¹

47. Abul Husain, "Adesher Nigroho" (the Hazards of Advice), **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 71-72.

48. **Ibid.** p. 71.

49. **Ibid.** pp. 60-74.

50. **Ibid.** pp. 63-71.

51. **Ibid.** p. 71.

The **mullahs** reacted strongly to Abul Husain's criticisms that such comments were meant to discredit them in the eyes of the Muslim community.⁵² Abul Husain was denounced by them as an infidel and an enemy of Islam. The orthodox section of the Muslim community in Bengal was such a reactionary force that the attempts of the **Muslim Shahitya Shamaj** to preach the "emanicipation of the intellect" were frustrated. Although this society was short-lived (1926-1936) it made a tremendous impact on the Bengali Muslim intellectuals in the 1920's and in the 1930's. Abul Husain is credited as the dauntless working force behind the movement. He believed in secular nationalism and was a strong supporter of communal harmony.

52. A section of the Muslims, for instance, the aristocracy represented in Eastern Bengal by the *nawabs of the Ahsan Manzil of Dhaka*, publicly criticized the **Sikha** group, as this group of intellectuals were popularly known. They openly chastised Abul Husain for his article, "Adesher Nigroho" (The Hazards of Advice). **The Monthly Mohammadi**, 3rd. year, 2nd. issue. Calcutta, 1929 also criticized that Abul Husain's article had much harmed the Muslim community compared to that done by the Christian missionaries or the Hindu **Arya Samaj**. See, Khondar Sirajul Huq, **Muslim Shahitya Shamaj : Shamaj Chinta O Shahitya Karma**, Op. Cit. pp. 122-128.

S. Wajed Ali (1890-1951)

With the emergence of a Muslim middle class in Bengal by the 1920's a group of young Muslims had begun seriously to think about the upliftment of their community through social and economic reforms. S. Wajed Ali was more concerned with finding a suitable political basis for the Bengali-speaking Muslims and their social and economic development.

S. Wajed Ali was born on 4 September, 1890 in the village of Borotazpur in the district of Hooghly under Srirampur subdivision in West Bengal.¹ He fell a victim to the custom of early marriage and was married at the age of seven.² He was educated in English medium at Shillong where his father was employed. After passing Matriculation (Entrance) examination, he was admitted to the Aligarh Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College. He passed his Intermediate in 1908 and got his Bachelor's degree in 1910. At Aligarh he studied Sanskrit and Urdu but felt that as a Bengali he must learn his mother tongue.³ For two years between 1910-1912 he stayed at Shillong with his wife. In 1912 he left for England to study Bar-at-Law at Cambridge University.⁴

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1. Syed Akram Hossain (ed.) **S. Wajed Ali Rachanabali, Vol. 1.** Dhaka, 1985. p. 569.
 2. **Ibid.** p. 571.
 3. **Ibid.** p. 571. Syed Akram Hossain has given a fairly extensive life-sketch of S. Wajed Ali at the end of volume one of the **Rachanabali.**
 4. **Ibid.** p. 572.

There he married Nelly, a girl from Bristol.⁵ In 1915 he returned to Calcutta with his second wife and was involved in law profession until 1922. In 1923 he was appointed magistrate and started writing articles and stories and also doing some translation works.⁶ During this time his second wife left him. He married for the third time a Burmese girl of royal family. In 1931 his third wife died. S. Wajed Ali retired from his job as magistrate in 1945 and started his law profession again. In 1949 he was paralysed and remained bed-ridden for two years. He died in Calcutta on 10 June, 1951.⁷

S. Wajed Ali started writing in the 1920's with a conscious feeling and a practical political insight for social upliftment of the Bengali Muslim society. He advocated the formation of an autonomous state which would include the Bengali speaking regions. As early as the 1930's he proposed that language was to be the basis of such territorial unit. In the midst of diversity in India, a unity had to be sought and maintained. To S. Wajed Ali a federation of states of India, based on linguistic affinity was the only possible means to keep India united and at the same time allow the various racial and linguistic groups to maintain separate existence.⁸

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5. **Ibid.** p. 572. He did not divorce his first wife, who was in fact, his cousin sister and remained his wife till his death. She had nursed him when he remained paralysed before his death.
 6. **Ibid.** pp. 573-574.
 7. **Ibid.** pp. 579-580.
 8. **Rachanabali, Vol. 1.** p. 14.

S. Wajed Ali was a didactic writer who believed in art for life's sake. His writings were published in various journals such as the **Gullistan**, **Shabuj Patra**, **Bangabani**, **Bharati**, **Saogat**, **Shahityk**, the **Monthly Mohammadi** between 1919 and 1945.⁹ Most of his writings stressed the need for education, economic improvement and rational analysis of the Quranic scriptures.¹⁰ In his early writings he had expressed that religion was the most important factor in a man's life and that the culture of the Bengali Muslims was to be based on their religion.¹¹ In his later writings he modified his opinion and stressed on developing a Bengali culture from a secular point of view.¹²

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9. **Gullistan** was brought out from Calcutta in 1932 and continued to be published till the late 1940's. The journal aimed at Hindu-Muslim unity. Syed Akram Hossain (ed.) **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 575-576. **Bangabani**, first published from Calcutta in 1922. Its editor was Bijoy Chandra Majumdar. **Saogat**, a monthly literary journal, published from Calcutta from 1918 onwards. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Shamaik Patre Jiban O Janamat, 1901-1930** (Public Opinion as Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977. p. 436. **Shahityk**, a monthly literary journal brought out from Calcutta from 1927 onwards, **Ibid.** 447. **Monthly Mohammadi**, literary journal published from Calcutta from 1927 onwards, **Ibid.** pp. 447-448.
10. **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 6-11.
11. **Ibid.** Vol. 2. pp. 118-119, 156, 166-169. Also see, Abdul Huq, "Akjon Bangali Jatiotabadi" (A Bengali Nationalist), **Nishongo Chinto O Annanya Prasanga**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1984, p. 76.
12. **Rachanabai**, Vol. 1. pp. 46-48.

Ideas of the Muslim thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were mostly concerned with religious matters, particularly, past glory of Islam and connection of Indian Muslims with the Islamic world. To most of them Islamic culture, however, meant non-Indian and non-Bengali Muslim culture. Abdur Rahim (1859-1931), Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed (1862-1933) and Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji (1880-1931) were Pan-Islamists and believed in maintaining a religious code of life according to the *Sharia* (principles of Islam). S. Wajed Ali, on the contrary, gave importance to education, economic development and tolerance to other religious communities. These, according to him were the pre-requisites for the development of the Bengali Muslims. S. Wajed Ali directed his writings against the conservatism existing among most Bengali Muslims and the orthodoxy of the *maulvis*. He spoke strongly against religious fanaticism, which he pointed out, hindered communal harmony in the province.¹³

S. Wajed Ali attempted to make the Bengali Muslims conscious of their shortcomings and the necessity to promote their socio-political and economic development. In his article, "Religion and Society" he clearly pointed out that religious ideas must be co-ordinated in accordance with the transformation of the society.¹⁴ Considering that human life and society is fast changing he stressed on the need for re-interpretation of Islam in order to make it suitable for practical purpose.¹⁵ He maintained that human

13. *Ibid.* p. 491.

14. *Ibid.* p. 479.

15. *Ibid.* p. 479.

beings cannot live by completely discarding religion and for that reason religion must be made suitable to the needs of time. Religion must be given a scientific and rational analysis so that it could come to positive use. In this respect he went further to say that religion must be separated from politics. A nineteenth century thinker and social reformer, Delwar Hossain Ahmed (1840-1913) who was a forerunner of similar idea, had urged the Muslims of Bengal to discard such rules of Islam which did not directly relate to practical life and stressed on the need to disassociate religion from politics.¹⁶ Abul Husain (1897-1938) a contemporary of S. Wajed Ali, and a radical social reformist in the 1920's believed that Islam was a synthesis of all religions and maintained that Islam must be made suitable to the needs of time through a rational interpretation of the **shariah**.¹⁷

Educated at institutions like Aligarh Mohommedan Anglo-Oriental College, Allahabad University and Cambridge, S. Wajed Ali was acquainted with modern liberal ideas.¹⁸ Among Muslim literateurs and social thinkers in Bengal in the early decades of the twentieth century S. Wajed Ali had the

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16. See, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, **Bangladesh : Tradition and Transformation**, Dhaka, 1987. p. 73.
 17. See, Khondkar Sirajul Huq, **Muslim Shahitya-Shamaj : Shamaj-Chinta O Shahitya Karma** (Muslim Literary Society : Literary Thought and Literary Works), Dhaka, 1984. p. 398.
 18. See, **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 571-72. Also see, Abdul Kadir, "S. Wajed Ali", **Uttaradhikar, Bangla Academy Patrika**, Dhaka, March-April, 1977.

rare advantage of education at European institutions. He had gathered knowledge of both north Indian and European cultures, social customs, economic conditions and religious beliefs of various nationalities. He noticed that the Muslims of Bengal were suffering from severe economic, social and political crises. Economically they were distressed, politically weak and mostly illiterate. Of the total population of Bengal in the 1930's, 59% were Muslims, two-thirds of which were peasants having little or no education. Compared to the Muslims of northern India, those in Bengal were illiterate and poverty-stricken. S. Wajed Ali suggested that the Muslims of Bengal could overcome their problems if only they could begin to look to the future.¹⁹ He urged them to cut off all connections with the past. He pointed out that Turkey was also a Muslim state but had severed its connections from the Arab countries and had made radical reforms for the development of the country.²⁰ S. Wajed Ali believed that Bengali Muslims also needed to disassociate themselves from the rest of the Arab world and at the same time from the rest of India in order to make an independent effort to enhance economic and social development.²¹ To his opinion, the main reason for the Bengali Muslims to remain backward was their emotional links with the Middle Eastern Muslim countries, particularly Turkey and their love for the past.²²

19. See, **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 37-38.

20. **Ibid.** p. 37.

21. **Ibid.** p. 38.

22. **Ibid.** p. 37.

Nationalist feeling was more or less absent among Muslims in India. They harped more on their extra-territorial feelings rather than on their Indian or Bengali nationhood. S. Wajed Ali spoke against pan-Islamism and the extra-territorial leanings of the Muslims.²³ He wrote,

We want Islam as a religion but ideas of Khilafat and Pan-Islamism are extinct now as an effective policy for statecraft. There is no longer any spirit left in those movements. The independent Muslim states are more inclined to ideas of nationalism. If we still try to hold on to such ideas of the past, we are sure to fall back in our cultural and political attempts.²⁴

Some of the Bengali Muslim thinkers who were contemporaries of S. Wajed Ali had joined the Khilafat movement (1919-1924). Mohammad Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950) for instance, although a nationalist, supported the movement for the protection of the Caliphate.²⁵ Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed was distressed at the abolition of the Caliphate and disliked the modernization initiated by Mustafa Kamal of Turkey.²⁶ S. Wajed Ali, on the other hand, declared that it was foolish on the part of the

22. *Ibid.* p. 37.

23. *Ibid.* p. 13.

24. *Ibid.* p. 13. (Translation done by me from the original Bengali.)

25. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manash O Bangla Shahitya* (Muslim Mind and Bengali Literature), Muktadhara, Dhaka, 1983. p. 296.

26. *Ibid.* p. 286.

Muslims in Bengal to harp on their past glory. He wrote,
Past is the infancy of human civilization.
Infants are to be loved, not respected. One
can love the past but it would be foolish
to be a slave to it.²⁷

S. Wajed Ali's suggestions to the Bengali Muslims expressed his concern for the community, his foresightedness and his pragmatism.

S. Wajed Ali attempted to evoke patriotic feeling in the minds of the Bengali Muslims. He pointed out that there was none among them to make them conscious of a national identity or to inspire patriotism in them. He mentioned that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1836-1894) had borrowed the idea of patriotism and nationalism from English literature and had infused these ideas among the Bengali Hindus.²⁸ In northern India there were men like Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926) and Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) who had evoked in the minds of the Muslims of India love for the past glory of Islam and the idea of pan-Islamism.²⁹ Iqbal had demanded the creation of a separate state for the Muslims of India and had proposed the formation of such a state comprising the Punjab, North West Frontier Province, Sindh

27. See, *Rachanabali*, Vol. 1. p. 77. (This is a literal translation from the original Bengali).

28. *Ibid.* pp. 12-13.

29. *Ibid.* p. 13.

and Baluchistan, either under the British government or independent.³⁰

S. Wajed Ali noted that Iqbal had completely left out Bengal from such possible arrangement. S. Wajed Ali did not think that Iqbal was communal but his ideas had contributed to the growth of communalism in India, if not directly, by advocating "two-nation" theory on which the partition of India had taken place in 1947.³¹ According to S.Wajed Ali, none among the Muslims either in Bengal or in India contributed to the growth of patriotism.³² He pointed out that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had been credited for introducing patriotic feeling among Hindus but his excessive inclination towards giving religious connotation to patriotism contributed to the growth of communalism in Bengal.³³

S. Wajed Ali was more concerned with the separate cultural and linguistic existence of the Bengali people. For the Muslims of Bengal he suggested that pan-Islamism was unnecessary and spoke for the formation of a separate state in order to bring the distinct features of Bengali nation to

30. **Ibid.** p. 12. Also see, Peter Hardy, **The Muslims of British India**, Cambridge University Press, London, 1972. p. 176.

31. **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. p. 13. Also see, C.M. Naim (ed.) **Iqbal, Jinnah and Pakistan - The Vision and the Reality**, Syracuse University, New York, 1979. p. 54.

32. **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. p. 12.

33. **Ibid.** p. 13 .

the limelight.³⁴ He clearly declared that religion was not the basis for such distinction. Pointing out the distinct identity of the Muslims of Bengal he wrote,

Bengali Muslims carry the blood of foreigners
and the indigenous people, the blood of the
Aryans and the non -Aryans. ----- We must
feel pride in accepting this fact and keep in mind
that we are all Bengalees now.³⁵

S. Wajed Ali believed that the distinctiveness of the Bengalees lay in the fact that the nation emerged from a mixture of Dravidians, Aryans, Mongols and Semitic races through centuries which resulted in the formation of the present Bengali race.³⁶ Considering the racial and linguistic affinity S.Wajed Ali maintained that Bengal fulfilled the requisites for an independent state, either autonomous or within a federation.³⁷ He also declared that for the Muslims of Bengal, East Bengal was the centre for their hope.³⁸ The idea of creating an autonomous Bengali state in the eastern half of Bengal was not thought of in the 1930's. It was after four

34. **Ibid.** p. 14.

35. **Ibid.** p. 34. (Translation has been done from the original Bengali).

36. **Ibid.** pp. 35, 281.

37. **Ibid.** p. 14. Also see, Sir Francis Wylie, "Federal Negotiations in India 1935-39 and After", Philips and Wainwright (ed.) **The Partition of India : Policies and Perspectives 1935-47**, Allen and Unwin, London, 1970. pp. 518-522.

38. **Rachanabali, Vol. 1.** pp. 14, 32, 35.

decades that his idea came to reality in 1971 when an independent state was created in the eastern half of Bengal. S. Wajed Ali was probably the first among Bengali Muslims to make a definite suggestion of the possibility for East Bengal to emerge as a separate political, cultural and economic unit.

In the 1930's and the 1940's demand for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India on the basis of "two-nation" theory gained popularity. A communal fervour was also running high. In the midst of such communal tension a section of contemporary Bengali Muslim intellectuals had supported an all-India nationalist movement and had strongly demanded that India should remain united. Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894-1970) and Abul Husain (1897-1938), for instance, differed with S. Wajed Ali on the question of nationalism. They did not accept the idea of creating language - based state either within or outside the federation of India and actually had the least interest in implementing the idea of federation. Kazi Abdul Wadud stated that India comprised various linguistic and racial entities and together they formed Indian nation.³⁹ He never supported a nationalism based on language or religion. Abul Husain, on the other hand, believed that in a single political framework there could be several societies but not several states.⁴⁰ S. Wajed Ali, on the contrary, declared that in India federation of

39. See, Khondkar Sirajul Huq, **Muslim Shahitya Shamaj, Op. Cit.** p.322.

40. See, Abdul Qadir (ed.) **Abul Husain Rachanabali** (Complete Works of Abul Husain), Bangla Academy ^{Dhaka} rpt. 1976. pp. 19 - 20.

states was the only workable alternative to maintain unity among diverse religious and ethnic communities. He maintained that religion must be dissociated from politics and language was to be made the basis of unity among existing communities in each province. He believed that geographical boundry should be maintained according to each linguistic unit.⁴¹

Bengali Muslim intellectuals also differed in their opinion relating to the use of Bengali language which was a dominant issue since the 1920's. The question whether Bengali or Urdu was to be the language of the Muslims of Bengal was a controversial issue among the Muslims in Bengal since the late nineteenth century. Kazi Abdul Wadud, Abul Husain and others declared that Bengali was to be the vernacular of the Muslims of the province and stressed on the development of Bengali language and literature.⁴² Earlier, Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmad (1862-1933), Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji (1880-1931) and others had expressed opinions in

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41. See, **S. Wajed Ali Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 292, 315. In **Bhabishwater Bangali** (The Future Bengalis), S. Wajed Ali wrote about the need to form a language-based unit and the formation of a federation of states in India and at the same time maintained strongly that only a federation of states would keep India united and also help to retain communal harmony. **Ibid.** pp. 314-315.
42. See, Anisuzzaman, **Muslim Manash O Bangla Shahitya**, **Op. Cit.** Op.323. Also see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Shamaik Patre Jibon O Janamat**, **Op. Cit.** pp. 312-322. Extracts from various journals during the early decades of the twentieth century reveal opinions in this respect.

favour of Arabic language.⁴³ Stressing on the imagined links of the Bengali Muslims with the Arab world they stated that Arabic was to be the language of the Muslims.⁴⁴ S. Wajed Ali, on the other hand, was of opinion that Bengali language was to be the mothertongue of the people of Bengal although the use of some Arabic, Persian and Urdu words was natural.⁴⁵ In this respect, he considered it unnecessary to make an issue out of the language question.⁴⁶

S. Wajed Ali made critical observations on the backwardness of the Bengali Muslims. He stated that Bengali Muslims were unreasonably accusing the British government and the Hindu community for their own political immaturity and economic backwardness.⁴⁷ Their problem, in fact, lay in their illiteracy, aversion to English education, absence of a strong and enlightened leadership and lack of political awareness.⁴⁸ In fact, most political leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries like Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928) had not been successfully able to disseminate their progressive ideas among ordinary Bengalees.⁴⁹ These upper-class Urdu-speaking Muslim leaders had failed

43. See, Anisuzzaman, **Ibid.** p. 286-287.

44. **Ibid.** p. 286. Also see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Op. Cit.** pp. 324-327.

45. See, **S. Wajed Ali Rachanabali, Vol. 1.** pp. 129-134.

46. **Ibid.** p. 134.

47. **Ibid.** pp. 50-51.

48. **Ibid.** pp. 50-51.

49. See, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, **Op. Cit.** pp. 45-47.

to give an effective leadership to the Bengali Muslim community because they wrote in English and spoke Urdu which prevented necessary communication between them and the ordinary Muslims.⁵⁰ S. Wajed Ali pointed out that among the Bengali Hindus there were social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) who had contributed greatly to the religious and political consciousness of their community.⁵¹ The saddest thing was that there was no such Muslim leader among Bengalees to make them conscious of their distinct identity.⁵² There had been religious reformers among Muslims in Bengal in the early and mid-nineteenth century but their movement increased fundamentalism rather than creating the scope for non-communal politics. Although in rural Bengal ordinary Muslims were little influenced by religious revivalism, poverty and lack of education had created religious conservatism and social backwardness. However, a social reformist and political leader, like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) emerged in the later half of the nineteenth century who had contributed greatly to the progress of the Muslim community in northern India but there was none among the Bengali Muslims to make a similar awakening.⁵³

50. **Rachanabali**, p. 51. Also see, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, **Op. Cit.** pp.46-47, 48.

51. See, **S. Wajed Ali Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. p. 51.

52. **Ibid.** p. 52. Also see, Anisuzzaman, **Op. Cit.** pp. 344-345.

53. See, **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 66-67.

S. Wajed Ali attracted much attention as a social and political thinker in the decades after partition in 1947. His didactic and analytical writings expressed concern for the welfare of the Muslim community in Bengal. He was not actively associated with any political party and as such he failed to make an impact. Muslim community in Bengal was in a state of confusion as to what would be the right course for their future political existence. S. Wajed Ali had made suggestions which contained practical and positive implications but the contemporary politicians failed to appreciate his ideas. The creation of a language-based regional or provincial nationalism advocated by him remained a possible alternative to the existing dominant trend of separatism. In the years just before partition in 1947, a handful of Bengali-speaking politicians unsuccessfully carried out attempts to create a greater Bengal comprising eastern and western Bengal and to make it an autonomous state. They had based their logic for such a demand on linguistic unity. However, only a couple of decades later, in 1971, Bengali Muslims found a political solution to the controversy over language between the Bengali and the non-Bengali Muslims in Pakistan. The Bengali-speaking Muslims of the then eastern wing of Pakistan based secessionist movement on their distinct linguistic and cultural identity. The creation of an independent Bangladesh in 1971 proved that linguistic and cultural nationalism was much stronger than religious nationalism. It also proved that the Bengali Muslims had preferred to choose secularism rather than the path of religious separatism.

(This is a revised version of the paper read by me in Bengali at the seminar arranged by the Centre for Advanced Research in Humanities, Dhaka University in 1986.)

Shamsuddin Ahmed (1889-1969)

Shamsuddin Ahmed was a Bengali Muslim politician of the front rank in the three decades before partition of India in 1947. In his early life he was a Congressman and had joined the Khilafat and non-co-operation movement.¹ He was the Secretary of the Provincial Khilafat Committee and also the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee from 1921 to 1925 when C.R.Das (1870-1925) was its President.² Shamsuddin Ahmed was an ardent follower of Das. He had supported the Bengal Pact of 1923 and had all through his political life believed in communal harmony. He was a secular nationalist politician. After he left Congress in 1929 he did not join the Muslim League which was then the organization luring the young educated Muslims. Shamsuddin Ahmed joined the **Nikhil Banga Proja Samity**, a non-communal organization formed in July 1929 and became one of its joint secretaries.³ He remained a staunch supporter of the peasant cause as long as he remained in politics. When in 1936, the **Nikhil Banga Proja Samity** and the **Bengal Proja Party** merged together to form the **Krishak Proja Party**, Shamsuddin Ahmed was elected its

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1. Humaira Momen, **A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937**, Dacca, 1972, pp. 89
 2. *Ibid.* p. 89. Also see, **Charitavidhan (A Dictionary of Biography)**, Bangla Academy, Dacca, 1985, p. 246.
 3. This organization was formed under the leadership of Maulana Akram Khan. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh**, Dacca, 1987. pp. 32-33. Humaira Momen, *Op.Cit.* p. 89.

Secretary.⁴ He had joined the Muslim League in 1944 but he never gave up his commitment to secularism and the interest of the peasantry. He remained in the Muslim League as a left-wing member of the party defending the ideals of the **Krishak Proja Party** and improving the conditions of the peasants and workers.

Shamsuddin Ahmed was born in August 1889 at Sultanpur village under Kumarkhali thana in Kushtia, formerly the district of Nadia.⁵ He

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4. The Bengali Muslims who had been in the Congress had left the party and formed two separate organizations both on tenant's agenda, one under the leadership of Maulana Akram Khan, the other under A.K. Fazlul Huq. Those Muslim members who were outside the Bengal Legislative Council joined Akram Khan's group. Shamsuddin Ahmed was in this group. When the two organizations merged together before the 1937 elections, the nature of leadership and **Krishak Proja** politics had changed a lot. See, Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Cit.* pp. 32-33; 47-48. Also see, Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar* (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It), Dacca, 2nd ed. 1970. pp. 61; 64-65; 111-112. And also see, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims : A Study in their politicization (1912-1929)*, Calcutta, 1991. pp. 221-223.
 5. See, Humaira Momen, *Op. Ct.* p. 89. and *Charitavidhan*, p. 246. Also see, Mohammad Amjad Hossain, "A Forgotten Genius in Politics : Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Friday, 3 November, 1995. The article was published on the occasion of the 26th. death anniversary of Shamsuddin Ahmed.

passed his matriculation from Hooghly Collegiate school in 1910, graduated from Presidency College, Calcutta and obtained both Masters in History and Law Degree from the Calcutta University in 1916.⁶ He then began to practice at Krishnanagar district court in 1917 and at the Calcutta High Court in 1919.⁷ He was under the juniorship of C.R.Das, a leading barrister of Calcutta at that time and the leader of the left-wing of the Congress.⁸

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6. See, Humaira Momen, **Op. Cit.** p. 89. **Charitavidhan**, p. 246. Also see, **The Daily Star**, Dhaka, 3 November, 1995.
 7. It has been mentioned in both the **Charitavidhan**, p. 246 and Humaira Momen, **Op. Cit.** p. 89 that Shamsuddin Ahmed started to practice at the Calcutta High Court in 1917 but the author of the article in the **Daily Star** mentioned the year 1919. Most probably he practiced at both the courts simultaneously.
 8. C.R.Das was the founder of the Swaraj Party in 1922. He played a dominant role in Congress politics in Bengal between 1920 and 1925 and was very much anti-Gandhian. See, Leonard A. Gordon, **Bengal, The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940**, New Delhi, 1974. pp. 165-166; 191-193. Although C.R.Das lived in Calcutta, he was a native of Dacca district in eastern Bengal. Das was in prison for sometime in 1921-1922 for anti-British demonstration during the non-co-operation movement. He was released from jail in August, 1922 and from then onwards formed a political strategy of his own. He had formed the Swaraj Party in December 1922 and came to be known as the Swarajists or the "Pro-Changers" who wanted to enter the Bengal Legislative Council and 'wreck the government from within'. In 1923 Das formed the "Bengal Pact" which gave economic and political concessions to the Muslims of Bengal. In a Muslim majority province Das felt, to gain a powerful position he needed the support of the Muslims. But there were criticisms of the pact and both Gandhi and the Congress High Command did not accept it. **Ibid.** pp. 195-197.

Shamsuddin Ahmed got involved in politics in 1919 and participated in the Khilafat and non-co-operation movement.⁹ The Campaigns carried out by the Bengali Khilafatists was strong in the districts.¹⁰ It was during this time that Shamsuddin Ahmed boycotted courts and resigned from the membership of the District Board of Nadia and also decided to boycott foreign clothes and began to wear hand-woven **Khadi**.¹¹ On the eve of the arrival of the Prince of Wales in December 1921 Shamsuddin Ahmed was arrested among others, in Calcutta for anti-British demonstrations.¹² This showed the extent of his participation in the non-co-operation movement. After his release he got actively involved in the non-co-operation movement again, particularly in the Nadia district. He had strong connection with the religious and social leadership among the Muslim peasantry and was able to make a successful propaganda in favour of the non-co-operation movement.¹³

9. Humaira Momen, *Op. Cit.* pp. 89-90.

10. See, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Op. Cit.* p. 106.

11. It was during the Swadeshi movement (1905-1908) and later during the Khilafat and non-co-operation movements that use of **Swadeshi** i.e. home-made products and boycott of foreign goods were adopted as one of the measures of demonstration against the British government. See, Leonard A. Gordon, *Op. Cit.* pp. 184-186.

12. See, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Ibid.* p. 121. He was kept in Alipore jail, Calcutta. See, *The Daily Star*, 3 November, 1995.

13. See, Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947 : The Land Question*, Calcutta, 1984. p. 65.

Shamsuddin Ahmed was a follower of Congress ideology and more particularly, of C.R.Das. He was closely associated with the "Bengal Pact" formulated by Das in 1923 with a view to making Hindu-Muslim relation a cordial one. The "Bengal Pact" assured the provision for reservation of 60% of all new appointments for the Muslims till such time as they achieved proper representation according to population.¹⁴ Similar terms were offered in respect of the Calcutta Corporation where 80% of new appointments were to be reserved.¹⁵ These the Congress would provide to the Muslims if it came to power in Bengal. It was a deal which, though primarily a political one, was apparently considered one to forge communal harmony. Many Muslims supported Das and his Swarajist Party.¹⁶ Shamsuddin Ahmed had supported the "Bengal Pact" but after the death of Das in June 1925 communal relation in Bengal worsened.¹⁷ Both Congress and Bengali Muslim leaders failed to come to compromise on issues concerned or to contain the communal rivalry. After Das's death fruitless meetings took place between 1926 and 1928 where the Bengali Muslims and the Congress

14. Leonard A.Gordon, *Op. Ct.* p. 195.

15. *Ibid.* p. 195.

16. *Ibid.* p. 195. It is significant to note that in the Bengal Legislative Council Muslim Swarajists constituted more than 50% of the members. Even some Muslim members who were not Swarajists supported Das on several issues. Das was, in fact, popular among Muslims of Bengal and of other provinces as well.

17. See, Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Ct.* p. 27. Also see, Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi, 1976. pp. 58-59.

leaders met to discuss issues particularly like the Muslim share of jobs in public service and the question of separate electorates.¹⁸ The formation of the Simon Commission in 1927 excluding any Indian in it had caused deep resentment among political leaders in Bengal. Both the Congress and the Muslim League leaders decided to boycott the Commission but such decision created factions among the Swarajists in the Legislative Council and also among the major section of the Bengali Muslim leaders.¹⁹ There were, however, efforts to revive the "Bengal Pact" but those failed.²⁰ In 1928 the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill brought division among the pro-peasant and the pro-landlord Swarajists, as well as among the Hindu and Muslim leaders outside the Council.²¹ Communal solidarity forged, though

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18. See, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Op. Cit.* pp. 213, 219. C.R.Das had accepted separate electorates in the Pact. *Ibid.* p. 213.
19. *Ibid.* pp. 210-212. The Conservatives and the loyalists among the Muslims were of opinion that boycotting the Commission would not bring any gains for them. At the same time, Bengali Muslims in the Council began to lose confidence on the Swarajist leaders. *Ibid.* pp. 211-212.
20. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Op. Cit.* pp. 59-61.
21. *Ibid.* pp. 60-61. Also see, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Op. Cit.* pp. 213-216. It is essential to note that not only the Hindu **zamindars** or the pro-Congress leaders voted against the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill of 1928, there were many among Muslims who also opposed the bill. The entire House, except nine members of which eight were Muslims, voted against the motion. However, several pro-peasant Muslims voted against the bill because it did not include the **bargadars** in the category of tenants. See, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Ibid.* p. 215.

temporarily, by the "Bengal Pact" had clearly broken off by 1928.²² It is essential to note that taking advantage of the anti-peasant attitude of the Hindu landlords, the Muslim fanatical **mullahs** attempted to foment anti-Hindu feeling in the districts and the **mofussil** areas, kindling fire to the grievances of the peasants and creating agrarian tension.²³ The price of jute had fallen in 1920-1921 and again after 1927. Constant tension, therefore, prevailed between the Muslim peasants in the jute-growing districts in eastern Bengal and the **mahajans** (the money-lenders) and **beparis** (the retail traders).²⁴ To mention the extent of communal tension it is interesting to note that while Shamsuddin was an ardent advocate of communal harmony his own home-town, Kushtia was affected by communal tension. Shamsuddin's brother, Afsaruddin Ahmed, a religious preacher by profession, was believed to be behind all local communal agitation in Kushtia.²⁵ He used to deliver provoking speeches at public meetings

22. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Op. Cit.* p. 61.

23. Partha Chatterjee, "Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal, 1926-1935", Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies 1*. New Delhi, 1982. (paperback, 1986) pp. 19-22.

24. Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Op. Cit.* pp. 167-168.

25. See, Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Op. Cit.* pp. 21-22. Afsaruddin Ahmed reminded the Muslims of incidents during the riots and the after-riot effect. The Hindus had refused to transact business with Muslims; they boycotted Muslim carters and Muslim carriage-drivers after the 1926 riots. The Marwari traders also boycotted Muslim dyers, bandsmen, coachmen and syces (grooms to take care of horses, look after household, etc.). *Ibid.* p. 21.

inciting communal hatred against the Hindus.²⁶ The fact that the two brothers of the same family chose to take divergent paths highlighted the two distinct trends in Muslim politics in Bengal since the 1920's. Political influence of Congress and the Muslim League had not reached the villages yet. **Mullahs** in the villages acted as local leaders and in many cases incited communal agitation. Although communal relation in the district level had been generally peaceful the Hindu-landlord-**mahajan** and Muslim-peasant symbiosis had started to break down by the 1920's. Rise of the Muslim

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26. Ranajit Guha (ed.) **Subaltern Studies 1**, New Delhi, paperback ed. 1986, pp. 21-22. Also see, Partha Chatterjee, **Bengal, 1920-1947 : The Land Question**, Op. Cit. p. 131. The exact speech made by Afsaruddin Ahmed on 28 February 1927 in Kushtia is quoted here in English translation and in Bengali on p. 244n. Some portion of the speech has been extracted here to show the example of language and emotion Afsaruddin Ahmed used to incite the Muslims against the Hindus.

Musalman of Kushtia : you are poor, but do you realise what your position has become ? Do you know what the Hindus of Kushtia are doing ? They are trying to cripple the labourers, trying to starve the Muslims to death. During the disturbances in Calcutta not one Hindu shopkeeper sold anything to a Muslim. You did not pay heed then. Now look at what's happening to you You slaughter and eat your own cow and they bring charges against you. The Hindus take their idols in front of you, but nothing happens to them..... .

The effect of the 1926 riots was great and had affected both the communities deeply.

middle class and the growing demand for jobs in the towns heightened communal tension. The peasant-landlord relation also at times took communal turn. Clamour for Pakistan or for partition of India came much later in the villages, not until 1945 and 1946. Worsening of communal relation, in fact, and the failure to get the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) bill through, totally disillusioned the pro-Congress, or the "nationalist" Muslims, as they were called.²⁷ Most of them had left the Congress by early 1929 and had formed non-communal organizations to represent peasant demands but essentially to counter the Congress.²⁸

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27. See, Syed Serajul Islam, "Bengal Legislative Assembly And Constitutional Development" in Sirajul Islam (ed.) **History of Bangladesh, 1704-1971, Vol. 1.** Dhaka, 1992. p. 291. Also see, Chandiprasad Sarkar, **Op. Cit.** p. 222. And, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** p. 61. Those who left the Congress were Maulana Akram Khan, Sir Abdur Rahim, Maulvi Abdul Karim, Dr. Abdullah Suhrawardy, Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin and others who formed **The Nikhil Banga Proja Samity** and others who joined A.K. Fazlul Huq were Tamizuddin Khan, Azizul Haque and Shah Abdul Hamid. They formed **The Bengal Proja Party.**
28. The peasant organizations were led by middle class and upper middle-class men and even included landlords. Their attempt was to launch non-communal **proja** movement. The Hindus, who were mostly **zamindars** and **mahajans** called the movement a communal one. See, Chandiprasad Sarkar, **Op. Cit.** p. 225 and Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** p. 164. Also see, Humayun Kabir, **Muslim politics (1906-1942),** Calcutta, 1944. pp. 9-10. The author, himself a prominent politician of the time, mentioned that after the death of C.R.Das and the failure of the civil disobedience movement the Muslims lost confidence on the Congress.

Shamsuddin Ahmed was strongly committed to **proja** interest even before these organizations were formed. Earlier, in 1925 he had led the cause of the tenants at the All-Bengal **proja** Conference held at Bogra on 7 and 8 February.²⁹ As President of the Conference he demanded limiting the rate of interest on loans incurred by the tenants to the **mahajans**, granting occupancy rights to tenants and introducing free compulsory education in rural districts.³⁰ The demands did not, however, include those of the **bargadars**, i.e. the lower strata of the peasantry. Shamsuddin Ahmed represented the left-wing of the **Krishak Proja Party** but how far socialist he was remains a question. Shamsuddin Ahmed was also involved in trade union movement to some extent. In 1928, he mediated in resolving the workers' strike in Tata Company at Jamshedpur and succeeded in realizing the demands of the workers. During this time he was offered Vice-Presidentship of the Workers' Union of Tata Company.³¹ In the three decades before partition Shamsuddin Ahmed was actively involved in both labour movement and in the left-wing of the **Krishak Proja Party**.³² He came from Kushtia, then a well-known centre of revolutionary activities. Jatin Mukherjee (1883-1915), popularly known as **Bagha Jatin** ("Jatin, the

29. See, Chandiprasad Sarkar, *Op. Cit.* pp. 172-173.

30. *Ibid.* pp. 172-173.

31. *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 3 November, 1995.

32. Rangalal Sen, *Political Elites in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1986. p. 38. The author notes that Shamsuddin Ahmed acted as a Vice-President of the Labour Union led by Subhas Chandra Bose.

tiger"), came from Kushtia and made it a centre for his terrorist activities.³³ The district of Nadia was also an active centre of Subhas chandra Bose and the ex-revolutionaries who had joined the Congress in the 1920's and the 1930's.³⁴ Both C.R.Das and Subhas Chandra Bose had strong support for them.³⁵ Shamsuddin Ahmed came from such a political environment that was radical and revolutionary. Socialist and communist ideas had also began to spread in Bengal by early 1920's. The emerging Muslim middle class was restive and was getting associated with left ideas. A radical trend was strongly visible and Shamsuddin Ahmed was not left out of this influence.³⁶

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33. See, Leonard A. Gordon, **Op. Cit.** p.141. Jatin was an extremist leader and worked actively in his home district. He had led the **Jugantar Party** (1906), a terrorist organization, till his death in 1915. Also see, **Charitavidhan**, p. 220.
34. See, Leonard A. Gordon, **Op. Cit.** p. 250.
35. **Ibid.** p. 250. Subhas Chandra Bose had strong support in the districts of Nadia, Midnapur and the 24 Parganas of eastern Bengal. The Congress also had made Nadia a strong base for its activities by the 1920's. Kushtia was in Nadia district. **Ibid.** p. 30.
36. Rangalal Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 34. The Communist Party was born in India in 1921. The All-India Trade Union was formed a year before, in 1920. The young Bengalees, Hindus and Muslims alike, were getting attracted to socialist ideas. Fazul Huq had been associated with the leftists in his early life. Muzaffar Ahmad and Kazi Nazrul Islam were prominent among Muslims to spread socialist and communist ideas. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Banglar Madhyabitter Attabikash** (The emergence of the middle class in Bengal), Vol. 1. Dhaka, 1975. pp. 75-76.

Subsequently his activities in the **Krisahak Proja Party** and his role in A.K. Fazlul Huq's cabinet marked him distinctly as a left-wing politician.

Shamsuddin Ahmed had joined **The Nikhil Banga Proja Samity** in 1929 under the leadership of Maulana Akram Khan, who soon had allied himself with the Khwaja brothers and had adopted a right-wing position for his own political strategy. Shamsuddin had joined the **Krishak Proja Party** in 1936 under Fazlul Huq's leadership hoping to carry out progressive measures in the interest of the peasants. But, the **K.P.P.** though formed to safeguard the peasant's rights was, in fact, formed as a rival party to the Muslim League and also the Congress to contest the ensuing elections.³⁷ Shamsuddin Ahmed completely dissociated himself from the Khwaja brothers and from the right-wing politics in Bengal. He was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937 as a **K.P.P.** candidate. Fazlul Huq had formed his ministry in February 1937 in coalition with the Muslim League. Of the eleven members in Huq's ministry only three were from the **K.P.P.** - one being Huq, the Chief Minister, the other two being Shamsuddin Ahmed and Syed Nausher Ali.³⁸ Shamsuddin Ahmed had

37. See, Rangalal Sen, *Op. Cit.* p. 38. Shila Sen, *Op. Cit.* pp. 78-79. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, **A Socio-Political History of Bengal**, Dhaka, 1967. (4th. ed. 1975). pp. 33.

38. Shila Sen, *Ibid.* pp. 93-94. Shamsuddin Ahmed was one of the important personalities of the **K.P.P.** He was the Secretary of the party. He emerged victorious in the elections from Kushtia (Nadia) constituency. See, Humaira Momen, *Op. Cit.* pp. 66, 90.

represented the left-wing of the K.P.P. and had demanded from the beginning that the ministry should fulfil the election pledges and he particularly demanded the abolition of **zamindari** without compensation. This was the bone of contention which brought a rift both in the K.P.P. and in the cabinet. Shamsuddin's position was similar to that of Syed Nausher Ali in this respect. Both were progressive in their demands. Shamsuddin had left the cabinet in protest while, Syed Nausher Ali was forced to resign in 1938. Shamsuddin, however, joined the cabinet in November, 1938.³⁹

Fazlul Huq had joined the Muslim League on 15 October, 1937. He needed the support of the Muslim League more than the K.P.P. at this stage for his political existence. Because of his left leanings Shamsuddin Ahmed was not included in the cabinet and in his place Nawab Musharraf Hossain (1871-1966), a landlord and a tea magnate from Jalpaiguri, north Bengal was made the minister in charge of the Judicial and Legislative department.⁴⁰ The Khwaja brothers who represented the right-wing of the

39. See, Shila Sen, **Ibid.** p. 94. Enayetur Rahim, **Provincial Autonomy in Bengal (1937-1943)**, Rajshahi, 1981. pp. 130, 132-133, 142-145.

40. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 142-143. Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh**, pp. 91-93. The dropping of Shamsuddin Ahmed was done at the advice of Governor Sir John Anderson. Fazlul Huq had projected such view just as an excuse for keeping him out of the cabinet. **Ibid.** p. 93. In fact, Huq's attitude in 1937 was more accomodating and compromising to the Muslim League particularly. **Ibid.** p. 94. Also see, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 94. See, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Madhayabitter Attabikash, Vol. 1.** p. 104. In the 1937 elections Nawab Musharraf Hossain contested as an independent candidate. Harun-or-Rashid, **Ibid.** p. 91.

Muslim League and the European group alike considered Shamsuddin Ahmed a person of "extreme views".⁴¹ He was also considered as one of the disloyal K.P.P. members who had plotted with Congress to wreck the Huq ministry.⁴² Shamsuddin Ahmed was a genuine supporter of the **krishak proja** interest and, therefore, he was asked to resign which he first refused, then did with 21 other left-wingers of the **Proja Samity** on 1 September, 1937.⁴³ They had defected on grounds of betrayal to the election pledges made by Fazlul Huq. They had criticized Huq for several reasons, for not attempting to release the political prisoners which, of course, was a Congress demand, not reducing the salary of ministers and above all, for not adopting measures radical enough, for instance, abolition of **zamindari** without compensation.⁴⁴ However, their defection was a relief to both Huq

41. Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p.93.

42. **Ibid.** pp. 92-93. His position was similar to that of Syed Nausher Ali because both of them were hardliners in respect of **proja** programmes and non-communal in attitude.

43. See, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 98-99. Enayetur Rahim, **Op. Cit.** pp. 132-133. Shamsuddin Ahmed was the Secretary of the K.P.P. Keeping him out of the cabinet was a matter of great distrust on Huq and indignation from other members. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 144-145. Others who left with Shamsuddin Ahmed in September 1937 were leaders like Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Abu Hossain Sarkar, Ghyasuddin Ahmed, Nawabzada Hasan Ali and others. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p.94.

44. Enayetur Rahim, **Op. Cit.** p. 132.

and the European community. Governor Sir John Anderson had not liked Shamsuddin Ahmed at all and had accused him of leading anti-state agitations on several occasions.⁴⁵ He was considered a "recalcitrant element" for his radical views.⁴⁶ He was also blamed to split the **Krishak proja Party**.⁴⁷ The landlords and the European group were, however, happy because they had not wanted the drastic tenancy bills to be passed. Absence of Shamsuddin Ahmed from the ministry stopped that "avalanche" they had feared. This was the opinion of the Governor Sir John Anderson who expressed his view to Governor General Marquess of Linlithgow in September, 1937.⁴⁸

45. **Ibid.** p. 127.

46. Z.H. Zaidi (ed.), **M.A. Jinnah – Ispahani Correspondence, 1936-1948**, Karachi, 1976. p. 27. Also see, **The Star of India**, Calcutta, 16 January, 1937.

47. Huq had alleged Shamsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin Khan to break up the ministry. See, **The Sunday Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, 19 June, 1938.

48. See, **L/P&J/5/141, Confidential : Bengal Governor's Situation Report, Second fortnight of September, 1937**. The Viceroy wrote this to the Governor-General on 7 September, 1937. Accepting all the **proja** demands one after another would mean a real stripping of all powers of the **zamindars**. In that sense it seemed to them that they had managed to stop an "avalanche", at least for the time being.

It is essential to note at this stage that the real conflict in the **K.P.P.** was not one of ideology. Shamsuddin Ahmed had been the General Secretary and a founder member of the Party. He was dropped on the excuse that Governor Sir John Anderson did not like him. This incident was supposed to create a great uproar but, in fact, no strong protest was made. Similarly, when Syed Nausher Ali was asked to resign there was little indignation from the **K.P.P.** members. The **Krishak Proja Party** was formed to contest election as a rival to Congress and the Muslim League. Its election pledges had very well attracted the peasantry. Victory at the expense of the **Krishak - Proja** seemed the real purpose of the leaders which had been served. Now that a coalition had been formed with the Muslim League it was necessary for Huq to accommodate the League members and the League High Command. Because there was little ideological difference and the conflict was one of leadership, the **K.P.P.** members felt it wise to make as little uproar as possible. Besides, to put up a strong opposition against Huq at this stage would have destroyed the political dominance of the Muslims in the province.⁴⁹

Manipulation, factional politics and shifts in alliances now became a prominent phenomenon in the **Krishak Proja Party**.⁵⁰ Those who had

49. See, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Madhyabitter Aattabikash, Vol. 1.** pp. 104-105. The author was himself actively involved in politics in Bengal during this time and had felt that strong opposition against Fazlul Huq at this stage would have created a serious crisis in leadership.

50. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Ibid.** pp. 93-97. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, **Op. Cit.** pp. 130-134.

defected under Shamsuddin Ahmed announced their intention to oppose Huq's ministry on any move that went against the **K.P.P.** agenda. They demanded reduction of salary of ministers, introduction of compulsory free primary education in rural areas, complete abolition of **zamindari** without compensation and the one important issue they took seriously was the release of political prisoners.⁵¹ The release of the political prisoners was mainly a Congress demand. The obvious reasons were that there had been some 200 Bengali political prisoners serving prison terms in the Andaman Islands and there were many young men in detention camps held up without any trial and without adequate provision for their families in some cases. In the closing months of 1936 some prisoners went on hunger strike to force the government to fulfil their grievances and some committed suicide. People all over Bengal particularly, became stunned at the drastic steps they took.⁵² Congress had declined to form coalition ministry with the **Krishak Proja Party** disagreeing on the same issue. This was not obviously an insignificant issue considering the situation but during this crucial stage when the **Krishak Proja Party** had earnestly and repeatedly hoped for an alliance with the Congress the latter could have formed a coalition and then come together to solve the detenu problem. Some scholars believe that Congress had made a big mistake by not forming coalition with the **K.P.P.**

51. Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Cit.* p. 96n. And see, Enayetur Rahim, *Op. Cit.* p. 132.

52. Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Cit.* p. 89n and see, Enayetur Rahim, *Op. Cit.* p. 132. Also see, **The Indian Annual Register, Vol. 1. January-June 1937**, Calcutta, 1937. pp. 284-285. See also Enayetur Rahim, *Ibid.* p. 155n. To the Congress the release of these political prisoners was important ethically as well as to boost up its own image in the province.

in 1937. Had they allied with the K.P.P. the Muslim League would have failed to dominate Bengal politics. Bengal would not probably have turned to communalism and perhaps partition of Bengal would have been averted in 1947.⁵³ Congress was also partly blamed for the split in the K.P.P. because most K.P.P. men had hoped for coalition with the Congress and the left-wing of the party continued to keep liaison still hoping for such a possibility.⁵⁴ Congress, in fact, had never supported the demand of the K.P.P. for abolition of **zamindari** without compensation but was not honest enough to declare that openly. Congress felt safe that strong anti-landlord measures would be delayed or might not be taken at all and also hoped, as was apprehended, to form an alternative coalition government with the strong opposition group against Huq. In July, 1937 the Governor Sir John Anderson wrote to the Viceroy, Linlithgow that he was certain that Congress would spare no effort to create split between the two wings of the Muslim coalition by detaching members of the **Proja** section with the Chief Minister. This was the main reason why they supported the left wing of the K.P.P. like Shamsuddin Ahmed, Syed Nausher Ali and others so that those hardliner and dedicated peasant leaders would come out of Huq's ministry.

53. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** p. 165. Humayun Kabir, **Op. Cit.** p. 17. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 89.

54. Main purpose of the Congress was to create rift in the K.P.P. See, **L/P&J/5/141, August, 1937 ; Confidential : Fortnightly Report on Bengal Governor's Situation.**

After leaving the Coalition ministry Shamsuddin Ahmed called his group the real **Proja Party** and collaborated with the Congress in opposing Huq's ministry.⁵⁵ Anti-Huq campaigns and numerous meetings were held in the districts. Shamsuddin's anti-Huq campaigns created confusion among peasants in the **mofussil** and weakened the party. The Congress, in fact, welcomed this while the Muslim League continued to blame Congress for its intrigue to disrupt the Muslim unity. The Muslim press in Calcutta, particularly, **The Azad**, **The Mussalman** and **The Star of India** blamed the Congress for inciting Shamsuddin. In October 1937 at the annual general meeting of the **Bengal Krishak Proja Samity** held in Rangpur, Shamsuddin Ahmed's group declared no-confidence in Fazlul Huq's ministry.⁵⁶ In 1938 the Confidential reports on the events of Bengal recorded Shamsuddin Ahmed's activities which were mostly anti-government but very much pro-peasant and pro-workers. On 1 April 1938 he had attended a meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall where about 600 persons were present and after the meeting they submitted a copy of their grievances to the

55. On 11 September 1937 **The Nikhil Banga Proja Samity** and **The Assembly Krishak Proja Party** were reorganized and they expelled Fazlul Huq and other K.P.P. members who continued to remain in the coalition. See, Shila Sen, *Op. Cit.* p. 103.

56. See, Enayetur Rahim, *Op. Cit.* pp. 132-133. Also see, **L/P&J/5/141, Confidential : Review of events in Bengal for the first fortnight of May 1937.** It has been mentioned in Enayetur Rahim, *Ibid.* p. 132 that at the annual meeting of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, Shamsuddin Ahmed and a few others disrupted the proceedings of the meeting with the help of hired hooligans.

Chief Minister.⁵⁷ Shamsuddin Ahmed also held secret meetings in Kushtia with the peasants. He was often addressed as a "comrade" by his associates and it was believed that he was working for the Communist Party of India trying to disseminate Communist ideas among the peasants.⁵⁸ Shamsuddin Ahmed and the members of the K.P.P. outside the ministry had exerted considerable pressure on the coalition ministry to enact the Bengal Tenancy Amendment bills.⁵⁹ The bills were passed in August 1938 but Huq refused to give them any credit.⁶⁰ There was great jubilation; some 5,000 persons attended the ceremony organized by the Muslim Students' League.⁶¹

57. The meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall was of the Calcutta Electric Supply Workers' Union. There were also other prominent Bengali leaders like Tamizuddin Khan, J.C. Gupta, Dr. Suresh Chandra Banerjee present at this meeting. See, **L/P&J/5/142, Confidential : Review of events in Bengal for the first fortnight of April 1938.**

58. See, **L/P&J/5/142. Confidential : Review of events in Bengal for the second fortnight of March, 1938.** Several peasant conferences were held in Kushtia which attracted large audiences and there was a general feeling of unrest in the district. Usually **Krishak** conferences in Bengal attracted large audiences. At one meeting in Kushtia in May 1937 about 1,000 people assembled. This meeting was presided over by Shamsuddin Ahmed. Landowners of the district felt uneasy. See, **L/P&J/5/141, Second fortnight of May 1937.**

59. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Ibid.** pp. 110-112.

60. **Ibid.** pp. 110-112.

61. See, **L/P&J/5/143 : Confidential : Review of events in Bengal for the second fortnight of August 1938.**

The whole atmosphere in the country changed as a result of the passing of the bills.⁶² As most of the progressive measures in the Tenancy Bills introduced in September 1937 were now passed in August 1938, Huq's ministry became very popular. The credibility of the left-wing of the K.P.P. was now subdued to a great extent. Huq's ministry had passed the major peasants' reform bills in the absence of the left-wing members of the K.P.P. and this had also greatly increased his personal image among the Bengali masses.⁶³ Shamsuddin and his associates had always highlighted and struggled for emancipation of the peasantry from the clutches of the landlords and the **mahajans**. The poor peasants of Bengal, who often had to borrow money from the landlords due to successive failures of crops for infiltration of saline water or for want of rains, used to mortgage their

62. Measures taken in the bills gave much rights to the tenants. The landlord's transfer fee, known as **Salami**, their right of pre-emption (introduced under the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act, 1928) and the right to realise rent by certificate procedure were abolished. Tenants were given the right to recover diluvial land within 20 years on payment of only four years' rent. The under-ryots with occupancy rights, who came into existence either before or after 1928 were given similar rights, including the right to surrender their holdings. Rate of interest payable by ryots on arrears of rent was reduced from 12 ½% to 6¼%. Landlord's right to increase rent was suspended for a period of 10 years. There were also several other measures which came to peasants' advantage. Debt Settlement Boards were set up. Money-Lenders Act was also passed in 1940. See, Shila sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 102-103. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** 177.

63. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 177; 179-180.

lands to the landlords or **mahajans** at high rate of interest. Shamsuddin wanted to write off these debts and emancipate the peasants. Consequently he became very popular amongst the peasantry. But, A.K. Fazlul Huq, an intelligent and shrewd politician as he was, was reluctant to give credit to Shamsuddin. Thus he got rid of Shamsuddin and by passing the Debt Settlement Act and amending the Bengal Tenancy Act he himself took the credit. The impact of demands made by Shamsuddin and his associates was so great that those were materialized soon after partition through State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, abolishing both **zamindari** system and the intermediaries. **Zamindari** was abolished in 1950 but was brought to effect from 1955 onwards. Abolition of **zamindari** without compensation was thought too radical by the ministry and by most of the Congress leaders. Only the left-wing of the K.P.P. kept it a strong demand in their agenda as Congress and Muslim League leaders were reluctant to extend their support now that their purpose had been partially served in not hurting the **zamindars** too much.

By November 1938 Huq's position in the Cabinet had become precarious. Huq had to depend completely on the European group. He found his position also threatened as the number of the Muslim League members in the ministry had increased consequent upon the ouster of the K.P.P. members in the cabinet. Huq's ministry was strengthened but his position was at risk.⁶⁴ He, therefore, opened negotiations with the left-wing of the

64. See, Shila Sen, *Op. Cit.* p. 118. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, *Op. Cit.* p. 146.

Proja Samity.⁶⁵ On 17 November, 1938 Huq made a redistribution of some of the portfolios by including Shamsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin Khan as two additional ministers in the Cabinet.⁶⁶ Shamsuddin Ahmed was given the portfolio of Agriculture and Veterinary while Tamizuddin Khan was given the portfolio of Public Health and Medical.⁶⁷ The Congress and the hard core of the **Proja Party** had made all attempts to prevent them to be included in the Cabinet. It was to their advantage if Huq's ministry and Huq personally was in difficult position. In fact, prolonged negotiations took place between Huq and the defectors from the ministry but considering the situation at that time, it seemed that Huq needed them more to make his position stronger in the ministry. However, this attempt to strengthen Huq's position proved short-lived. Shamsuddin Ahmed agreed to join the Cabinet on certain conditions imposed by the **K.P.P.** on Huq ministry. There were 12 conditions agreed upon which Huq promised to fulfil within a fixed time but failed to keep. The European community and the right-wing of the Muslim League, however, did not want them at all.⁶⁸ They were particularly hostile to Shamsuddin Ahmed. Tamizuddin Khan

65. Enayetur Rahim, *Ibid.* p. 146.

66. See, *The Indian Annual Register, July-December, 1938. Vol. 11.* Calcutta, 1938. p. 24. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Cit.* pp. 95-96. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Op. Cit.* pp. 182-183.

67. *The Indian Annual Register, Ibid.* p. 24.

68. See, *L/P&J/5/143. Governor's Report, 18 November, 1938.* The Governor wrote that the "attraction of office proved too strong for them and they have each come in with a certain number of their own followers". Also see, Enayetur Rahim, *Op. Cit.* 147 and Harun-or-Rashid, *Op.Cit.* p.96.

had earlier been a member of the Muslim League and was, in fact, not that hostile to the government.⁶⁹ Shamsuddin Ahmed, on the other hand, had a record of anti-government activities, had no administrative experience and he was strongly opposed for his radical opinions. Because of government hostility towards him he left the ministry in February 1939.⁷⁰ He then began to act as the leader of the left-wing of the **Krishak Proja Samity**. The **K.P.P.** members had wanted him to stay because they hoped that if he stayed the **K.P.P.** demands would be gradually fulfilled.⁷¹ Huq had also wanted him badly in his cabinet, mainly to win the support of Tamizuddin Khan who, Huq believed, would vote for him if only Shamsuddin continued to stay in his favour.⁷²

69. Tamizuddin Khan had left the Congress and joined the Muslim League in 1930. He had defected from Huq's ministry since he was not given the post of Speaker, he had aspired for. He formed the **Independent Proja Samity** with 13 other members of the Legislative Assembly on 15 March 1938. Later again, he joined the Muslim League in 1939. See, Humaira Momen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 93-94. **Charitavidhan**, p. 113 and also see, Enayetur Rahim, **Op. Cit.** pp. 138, 147.

70. **The L/P&J/5/143, Governor's Report, 18 November 1938** revealed government attitude to Shamsuddin Ahmed. He also decided to leave the ministry because Huq had not fulfilled any of the preconditions imposed on him. Huq, however, admitted that he had never intended to fulfil those because he wanted the **K.P.P.** to act the role of the opposition party and not as a real coalition with the Muslim League. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 185-187.

71. **Ibid.** p. 187.

72. **Ibid.** p. 185. The author mentioned that Huq had never fully trusted Tamizuddin Khan.

Ideologically, however, Huq had never left his association with the **K.P.P.** and soon began to start liaison with Shamsuddin Ahmed. Both of them visited various districts and held meetings of the **Krishak Proja Samity** in the years 1939 and 1940 and everywhere they received warm welcome.⁷³ By 1940, however, most of the peasants' reform bills had been passed. Between 1938 and 1940 land-revenue policy, rural reconstruction, clearance of **khals** (canals), re-excavation of rivers, improvement in communication by land and water, establishment of union board dispensaries and above all, extensive education policy of the ministry were worthnoting.⁷⁴ H.S. Suhrawardy, who controlled the trade-union and workers' movement was the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League from 1937 and 1943. He succeeded in regulating the trade union movement.⁷⁵ All these steps had strengthened Muslim League's position in Bengal. **The Krishak Proja Party** seemed redundant by 1940 now that most of its demands had been fulfilled and the peasants were comparatively in a better position.

Between 1939 and 1941 Shamsuddin Ahmed carried on extensive participation in peasant agitation and pro-worker's campaigns. Second World War conditions were prevailing at that time. Government had imposed restriction on jute cultivation because of low price of jute and encouraged the

73. See, L/P&J/5/142. **Confidential : Report for the second half of December 1939.**

74. Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 103-107.

75. **Ibid.** pp. 107-108.

cultivation of rice since supply of rice from Burma was little due to war obstructions. Shamsuddin Ahmed used this as an issue to criticize Huq's ministry.⁷⁶ Shamsuddin Ahmed criticized the government for not handling the problem arising out of the fall in the price of raw jute appropriately. It did not guarantee an economic price for raw jute in the **mufassil**. He criticized Huq by saying that his ministry was incapable of controlling the jute market or to keep agreement with the Jute Mill Association fearing that his "white masters will be displeased and will not vote" him and his ministry would go out.⁷⁷ Shamsuddin Ahmed was so serious that he called for 28 February, 1940 to be observed as 'Jute Day' in protest against government's inadequate measures.⁷⁸ He became known during this time as a pro-Congress leader.⁷⁹ He had also begun to take interest in Communist activities supporting the successive strikes in various jute mills in Bengal, particularly in Howrah district.⁸⁰ In Nadia, he had actively supported the

76. See, Enayetur Rahim, **Op. Cit.** p. 188.

77. **Ibid.** pp. 187-188.

78. **Ibid.** p. 188.

79. **Ibid.** p. 188. During this time Shamsuddin Ahmed was the leader of the pro-Congress faction of the **Proja Samity**. His anti-Huq campaign was given a communal interpretation and he was held as an enemy of Islam since he was trying to obstruct measures taken by the Coalition government for the benefit of the jute growers who were mostly Muslims.

80. See, **The Indian Annual Register, Vol. 1, January-June 1937. Calcutta, 1937.**

peasant cause led by the **Kisan Sabha** in association with the Communists.⁸¹

The year 1941 was politically very significant. Circumstances were so that Shamsuddin Ahmed joined Huq's ministry again. Huq had formed the Progressive Coalition Ministry on 11 December 1941 including members of the K.P.P., the Forward Bloc, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Independent Scheduled Caste.⁸² Huq had displeased Jinnah and the Muslim League High Command by joining the British Government's war effort without consulting Jinnah. In August 1941 Huq was asked to resign from the Muslim League but he managed to patch up for the time being. But, between September and November 1941 there were intrigues, no-confidence motions and resignations in Huq's ministry. On 1 December 1941 the Muslim League

81. The **Kisan Sabha**, in association with the Communists had been stimulating the **tebhaga** movement since 1940 when actually the Land Revenue Commission of 1938 (popularly known as the Floud Commission after the name of Sir Francis Floud, the Chairman of the Land Revenue Commission) suggested the abolition of **zamindari** and also recommended two-thirds of the share of crops for **bargadars**. Since 1938 the **tebhaga** demand was taken up by the Bengal Provincial **Kishan Sabha** in various districts of Bengal, particularly in the northern regions. See, Sunil Sen, "Tebhaga Chai" and Krishna Kanta Sarkar, "Kakdwip Tebhaga Movement" in A.R. Desai (ed.) **Peasant Struggles in India**, New Delhi, 1979 (2nd. Impression, 1982), pp. 443, 476. The **L/P&J/5/153, Confidential : Fortnightly report on Bengal, Second half of December, 1946** also confirms the **tebhaga** movement reaching its height in various districts including Nadia.

82. Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 132-133; Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 225-226.

members resigned. Huq had formed the Progressive Coalition Party on 28 November 1941 and was able to form his new ministry. The Muslim League High Command and the British Government opposed Huq vehemently and Jinnah expelled him from Muslim League on 26 December 1941.⁸³ Shamsuddin Ahmed joined Huq's ministry as the leader of the **Krishak Proja Party** and remained with Huq till the end of his ministry in March 1943.⁸⁴ By the year 1945 most of the **Krishak Proja Party** members had joined the Muslim League. Shamsuddin Ahmed also joined the Muslim League by 1945.⁸⁵ The K.P.P. had politically become non-existent after 1940 but Shamsuddin kept close touch with the left-wing of the Congress and also with the Communists. The socialists, however, did not have a powerful strategy to give in the 1940's. The Communist Party of India had also supported the proposal for a separate homeland for the Muslims of

83. Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 133-134.

84. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 225-226. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 141-142.

85. Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 211, 214 mentioned that Shamsuddin Ahmed joined the Muslim League in December 1945. The author quoted from the Secret Report of the Bengal Government for the second half of December 1945 that the minor parties were "fading out" and most of the Bengali Muslims who either supported the K.P.P. or the Congress had started to join the Muslim League. Also see, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 195. Humaira Momen, **Op. Cit.** p. 90 and **The Charitavidhan**, p. 247 however, mention 1944 as the year of Shamsuddin Ahmed joining the Muslim League. The year 1945 seems to be more acceptable.

India made by the Muslim League in 1940. At the same time, Shamsuddin Ahmed observed that the left-wing of the Congress with which he had been actively associated was not, in fact, genuinely pro-peasant. Shamsuddin Ahmed saw no point in remaining outside the Muslim League. Besides, he was interested to be in parliamentary politics rather than stay outside. He was in H.S. Suhrawardy's ministry between 24 April 1946 and August 1947 as Commerce, Labour and Industry minister.⁸⁶ After partition he was appointed Ambassador to Burma. He is mentioned to have formed the Socialist Party of Pakistan but it seemed that he was not much active in the then East Pakistan politics.⁸⁷ He died in 1969.

Shamsuddin Ahmed's career in the three decades from the 1920's till the partition proved to be very secular and liberal. His participation in the **Krishak Proja** movement projected him as a political leader with genuine feelings for fulfilling the demands of the peasants and devoted wholeheartedly for the cause of the Bengal peasantry. He was also involved in trade union and workers' movement. His socialistic leanings and his association with the left-wing of the Congress often brought him criticisms that he was anti-Muslim. He had favoured partition in 1947 but was never communal.

86. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 243.

87. That Shamsuddin Ahmed formed the Socialist Party of Pakistan has been mentioned in Humaira Momen, **Op. Cit.** p. 90 and **The Charita-vidhan**, p. 247.

Syed Nausher Ali (1890-1972)

Syed Nausher Ali was one of the leading nationalist Muslims in Bengal in the 1930's and the 1940's. He was one of the leaders who did not come from a **zamindari** background.¹ He was born in the district of Jessore in Narail subdivision where majority of the population belonged to **namasudra** class who represented lower caste Hindus. They were landless peasants. Nausher Ali's father was a tenant farmer who knew Arabic and Persian and did clerical job in Narail during off season.² Nausher Ali was a graduate in Sanskrit and later became a lawyer around 1915.³ He began to practice in 1921 at the Calcutta High Court.⁴ He was in his mid-twenties

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1. Rangalal Sen, **Political Elites in Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1986. p. 44 .
 2. Interview with Syed Mansoor Gilani, eldest son of Syed Nausher Ali, taken at London in November 1987 by Dr. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed for Oral History Project, Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka.
 3. Interview with Mansoor Gilani. Nausher Ali's Sanskrit education was interpreted by his political opponents as the main reason behind his opposition to Muslim communalism. See, **The Sunday Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, July 3, 1938 where Fazlul Huq projected him as anti-Muslim pointing out that Nausher Ali had been "a student of Sanskrit and un-Islamic classics and had never been fortunate in receiving training in Muslim classics" and, therefore, he did not "appreciate the real meaning of Muslim solidarity."
 4. Enayetur Rahim, "Fazlul Huq-Nawsher Ali Correspondence on Contemporary Political issues". **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, (Hum) XXVII**, 1982. p. 31. It is essential to point out an anomaly that when Nausher Ali's name is spelt with an 'u' the author spelt his name with a 'w'.

when he started organizing **Krishak** movement in Jessore. He spent most of his time in Jessore running the **Krishak Samiti** offices all over Narail and Magura . He had close contact with members of the Scheduled Castes representing the peasantry and also had association with the communists.⁵ Nausher Ali had gathered around him **namasudras** and the Muslim peasantry from the borders of Faridpur and Jessore and organized them against the Narail **zamindar**.⁶ It was during this time that he was called a communalist rather than a communist or a secularist by the Hindu press, particularly the **Amrita Bazar Patrika** because of his movement against the Hindu **zamindar** of Narail. The upper class Hindus, i.e. the caste Hindus disliked Nausher Ali for his active participation in organizing the

5. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *op. cit.* Also see, the **Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, July 3, 1938, Fazlul Huq discredits Nausher Ali by writing that he contributed little or nothing to the **Krishak Proja** movement even though in reality he was in the movement from the beginning. Nausher Ali was elected as a candidate of the **Krishak Proja** Party and was included in the first coalition ministry of Fazlul Huq in 1937.
6. Interview with Mansoor Gilani. The **namasudras** formed the largest agricultural group in Bengal with a population of about 2,500,000 by 1920's. They had formed the Bengal Namasudra Association in 1912 with its headquarters in Calcutta. The president of the Association was Mukunda Behari Mallick. See, J.H. Broomfield, **Elite Conflict in a Plural Society : Twentieth Century Bengal**, California, 1968. p. 158.

peasantry in Jessore, Narail and Magura regions.⁷ They projected him as a communalist. Nausher Ali was supported by the Muslim peasants and the **namasudras** and also by the rising Muslim middle class.⁸ His power base was among the rural Muslims. He was elected chairman of the Jessore District Board in 1928 and continued in that office until 1937. The **Krishak Proja** Party fared better than the Muslim League in eastern Bengal. The Muslim League was not much popular yet in Bengal in the 1920's. Syed Nausher Ali won the Jessore Sadar Mohammedan Constituency as a **Krishak Proja** candidate.⁹ It was widely believed that

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7. A contradiction worked in Nausher Ali. His son Mansoor Gilani reveals in his interview that his father was a disciple of the **pir** of Nawapara, Jessore and also had beard. It was easier, therefore, on the part of his rivals to call him a communalist. In fact, he was a devoted Muslim in his private life, as his son recalled. He had removed his eldest son from Hare School and got him admitted to **madrassh** and took his eldest daughter out of school and gave her marriage at an early age. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *op. cit.*
 8. The incident of his becoming a disciple of the **pir** of Nawapara could be interpreted as politically motivated. The **pir** of Nawapara had great influence and popularity among the rising Muslim middle class. By being a **murid** (disciple) of the **pir** he got their support to win the district board elections in 1927 and later the Legislative Council elections in 1937. *Ibid.*
 9. Syed Nausher Ali contested elections of 1937 from Jessore Sadar Mohammedan constituency as a **Proja** Party candidate and got elected with 13,069 votes. See, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Saturday, January 30, 1937.

Congressmen helped in his election. Most Muslim League leaders believed that the **Krishak Proja** Party was an offshoot of the Congress. In the coalition ministry Nausher Ali was given the portfolio of Public Health and Local Self-government. He was one of the two **Krishak Proja** Party members in the ministerial rank. The other being Fazlul Huq, the chief minister.¹⁰ The upper class Hindus and the Hindu press were a constant critique of Nausher Ali. The **Amrita Bazar Patrika**, for instance, expressed fear that Nausher Ali would exercise his power against the Hindus now that his department had frequent contacts with the actual life in matters of health, sanitation, village administration and medical and municipal affairs. On the other hand, the Bengali Muslim politicians saw him as a Congress man. His associates in the **Krishak Proja** Party saw him as a hard core left-winger very close to the communists because of his dedication to the cause of the **namasudras** and the peasantry.

Nausher Ali was **Krishak Proja** leader all through his life. He had never joined the Muslim League for which he earned the displeasure of the Jinnah coterie in Bengal. Nausher Ali's power base was mostly in the district and subdivision level and among the peasantry. In the ensuing conflict between Fazlul Huq and Nausher Ali the former got the upper hand and

10. By October 1937 Fazlul Huq joined the Muslim League and Nausher Ali was ousted from the cabinet in June 1938. Fazlul Huq's ministry was now dominated by Muslim League members and they held the largest number of important portfolios. Shila Sen, **Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947**, New Delhi, 1976. pp. 94, 119.

succeeded in convincing the Bengali public and the press mainly because Nausher Ali came from a peasant family and whose political base was mainly in the **mofussil**.

Within a year of the formation of the coalition ministry in March-April 1937 Fazlul Huq and Nausher Ali came into conflict first, on the issue of salaries of ministers and second, on the issue of party representation in the coalition ministry. Controversy arose in the cabinet with the announcement of two different amounts as salaries for the ministers, "one set getting Rs. 2,500 and another set getting Rs. 2,000 a month" while the Chief Minister getting Rs. 3,000 plus allowance.¹¹ Nausher Ali protested against this proposal on the ground that two classes of ministers were being

11. See, **Assembly Proceedings, Official Report, Bengal Legislative Assembly, Second Session, 1937. Vol. LI- No.2.** Alipore, Bengal. 1937. pp. 95-98. Mr. Pramathanath Banarjee (MP from Burdwan North-West constituency) reminded Fazlul Huq of his written pledge as part of his election campaign as **Krishak Proja** Party leader that "no office of profit or trust under the Crown was to be valued more than Rs. 1,000 a month." But, Fazlul Huq denied in the Assembly making such a pledge. *Ibid.* p. 96. Also see, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar** (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It), Dhaka, 2nd. ed. 1970. pp. 148-149. The author mentions that the representatives of the Muslim League in the cabinet did not want to accept the election pledge of the **Krishak Proja** Party that no minister would take more than one thousand rupees as monthly salary.

created. Later, all ministers were given the same pay.¹² Nausher Ali and Fazlul Huq came into conflict again on the choice of members from the **Krishak Proja** Party which included only two in the ministry, one being Nausher Ali and the other, Fazlul Huq, the Chief Minister. When the coalition was formed with the Muslim League it was declared that half the cabinet should be formed with ministers from the **Krishak Proja** Party. This did not, however, happen. In a cabinet of eleven members only two were from the **Krishak Proja** Party, four were from the Muslim League, three were nationalists and two from the Scheduled Caste Party. Nausher Ali and other members of the **Krishak Proja** Party were furious at Fazlul Huq for his quick deviation from earlier decision and more so when Shamsuddin Ahmad was left out of the cabinet. It was believed that Fazlul Huq had to concede to the wishes of the Governor who did not want to see Shamsuddin Ahmad in the cabinet.¹³ Besides, Huq had to please the

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12. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, November, 1987. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, "Fazlul Huq - Nawsher Ali Correspondence on Contemporary Political issues," **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Hum)**, Vol. XXVII, Dhaka, 1982. *op. cit.* p. 39. In a letter Huq wrote to Nausher Ali that his (Ali's) pay was raised from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 2,500 at his (Nausher Ali's) request.
13. Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.* pp. 142-145. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1987. p. 93. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, **Provincial Autonomy in Bengal (1937-1943)**, Rajshahi, 1981. p. 127. The Governor, the European community and the ministers from the Muslim League had purposely wanted to reduce the representation of the K.P.P. in the cabinet as a means to curb their influence.

Muslim League leaders at this time particularly because he had made a coalition with them after much effort. Huq's choice of Nawab Musharraf Hossain, a **zamindar** from North Bengal seemed more acceptable at that time than the choice of Shamsuddin Ahmad, the General Secretary of the **Krishak Proja Party**.¹⁴ As influence of the Muslim League over Fazlul Huq was increasing his relation with the left-wing of the **Proja Party** became strained. Fresh conflict developed between Nausher Ali and Fazlul Huq on the assumption that Nausher Ali was intriguing with the left-wing of the Congress, particularly Sarat Chandra Bose (1889-1950), to form an alternative coalition.¹⁵ Allegations were made against him by some cabinet members of disloyalty to the cabinet and of disclosing cabinet secrets to the

14. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 93. Shamsuddin Ahmad's views relating to **Krishak Proja** programmes were considered "extreme" by the Governor, Sir John Anderson. The original programmes of the **Krishak Proja Party** relating to the welfare of the peasants were viewed by the **zamindars**, both Muslim and Hindu, and the Governor as "extreme" simply because those went against their interests.

15. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 95. Also see, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p. 119.

Congress.¹⁶ Nausher Ali was asked to resign in May 1938 but he refused to do so explaining his reasons that his colleagues had conspired against him. He wrote to the Chief Minister, A.K. Fazlul Huq that he believed the majority in the Assembly had confidence in him and he was prepared to take the responsibility of administration if called upon to do so, which implied that he would not resign even if the rest of the cabinet did.¹⁷ Later he wrote an open letter to the Chief Minister in June 1938 that if he resigned he wanted the whole ministry to resign in order to form a more stable ministry.¹⁸ Nausher Ali believed that he commanded the confidence of the majority in the House which actually turned out not to be so. Since Nausher

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16. **R/3/2/64, 1938-39. Files of Bengal Governor's Secretariat, Secret, File No. 2, Collection No. XII.** India Office Library, London. It was alleged that Nausher Ali had given away cabinet secrets to the members of Shamsuddin and Tamizuddin groups who had earlier defected from the cabinet. It was also alleged that Nausher Ali had called a number of Select Committee meetings at Darjeeling and invited about seventy members of the Legislative Assembly in May 1938 and took the opportunity to carry on a propaganda against other ministers. Fazlul Huq came to know about this. He had called on Nausher Ali's house at Darjeeling and explained to him that the whole situation was becoming such that it was getting impossible by members of the cabinet to work with Nausher Ali. He was, therefore, asked to resign. See, **The Sunday Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, June 19, 1938.
 17. **R/3/2/64 Secret, File No. 2. Collections No. XII. 1938-39.** Office of the Secretary to the Governor of Bengal, Bengal ministry. India Office Library, London. Also see, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, "Fazlul Huq-Naushar Ali Correspondence", Friday, Calcutta, June 24, 1938.
 18. Report from **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, Wednesday, June 22, 1938. Also see, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p. 119.

Ali was delaying to take a decision the other ten ministers submitted their resignation forcing the Governor now, to dissolve the cabinet. Within a quarter of an hour Nausher Ali submitted his resignation separately on the night of 22nd. June, 1938. The next day a new cabinet was formed with all the ministers except Nausher Ali.¹⁹

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19. When asked to resign Nausher Ali sent letters to a number of members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly asking for their opinions. One of such letters was sent to Jalaluddin Hashemy (1890-1947) asking for advice whether to resign or not. Jalaluddin Hashemy replied from 14 Karaya Road, Calcutta on June 19, 1938 that "----- after what has happened you should not think twice, but resign at once. Cross the floor of the House and join the opposition and if the Premier and his friends have done you any injustice we are with you to see that they are thoroughly exposed. Joining the opposition you may try to get up a majority against the ministry and in that case a no-confidence motion might be tabled against the present ministry." See, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, Monday, June 20, 1938. After much discussions with the Chief Minister, Fazlul Huq and his colleagues, the Governor, Lord Bra^bourne had a long talk with Nausher Ali in order to convince him of the democratic conventions elsewhere and to point out that he should resign when he found that he had lost the confidence of his colleagues in the cabinet. Nausher Ali, took time to consider. On the same day, 22nd. June, 1938 he met the Governor once again and asked for time for further consultation with his friends. At 11 p.m. that night all other ministers had submitted their resignation letters to the Chief Minister which he brought, with the one of himself to the Governor. Syed Nausher Ali came at 11.15 p.m. that night and in the course of further discussion with the Governor he agreed to resign. Shortly after midnight, June 22, 1938 he sent his resignation letter from his 93 Baitakkhana Road house in Calcutta. See, R/3/2/64 Secret, File No. 2, Collection No. XII, 1938-39, Office of the Secretary to the Governor of Bengal, Bengal Ministry. Also see, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p. 119.

Difference between Nausher Ali and Fazlul Huq was mainly on the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill, besides other issues like appointment of a non-Indian as the chairman of the Land Revenue Commission. Regarding the appointment of Sir Francis Floud the cabinet was unanimous. Nausher Ali did not like the idea of the appointment of a European but he accepted it "without great or uncompromising protest."²⁰ Nausher Ali was criticized for the appointment of two Indian medical men at the Calcutta Medical College in preference to Europeans. Accusations against Nausher Ali were more inspired by propaganda than truth because there was not much disagreement over the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill between Nausher Ali and the cabinet. Nausher Ali's differences of opinion with Fazlul Huq or other members of the cabinet were never such as to cause serious cabinet crisis.²¹ However, it is true that there existed a strong ideological difference

20. Nausher Ali appointed Dr. Moni Dey to the post of Professor of Medicine for which another candidate was the son of Governor Sir John Anderson. Major Dabiruddin Ahmed was made the first Indian Principal of Calcutta Medical College. Nausher Ali came to the displeasure of Sir John Anderson because of these appointments. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *op. cit.* also see, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Wednesday, June 22, 1938.

21. See, "The Fazlul Huq - Nausher Ali Correspondence", **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, Friday, June 24, 1938 and *Ibid*, Sunday, July 3, 1938 which record series of charges and counter-charges made between Nausher Ali and Fazlul Huq. **The Amrita Bazar Patrika** put caption on its June 22, 1938 issue, "The Un-wanted Nausher Ali" and recorded the accusations against him that he had given away cabinet secrets to the members rallying behind Shamsuddin Ahmad and Tamizuddin Khan, who had earlier defected from the **Krishak Proja** Party and who were alleged of attempting to break up the ministry. Nausher Ali was also accused of secretly discussing with the Congress leaders, particularly, Sarat Chandra Bose to form a Congress-**Proja** Party coalition ministry.

between Nausher Ali and the other members of the cabinet. The left-wing of the **Krishak Proja** Party had never desired a **Proja- League** coalition. The left-oriented **Proja** leaders were secular in attitude and had never reconciled to a coalition with the communally oriented Muslim League. They also criticized the composition of Fazlul Huq's ministry which consisted mostly **zamindars** and wealthy merchants. Syed Nausher Ali, who belonged to the left-wing of the **Proja** Party came to believe that Fazlul Huq's coalition ministry was formed to safeguard the interests of "British imperialism and Bengal landlordism" and could not be expected to fulfil the demands of the peasantry or the people of Bengal at large.²² Main point of conflict between Nausher Ali and his opponents was on the ground that he always desired to have a Congress-**Proja** Party coalition which he had earlier mentioned in personal interviews with Fazlul Huq. But Huq rejected the idea as it was impossible under the circumstances of a Congress refusal to such coalition. In spite of that Nausher Ali continued to harp on this idea and had been in touch with Sarat Chandra Bose (1889-1950), his brother Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945), J.C. Gupta () and other Congress leaders. He was, therefore, accused of being disloyal to the cabinet by always

22. See, Nausher Ali's letter printed in **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, Monday, June 20, 1938 and see, **Ibid.** Friday, June 24, 1938. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* p. 143.

publicly declaring that he had been dissatisfied with the existing ministry.²³ Inside the ministry Nausher Ali was suspected "of placating the left-wing and building up a following than in pulling his weight as a member of coalition."²⁴ Besides this, he held a very strong view in favour of the tenant's rights opposing any compromise on the Tenancy Act relating to the modification of landlord's transfer fee. Controversy rested on the issue

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23. See, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, Saturday, June 25, 1938. Also see, the **Confidential Minute Paper of the Bengal Governor's Situation Report** dated 20th. March, 1938 which said that Nausher Ali kept touch with Sarat Chandra Bose, the leader of the Congress opposition who was negotiating with the left-oriented Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and the Muslim group under Tamizuddin Khan to discredit the Huq ministry. See, **L/P&J/5/142** preserved at the India Office Library (The British Library), London. Also see, Enayetur Rahim, "Fazlul Huq - Nawsher Ali Correspondence on Contemporary Political issues," **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, (Hum)**, Vol. XXVII, Dhaka, 1982. pp. 37-38. In a letter to Nausher Ali written on May 19, 1938 Fazlul Huq accused him of declaring that his ministry was reactionary, that it was impossible for him to co-operate with it; that it was doing no good to the people of Bengal and that it was not permitting him to carry out his policy. He also accused Nausher Ali of expressing that it was hindering him in his work and his schemes and that "sooner or later the Ministry must fall and the sooner it fell the better for Bengal and its people."
24. See, **L/P&J/5/142, Confidential Report on Bengal Government's Situation**, 5th. April, 1938. Files on Public and Judicial Department of India Office, London.

whether to introduce suspension of fees (**salami**) for ten years or to bring complete abolition.²⁵ The ministers in the cabinet were seeking a compromise with the Europeans on the question of the Tenancy Act by providing suspension instead of abolition of landlord's fees. They feared that it would be difficult to get the suspension proposals through in Nausher Ali's presence. And even if the suspension proposals were accepted there was a great possibility that Nausher Ali would have resigned on that issue. The decision in the cabinet, therefore, was to make "every effort to get rid of Nausher Ali before he carried this threat into execution."²⁶ The right-wing ministers could not risk putting Nausher Ali on such "strong" ground because that would have made him popular among the masses. Nausher Ali also demanded abolition of **zamindari** without compensation which the landlords as well as the European group in the cabinet opposed. They were anxious to bring the bill into operation as early as possible and therefore,

25. *Ibid.* Also see, Shila Sen, *op. cit.* p. 102.

26. See, *L/P&J/5/142*, 5th. April, 1938. See, Enayetur Rahim, "Fazlul Huq- Nawsher Ali Correspondence", *op. cit.* In a letter to Fazlul Huq written on May 28, 1938 Nausher Ali mentioned that "disastrous consequences were likely to follow if their proposal for substitution of "**salami**" for total abolition were not accepted." pp. 40-41. Also see, *L/P&J/5/142*, 5th. April, 1938.

they insisted Nausher Ali to resign.²⁷ Fazlul Huq was eager to hold his ministry together. After joining the Muslim League he faced an embarrassing situation with Nausher Ali the only K.P.P. representative in the cabinet and other hard core members of the **Krishak Proja** Party. By removing Nausher Ali from the cabinet Fazlul Huq made his position easier to pass the Tenancy bill without criticism. The bill had to be passed because of the pressure put by the other **Krishak Proja** members inside the ministry and outside. It had been alleged that the demand for resignation of Nausher Ali was intended to prove to the people that he had no contribution to the passing of the bill.²⁸ There was obvious conflict over the bill between the left-wing represented by Nausher Ali and the right-wing by Fazlul Huq on

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27. See, **L/P&J/5/142, op. cit.** March 20, 1938. Also see, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **op. cit.** pp. 177-178. After the bill was passed in August 1938, the ministry claimed credit for it. see, Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947**, Cambridge University Press, 1986.p.213.
28. See, Enayetur Rahim, "Fazlul Huq-Nawsher Ali Correspondence on Contemporary Political issues", **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, op. cit.** p. 41. Nausher Ali wrote to Fazlul Huq in a letter dated May 28, 1938 that according to his information, "Sir Nazimuddin, Mr. H.S. Suhrawardy, Mr. Shahabuddin (M.L.A. Narayanganj South) and few others of their own men were present, it was decided that I should not be allowed to resign on this issue, which according to them, would make me a hero in Bengal, but that steps would be taken from them to create a situation which would put me out of the Ministry with a blame."

the question whether to abolish **zamindari** without compensation or not. The Tenancy Act completely abolished the landlord's fee on transfer. The lands could now be transferred without the payment of **salami**. The law abolished landlord's right to pre-emption when occupancy holdings were sold. The occupancy **ryot** could sell his holding to any person he liked, thereby obtain a better price. The law also reduced the rate of interest on arrears of rent from $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ to $6\frac{1}{4}\%$. The Act also suspended for ten years the enhancements of rents by landlords of tenure holders and **ryots**.²⁹ It is essential to note in this context that the Congress had always been against the Bengal Tenancy Bill. Why would then Nausher Ali seek alliance with the Congress? The Congress in its attempt to create problems for the **Proja**-League ministry had encouraged the radical elements to defect on the ground of agrarian reform. There was doubt as to whether the left-wing of the Congress was actually progressive in respect of land reform or had used Nausher Ali to weaken Huq's ministry. Nausher Ali's contact with the Congress leaders was used as a propaganda to oust him from the cabinet to prove to the people that he was betraying the **proja** interest by seeking alliance with the Congress.³⁰ In fact, the Congress at this stage was hostile

29. Shila Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 102-104. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* pp. 110-111.

30. See, Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* p. 130. Manipulation of the Congress to disrupt Huq's ministry could not be discounted. The Congress had earlier in 1928, sided with the landlord's interests when the Bengal Tenancy Bill was passed. Even left-leaning leaders like, Sarat Chandra Bose, Kiran Sankar Roy and Nalini Ranjan Sarkar did not support the bill in 1937. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *op. cit.* November, 1987, London.

to the coalition ministry. Both the Congress and the **Krishak Proja** Party were secular political parties and had similar programmes in respect of agrarian reforms. The Congress had even announced to abolish **zamindari** system as its future plan, although most of its leaders supported the interests of the landlords. This the Congress did to encourage the left-wing of the **Krishak Proja** Party and to lure the peasants.³¹

Syed Nausher Ali was more left leaning compared to Fazlul Huq, who in October 1937 had already joined the Muslim League. Huq had wanted to strengthen his government in the face of constant opposition from the Congress and attempted to make a strong alliance with the Muslim League. Huq had, however, claimed that he had never left the **Krishak Proja** Party and was both a Muslim League and a **Proja** Party man and hoped to remain so till the end of his life.³² Most of the **Krishak Proja** Party members disliked Huq's rightist leanings and criticized him. Tamizuddin Khan and Shamsuddin Ahmad had already defected from the cabinet,

31. See, Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* pp. 130-131. It was believed that the Congress looked at the radicals of the **Proja** Party as their potential allies in sabotaging the ministry. In fact, many of the **Proja** Party members belonged to the Congress but the Congress had never wanted the Tenancy Bill to be passed, because most of its members protected the interests of landlords. It was also believed that the Congress encouraged defection of radical members in the cabinet hoping that if the coalition ministry failed or if dissension existed in the cabinet the passage of the tenancy bill would be delayed or postponed. *Ibid.* p. 144.

32. See, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, July 3, 1938.

which, however, came as a relief to Huq and gave him opportunity to act without opposition. Presence of a strongly pro-peasant Nausher Ali in the cabinet was an obvious embarrassment for Huq. Personal bias against Nausher Ali also acted as a great factor behind removing him from the cabinet.³³ Personal bias against Nausher Ali was also present in Suhrawardy and Khwaja Nazimuddin who did not like the attacks made on them by Nausher Ali on the ground that the cabinet was "reactionary" and bourgeois.³⁴ Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy started propaganda alleging that the members of the left-wing of the **Krishak Proja** Party were pro-Congress and against Muslim unity.³⁵

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33. Fazlul Huq disliked Nausher Ali so much so as to deny that Nausher Ali ever belonged to the **proja** movement and even projected him as a communalist. See, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, July 3, 1938, p. 29
34. See, Enayetur Rahim, *op. cit.* p. 143. Also see, **The Sunday Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, July 3, 1938.
35. See, Z.H. Zaidi, **M.A. Jinnah-Ispahani Correspondence, 1936-1948**, Karachi, 1976. p. 27. Syed Nausher Ali and Shamsuddin Ahmad have been called "recalcitrant elements" because they were left-wing compared to the Muslim League members they had close association with the Congress left-wing and also because they had brought split in the **Krishak Proja** Party. Nausher Ali's son Mansoor Gilani records in his interview mentioned above, that Suhrawardy called his father "Bakri Dari Ukil Maulvi" meaning, a lawyer and a **maulvi** with beard, to humiliate him. Nausher Ali had beard but he later shortened it when he joined the ministry. Also see, **The Star of India**, Calcutta, January 16, 1937.

Nausher Ali was closely associated with the non-communal and nationalist politicians of the time like Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950), Shamsuddin Ahmad (1889-1969), Humayun Kabir (1906-1969), Sarat Chandra Bose (1889-1950) and Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945?). He was also associated with the members of the Communist Party of India.³⁶ Nausher Ali had contested for the Speaker's post during the Progressive Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq between December 11, 1941 and March 29, 1943. He got elected in spite of the opposition from Huq, Nazimuddin and other members of the right-wing of the Muslim League. He was supported by the Congress and the **Krishak Proja** Party members. The Progressive Coalition Party formed on November 28, 1941 was non-communal and nationalist.³⁷ Nausher Ali had worked sincerely to form the

36. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *op. cit.*

37. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.* pp. 225-226. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 141. Fazlul Huq and Sarat Chandra Bose were elected the leader and the deputy leader respectively of the Progressive Coalition Party. It included the members of the **Krishak Proja** Party particularly those who had defected with Shamsuddin Ahmad, the Forward Bloc Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Independent Scheduled Caste. Neither the All India Muslim League leadership nor the British Government welcomed such a move. Jinnah expelled Fazlul Huq from the Muslim League in December, 1941 and the government arrested Sarat Chandra Bose on December 11, 1941, only a few hours before the ministers could take oath. Nausher Ali was opposed by those who were non-Bengali. They had Sir Abdur Rahman Siddiqui as a candidate. Nausher Ali won the post of speaker defeating Abdur Rahman Siddiqui badly see, Interview with M. Gilani.

party and the ministry. In the 1940's Nausher Ali was, in fact, not in any particular party. He remained a supporter of the **Krishak Proja** Party, the Congress left-wing, the Communist Party of India and also the Indian National Army formed by Subhas Chandra Bose in 1943. He was a secularist Muslim and believed in keeping India united. He had all along opposed the demand for separate electorates by the Muslims and their demand for Pakistan.

Nausher Ali was also an ardent supporter of the cause of the poor peasants. He gave leadership to **Krishak** movement in Narail subdivision in Jessore district. He was present at the **Krishak Sabha** Conference held on 8-9th. June, 1940 at Pajia in Kesabpur, Jessore where those present demanded immediate abolition of **zamindari**.³⁸ Nausher Ali also got involved in the 'Quit India' Movement led by Congress in 1942. He got arrested on February 2, 1943 on "Jute Day" when thousands of peasants particularly the jute cultivators assembled at **Krishak Sabha** at Netrokona to demand Rs. 10 as the lowest price for jute. This type of meetings and demonstrations was banned in various districts during war. Nausher Ali had

38. See, Mohammad Abdullah Rasul, **Krishak Sabhar Itihas** (The History of **Krishak Sabha**), Calcutta, 3rd. ed. 1982. pp. 105-106, pp. 115-116. This was the 4th. provincial conference of the **Krishak Sabha** where about a hundred representatives from different districts were present.

disregarded the ban and got arrested.³⁹ Being released from prison after a few days Nausher Ali continued to act as the Speaker of the Bengal Provincial Assembly until the election of 1946 when Nurul Amin became the Speaker. In the Assembly he got support from few. Both the Chief Ministers, Fazlul Huq and Khwaja Nazimuddin, and also the Governors and the members of the European group ----- all disliked him very much.⁴⁰

In the elections of 1946 Nausher Ali insisted that Congress should give him nomination to contest the election. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), the Congress president at this time, advised Nausher Ali to contest the election as an independent candidate and the Bengal Provincial Congress did not as well want that Nausher Ali should be given

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39. During war the price of jute fell very low and in some areas it came down to Rs. 3 or Rs. 4. The jute cultivators suffered a great loss. Price of jute came down so low that 5 maunds of jute which cost Rs. 114.50 in February, 1942 fell to Rs. 33.87 in October same year. There was an war-time announcement that less amount of jute should be cultivated. But, that announcement was not made in 1942 in the interest of the English owners of jute mills. See, Abdullah Rasul, *Ibid.* p. 130.
40. Governor, F.J. Burrows wrote to Lord Wavell, the viceroy on July 5, 1946, "as Mr Nausher Ali will not be in the chair there is a good chance that all will go well." Earlier on June 3, 1946 F.J. Burrows wrote to the viceroy that Khan Bahadur Nurul Amin was elected speaker on May 14, 1946 and the Governor wondered that it was "difficult to imagine that anybody could be a worse speaker than Mr. Nausher Ali." See, *L/P&J/5/153*.

nomination. Almost all the Congress leaders wanted Nausher Ali should contest as an independent candidate, apprehending that he would lose.⁴¹ Nausher Ali, at this stage was not much associated with the **Krishak Proja** Party, which was, in fact, a non-entity outside the Bengal Legislative Assembly, neither was he a supporter of the Muslim League. He was very much against the idea of creating a separate homeland for the Muslims of India and wanted to contest the elections as a Congress candidate to prove his belief in secularism. Sarat Chandra Bose gave his support to Nausher Ali.⁴² Muslim League supporters opposed Nausher Ali and there was large-scale rowdyism. There were incidents of rioting, arson, looting and houses being burnt. During the election campaign there were charges and counter charges of violence and hooliganism from various constituencies where prominent **Krishak Proja** Party or independent candidates were contesting the Muslim League.⁴³ Actually the 1946 elections was "not an ordinary

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41. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *op. cit.* Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress President and Chairman of its Parliamentary Board at that time was to make the choice of nominating candidates for the Muslim seats. See, Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 210-211. Interview with M. Gilani revealed that Maulana Azad had never wanted that Congress should support Nausher Ali and give him nomination possibly he felt that if more Muslims were in the Congress his position might be at stake. Gilani also mentioned that Azad and Nausher Ali never went on together in later life.
 42. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *op. cit.*
 43. See, Secret Report on the Political Situation of Bengal for the second half of March, 1946. **L/P&J/5/153.**

one" as Suhrawardy said.⁴⁴ It was to "decide the political destiny of Muslim India" and the Muslims could not "afford to lose a single seat".⁴⁵ Only a few nationalist Muslims contested. The Congress helped the nationalist Muslim candidates with money and volunteers to fight the League.⁴⁶ However, Nausher Ali lost the election very badly. The Muslim League candidates won an overwhelming majority against the nationalist candidates. Nausher Ali was criticized severely by the Congress leaders particularly by Maulana Azad, who said that he had lowered the prestige of the Congress.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Nausher Ali remained a member of the All India Congress Committee.⁴⁸ In 1946, he, along with Sarat Chandra Bose, J.C. Gupta and Suhrawardy joined the movement for united Bengal. After

44. Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.* p. 228.

45. *Ibid.* p.228.

46. See, *L/P&J/5/153*.

47. Interview with Mansoor Gilani, *Op. Cit.*

48. Nausher Ali was supported by Congress members in Bengal. In August, 1946 when riot broke out, few months before partition Nausher Ali's house was raided by Muslim League "goondas" (hooligans). His house was ransacked, the guard killed and his car burnt. During the next few months Nausher Ali and his family moved as a refugee in Calcutta taking shelter in the houses of Congressmen. The Congress members in Bengal had elected him to the All India Congress Committee. Interview with Gilani. Governor Sir Frederick J. Burrows wrote to Lord Wavell, the viceroy on 6th. September, 1946 that the former Speaker Syed Nausher Ali took shelter in a police station for several days to avoid "massacre by the League hooligans". See, *L/P&J/5/153*.

partition, however, like most nationalist Muslims he remained in Calcutta and worked with the Congress and the Communist Party. But, he never went well with the Congress High Command. Main point of conflict which bothered him, like most nationalist Muslims at this stage was whether Muslims should remain nationalists and that whether it had been a mistake for them to join the Congress. Neither Gandhi nor Nehru or Patel or other members of the Congress High Command gave importance to Nausher Ali. He was disillusioned with the Congress. He realized that the Congress leaders never understood the problem of the Muslims. He seemed to realize that it was a mistake for him to join the Congress.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, being a firm believer in secular politics he remained in the Congress and was elected to the Rajya Sabha by the Bengal Provincial Assembly. In 1956 he had an open conflict with Maulana Azad and Humayun Kabir. Nausher Ali was then totally disenchanted with the Congress and had begun to develop relations with the Communists which Maulana Azad could not approve of. Nausher Ali resigned from the Congress on that issue but he did not formally join the Communist party.⁵⁰ However, ^{he} maintained good relations

49. Interview with M. Gilani, *op. cit.*

50. **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, which had so strongly criticized Nausher Ali as communal, changed its attitude since the 1940's and painted him as a champion of the cause of the Muslims in Bengal because he was very much against the Muslim League politics and was associated closely with the communists and also the INA of Subhas Chandra Bose. In the 1950's Nausher Ali supported the Communists wholeheartedly and gave his house at 93 Baitakhana Road, Calcutta to the Communist Party (Marxist) of India for party office. See, Interview, *Ibid.*

with the communists till his death in 1972. It was very ironic that Nausher Ali, who had all along been a nationalist Muslim, who had believed in secular politics and had worked with the Congress had to put on **dhoti** and his wife had to put on vermillion (**shidur**) for saving their lives during the communal riot of 1964.⁵¹ He was so shocked to see the communal frenzy even in what was considered to be secular India, that he told his children to go to Pakistan.⁵²

51. Interview with M. Gilani, *op. cit.*

52. *Ibid.*

ABUL HASHIM (1905-1974)

Shila Sen and Harun-or-Rashid have made fairly extensive assessments of Abul Hashim's political career.¹ Abul Hashim also has a large number of his own writings in the forms of books and pamphlets which reveal his ideology and beliefs.² His autobiography **In Retrospection** is particularly useful in analysing his political, social and religious views. Abul Hashim had contributed greatly to the organizational work of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Through his continued efforts in the years between 1943 and 1947 he did the task of taking the party to the grass roots level. He had democratized the party organization and had decentralized the authority of the party leadership. He was primarily a socialist who based his philosophy on the principles of Islam. He had liaison with the Marxists and the members of the Communist Party of Bengal but he did not believe in Marxism as it were. His political philosophy was based on the idea of **Islamic Socialism**, called **Rabbaniyat**, meaning social order prescribed in Islam. He preached that all wealth belonged to God. Men did

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1. Shila Sen, **Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947**, New Delhi, 1976. Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1987.
 2. Abul Hashim, **The Creed of Islam**, Dhaka, 1950; **As I See It**, Dhaka, 1965; **Integration of Pakistan**, Dhaka, 1967; **In Retrospection**, Dhaka, 1974. Abul Hashim had also written several manifestoes and pamphlets most of which have been translated into Bengali. He has also written a book in Bengali, **Rabbani Drishtite** (In the Light of **Rabbani**) Dhaka, 1970. See, Mofidul Huq, **Abul Hashim**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1990. The author gives a list of Hashim's publications. pp. 121-134.

not have permanent right over land. Everybody had equal right over land and other wealth.³ In this respect he was indoctrinated by Maulana Azad Sobhani () who evolved the idea of an Islamic state.⁴

Abul Hashim was born on 27 January, 1905 in the village of Kashiara in Burdwan district.⁵ His father Abul Kasem was a prominent politician in his time taking active part in the Khilafat and non-co-operation movement.⁶ He had joined the Swadeshi and the anti-partition movement in Bengal in 1905.⁷ He was an ardent follower of Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925) and when the latter left the Congress due to conflict between the moderates and the extremists, Abul Kasem also left with him.⁸ He then participated in the joint movement of Khilafat and non-co-operation led by the Muslim League and the Congress. Abul Kasem never liked the separatist politics of

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3. See, Abul Hashim, **In Retrospection**, pp. 31-32. Also see, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 30-31, 33.
 4. Abul Hashim, **Ibid.** pp. 31-32.
 5. Abul Hashim, **Ibid.** pp. 1-2. Also see, Mofidul Huq, **Ibid.** p. 9.
 6. Mofidul Huq, **Ibid.** p. 19. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 162.
 7. Mofidul Huq, **Ibid.** p. 17-20.
 8. **Ibid.** p. 18. Also see, Leonard A. Gordon, **Bengal, The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940**, rpt. New Delhi, 1979. pp. 32-34. The author notes that Abul Kasem of Burdwan was one of the few Bengali Muslims who joined Congress politics. He had been a member of the Indian Association of Surendranath Banerjee, the "chief and guru" of Congress politics in Bengal. Also see, **Charitabidhan** (Dictionary of Biography), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1985. pp. 33.

the Muslim League.⁹ He was, however, involved in Muslim League politics but had never accepted the domination of the Dhaka nawab family.¹⁰ When Abul Hashim entered into politics after his father's death in 1936, he, too, started his political activity by totally rejecting the authority of the Khwaja family. He joined the Muslim League in 1937 but never believed in separatism or communalism. His father's influence on him had moulded his political belief to a great extent.

Abul Hashim came of a very wealthy and prestigious family. Several of his predecessors, like grandfathers and uncles from both father's and mother's sides were high officials.¹¹ Hashim passed his Matriculation in 1923 from the Municipal High School at Burdwan and passed his Intermediate and Degree examinations from Raj College, Burdwan in 1925 and 1928 respectively.¹² He married in 1928 and his wife also belonged to a very esteemed family of Dhaka.¹³ She was related to Huseyn Shaheed

9. Mofidul Huq, *Ibid.* pp. 17-18. The Muslim League had demanded the partition of Bengal in 1905 which Abul Kasem thought was a very separatist and communal expression of Muslim politics.

10. See, Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Cit.* p. 162. Abul Kasem presided over the third Annual Session of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in 1917 and was also elected one of the Vice-Presidents of the All-India Congress Committee.

11. Mofidul Huq, *Op. Cit.* pp. 8-16.

12. *Ibid.* p. 16.

13. *Ibid.* p. 16. Also see, Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, pp. 10-11.

Suhrawardy who played a significant role in Hashim's relatively brief but very active political life between 1943 and 1947.¹⁴ Hashim got his Law degree^{from} the Calcutta Law College in 1932 and started practising at the Burdwan district court.¹⁵ Hashim entered into politics only after his father's death in October 1936. Soon after, he contested the elections to Bengal Legislative Assembly as an independent candidate from Burdwan constituency and he won.¹⁶ His father had organized the Burdwan Mohammadan Association, a representative political organization of the Muslims of Burdwan, of which he was the president.¹⁷ This association was converted into Burdwan District Muslim League in 1937 of which Abul Hashim was elected President.¹⁸ He had joined the Muslim League in 1937

14. Abul Hashim's mother-in-law was the aunt of H.S. Suhrawardy. Abul Hashim was married to Mahmoodah Akhtar Meher Banu Begum, daughter of Shah Syed Ziauddin, a descendent of the famous Shah-Golam Ali of Hooghly district. Wife's mother was the daughter of Maulana Obaidullah Obaidee, an esteemed scholar of Midnapur. Obaidee's daughter, Khojistah Akhter Banu was the mother of H.S. Suhrawardy. See, **In Retrospection**, pp. 10-11. Suhrawardy and Hashim together had transformed the Muslim League to a broad-based party.
15. See, **In Retrospection**, p. 9.
16. **Ibid.** p. 16. He mentioned in his memoir that his father's popularity had won him victory at the elections. To him this was actually the expression of gratitude and recognition to his father's contribution to the Bengali Muslim society and politics.
17. **Ibid.** p. 18.
18. **Ibid.** p. 18. Also see, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 24-25.

being convinced initially by Jinnah that the party was democratic and that there was no place for the Khwajas or the Ispahanis to dominate Muslim politics in Bengal.¹⁹ Abul Hashim explained the reason why he joined Muslim League and soon realised, as he himself admitted, that he was deceived by the false impression given to him by Jinnah.²⁰ In fact, Abul Hashim started his political activity with the Muslim League but rejected from the beginning the authority of the non-Bengali landlords and capitalists in Bengali politics. He was very much against the political maneuverings of the Khwaja brothers in Bengal and the economic exploitation by the non-Bengali capitalists like the Ispahanis. He also disliked Fazlul Huq's repeated change of allegiance to political parties and quick shifts in opinions. Abul Hashim collaborated with H.S. Suhrawardy in 1943 and both had made tremendous efforts to organize the Muslim League between the years 1943 and 1945 but Hashim had also observed that Suhrawardy too, was more willing to gain higher political position than mere

19. See, *In Retrospection*, p. 17. Also see, Mofidul Huq, *Ibid*, p. 25.

20. See, *In Retrospection*, pp. 17-18. In 1937 Abul Hashim saw M.A. Jinnah at the residence of M.A.H.Ispahani at Calcutta. There Jinnah had invited Hashim to join the Muslim League telling, "Come, let us organize ourselves in such a way that we can give 24 hours' notice to the job hunters of Bengal and the Punjab". Hashim thought that by "job-hunters" Jinnah meant Khwaja Nazimuddin of Bengal and Sikandar Hyat Khan of the Punjab. Hashim had a dislike for the Khwajas and, therefore, he readily joined the Muslim League. One can, however, also form the opinion that he could not remain outside the mainstream politics of the Muslim League in Bengal, whether Jinnah insisted him or not. Also see, Mofidul Huq, *Op. Cit.* p. 24.

organizing the party. Hashim's total concern was to organize the party in a more democratized and decentralized manner. He had never wanted to be a parliamentary leader.²¹ He had a problem with his eyesight and was gradually losing his vision. This physical disability had obviously been a hindrance to his political career. Nevertheless, he was a political leader of the front rank and had participated in major political events and decision-makings. With his preachings of Islamic socialism on the one hand and his ardent belief in the principle of self-determination of every nation in India on the other, had made him a politician of a different kind. He was often believed to be a communist which was of course not, in the Marxist sense of the term. It seemed that he was a separatist and a supporter of Jinnah's "two-nation" theory but, in fact, he believed in the right to self-determination of every nation.²² He believed India was multi-national geographical entity

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21. Interview with Abul Hashim's son, Badruddin Umar, a renowned writer and political commentator, at his residence in Dhaka on 29 October, 1995. Umar mentioned that his father often used to say that his one desire was to be the speaker of the Legislative Assembly had he not lost his eyesight.
 22. The resolution adopted by the Muslim League at the Lahore Session in March, 1940 did neither mention the word "Islam" nor the word "Pakistan" anywhere. Jinnah had coined the term "two-nation" to emphasize the cultural and religious differences which existed among the Hindu and the Muslim communities in India. Jinnah realised, however, just before the creation of Pakistan that serious consequences would follow if religion was mixed up with politics. He declared in his presidential address to the constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11 August, 1947 that he wanted Pakistan to be a secular state. See, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, **Bengali Nationalism and The Emergence of Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1994. pp. 80-81. This statement of Jinnah was indeed belated and the "two-nation" theory had become politically very expedient to bring partition of India.

where people of different religions, castes, races and languages lived. Abul Hashim was the exponent of the idea of multi-nation in India and his political ideas reflected belief in nationalism, regionalism, linguism and socialism. His political moves for the United Independent Bengal in 1946-1947 with Sarat Chandra Bose and others clearly exposed him as a secular and democratic person.²³

Abul Hashim had attended the annual session of the All-India Muslim League held at Lahore on 23 March, 1940. He had supported the resolution adopted at this session which contemplated the creation of independent states in which the constituent units were to be autonomous and sovereign.²⁴ The Lahore Resolution proposed two independent sovereign states as homelands for the Muslims of India, one in the North-West consisting of the Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, the North-West Frontier Province and Kashmir and the other in the North-East consisting of Bengal and Assam.²⁵ Abul Hashim supported this move hoping for complete independence in the North-Eastern region of India. He saw nothing

23. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 162-163. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, **A Socio-Political History of Bengal**, Dhaka, 1967. (4th. ed. 1975). pp. 61-62, 74-75.

24. See, **In Retrospection**, pp. 22-23.

25. The resolution contemplated two independent sovereign states as homelands for Muslims of India. See, Appendices, **In Retrospection**, pp. 168-169, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** p. 390.

communal in the Lahore Resolution of 1940.²⁶ Abul Hashim wrote in his memoirs explaining very clearly that he never believed in Jinnah's "two-nation" theory which, according to him, had created a separatist tendency in Indian politics.²⁷ Abul Hashim wrote that he neither believed in the "two-nation" theory nor did he ever preach this in Bengal.²⁸ He believed in the multi-nation theory which meant that India was a sub-continent comprising various nations each having its own language, culture, race and religion. "To me", he wrote, "India conveys the same sense as the term Europe does."²⁹ The multi-national concept was not new in India but at a time when separatist tendency was getting upper hand and was being popularized in India the assertion and the attempts to establish the multi-national concept

26. See, *In Retrospection*, p. 23.

27. *Ibid.* p. 23.

28. *Ibid.* p. 23.

29. *Ibid.* p. 23. The Communists had developed the multi-national theory asserting the right to self-determination. They had supported the Muslim League demand for separate state. The Indian Communists, indoctrinated by the idea of self-determination declared by Stalin as early as in 1925, made them support the right of each nationality to secede from the Indian union. See, Sankar Ghose, **Political Ideas and Movements in India**, New Delhi, 1975. pp. 194-195. B.T. Ranadive, the communist leader in India, said in August 1942, "Muslims in certain areas do form a distinct nationality bound together by common culture, history and tradition. In consequence--- they must have the completest liberty to --- form a separate state if and when they choose." The Communist party of India made this an open declaration. *Ibid.* p. 194. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, *Op.Cit.* p. 62.

by Abul Hashim went in contrast with the dominant trend. He was trying to preach the theory of a multi-religious national state in India when Jinnah started propagating his theory of "two-nation".³⁰ The multi-national concept of Abul Hashim went in conflict both with the "two-nation" theory of Jinnah and also with the Congress theory of a unified India.

The approach of Abul Hashim and his followers in Bengal was never communal. Abul Hashim's non-communal attitude was manifested even when he did not get involved into active politics. He had voted a candidate against his father in Burdwan only to avoid a communal rift in the Burdwan Muhammadan Association.³¹ He always believed in maintaining a status-quo when it came to communal matters.³² Abul Hashim never preached that India was one country but he never incited communal difference or ill-feeling. He urged for a common front of all parties and organizations to fight

30. Basically Jinnah was a secularist. Had he declared his belief in the creation of a secular state earlier not highlighting the "two-nation" theory one would have hoped that the orgy of communalism could have been avoided. But the communal issue in the 1940's could not be treated a matter as simple as that. There were other factors existing like the attitudes of the conservatives in the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League separatists and to some extent British attitude to the communal affair.

31. **In Retrospection**, pp. 25-26.

32. **Ibid.** p. 26. where Hashim mentioned that he had supported a Congress candidate named Togo Sarkar, at the election for Chairman of the Burdwan municipality in 1942. By taking measures like this he was able to keep communal harmony in his district.

against British imperialism in order to achieve freedom and establish the right to self-determination.³³ He also believed in joint electorate and the formation of democratic government.³⁴

Abul Hashim's active participation in the Muslim League began on a provincial level from 1943 when he was elected the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.³⁵ Khwaja Nazimuddin was then the Chief Minister. When Hashim took office the BPML had no organized fund or any treasury. Although Mirza Hasan Ispahani was the treasurer there was no regular system of preparing annual budget or disbursing the bills and making payments at regular times.³⁶ There were no office of the Muslim League in any of the districts of Bengal.³⁷ The President of the Dacca district Muslim League was Khwaja Shahabuddin who was Nazimuddin's

33. Kamruddin Ahmad, *Op. Cit.* p. 74.

34. *Ibid.* p. 74.

35. Abul Hashim was elected General Secretary of the BPML on 7 November 1943. He was elected with a huge majority. Hashim had begun to lose eyesight but Maulana Azad Sobhani who had inspired him to preach the philosophy of **Rabbaniyat** had particularly insisted him to contest for the post. Sobhani had wanted Hashim to preach the philosophy of **Rabbaniyat** while organizing the Muslim League. H.S. Suhrawardy had also supported Hashim in the election. See, *In Retrospection*, pp. 30-32. Also see, Mofidul Huq, *Op. Cit.* p. 30. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, *Op. Cit.* p. 61.

36. See, *In Retrospection*, p. 36. Henceforth the abbreviation BPML has been used for the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.

37. *Ibid.* p. 37.

younger brother. Hashim saw that the BPML was under the complete domination of the Dacca nawab family.³⁸ He also noticed that whoever wanted to gain any political position in the BPML had to work in allegiance with the Khwajas. Even Suhrawardy at times had to accept the authority of the Khwajas to retain his political position.³⁹

Hashim claimed that from the beginning, he kept himself out of the "unholy game of power politics".⁴⁰ He got himself involved in the task of organizing the Muslim League in the grass-roots level.⁴¹ His first step as the General Secretary of the BPML was to curb the authority of the Khwajas, to free the party from financial constraints and then to move towards establishing Muslim League offices in the districts. He took up extensive programme to decentralize and democratize the party. The Muslim League was, in fact, "mortgaged" to the Ahsan Manzil for leadership, to the

38. Nine members of the Dacca nawab family were in the BPML. Hashim also observed in his memoirs that Khwaja Shahabuddin was very good at adopting Machiavellian means when needed. Hashim was puzzled at times to see their political maneuverings. *Ibid.* p. 38.

39. Hashim's son, Badruddin Umar also observed that Suhrawardy was equally Machiavellian like the Khwajas and all of them were power-seekers. Interview with Badruddin Umar, Dhaka, 29.10.95. Also see, *In Retrospection*, p. 38.

40. *Ibid.* p. 41.

41. *Ibid.* p. 38.

Daily Azad for publicity and to the Ispahanis for finance.⁴² Hashim's aim was to free the Muslim League from such position. He took up an extensive programme to organize the party, particularly in the **mofussil** areas. He issued bulletins and periodical circulars giving instructions to the leaders in the districts as to how to organize the party bases there. He ordered them to set up party offices in every district and sub-divisional headquarters.⁴³ This was how he did the task of making the Muslim League a mass party.

42. Ahsan Manzil was the family home of the Khwajas, the nawab family of Dacca. Maulana Akram Khan, who published the **Daily Azad**, also had strong connection with the Khwajas. **The Daily Azad**, brought out from Calcutta from 1940 onwards, acted as the mouthpiece for the Muslim League. The Ispahanis were the leading non-Bengali merchants in Bengal and allies of the Khwajas. They represented the right-wing of the Muslim League in Bengal. The Bengali-speaking middle class youths had begun to dislike their domination and authority. See, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 61-62. And see, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Banglar Madhabitter Attabikash (Emergence of middle class in Bengal)** Vol. 11, Dhaka, 1975. p. 21. Also see, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 184-185. The "battle royal" Hashim fought inside the Bengal Presidency League against the Khwajas led to long-term consequences. When he was forced to migrate to Dacca in 1950 (when his house in Burdwan was set on fire) Hashim was imprisoned for several months by members of the Khwaja coterie, he had angered in 1943. See, Kenneth McPherson, **The Muslim Microcosm : Calcutta, 1918-1935.** Wiesbaden, 1974. pp. 150-151.
43. **In Retrospection**, pp. 42-43. Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 38-39. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, **A Socio-Political History of Bengal**, p. 62.

He felt Muslim membership had to be increased in the Eastern and Northern Bengal where Muslim population was a majority and he made appeals to the Muslim youths in general and student leaders of Calcutta and Dhaka in particular, to organize the party disregarding personal interest or intra-party conflict.⁴⁴ He had also inspired the students and the general masses to gain membership for only two **annas** which, in fact, transformed the Muslim League into a broad-based organization like the Congress.⁴⁵ This had made a tremendous impact and within a year membership of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League rose to half a million.⁴⁶ Hashim made extensive tours in the years 1944 and 1945 in various places like Narayanganj, Dhaka, Faridpur, Chittagong, Comilla, Calcutta and other districts and carried on organizational work there.⁴⁷ He was able to gather a large following among the younger generation, particularly in the two university centres of Calcutta

44. See, **In Retrospection**, p. 44. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op.Cit.** p.165.

45. Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 166, 192.

46. See, **In Retrospection**, p. 42.

47. Within a period of only two years he was able to open Muslim League branches in 18 districts. See, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 48-49. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 166-167. Hashim made a tour of Bengal for 45 days in 1945 and called it a "Long-March for 45 days" which reminds one of Chairman Mao-Tse Tung's long march in China. Hashim's methods of organizing the party through direct personal contact with the people, discussions, bulletins, pamphlets and manifestoes were similar to those of the Communist party. see, **In Retrospection**, p. 78. Also, the interview with Badruddin Umar,

and Dhaka.⁴⁸ The overwhelming victory of the Muslim League in the 1946 elections to the Legislative Assembly was largely due to the tours and organizational work carried out by Abul Hashim.

During his extensive tours Hashim had advocated that all Muslims should join the Muslim League and at the same time he had preached the fundamentals of Islam.⁴⁹ This had put him in a very controversial position. He was interpreted as a communal person. The Hindu community could not trust him. It was difficult for many Hindus to accept whether Hashim's non-communal interpretation of the Lahore Resolution was his genuine belief. On the other hand he was alleged to be a Communist for the doctrine of **Rabbaniyat** or Islamic Socialism he preached, was close to Communism. He was often dubbed in the Muslim press, particularly by **The Daily Azad**,

48. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 166-167.

49. See, **In Retrospection**, pp. 54-58. Hashim's commitment to the peasantry and his socialist leanings were not secret matters and he openly preached those in all his meetings. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 171-172.

The Morning News and **The Star of India** and by the Khwaja committee as a Communist.⁵⁰

Abul Hashim had published a draft manifesto of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League on 24 March, 1945 which contained his views of the ideals of the Muslim League and the socio-economic and political objectives of Pakistan. The pamphlet was called "Let Us Go to War" which was widely circulated and contained mainly a multi-nation than a two-nation theory.⁵¹ Most of his ideas brought him under severe criticisms from the

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50. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 145,243. These papers conducted malicious propaganda against Abul Hashim. See also, Z.H. Zaidi (ed.) **M.A. Jinnah-Ispahani Correspondence, 1936-1948**, Karachi, 1976. Hassan Ispahani wrote to Jinnah in 1942 when **The Morning News** was brought out that "one more weapon in the armoury of the League" was added. **Ibid.** p. 295. It is very useful to note the extent of hatred of the Khwajas against Abul Hashim which, in fact, had created a polarization in the Muslim League politics in Bengal. H. Ispahani wrote to Suhrawardy on 6 March, 1947 from Calcutta "..... Fazlul Huq is a danger and Abul Hashim is most undesirable." **Ibid.** pp. 516-517.
51. See, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 184. Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 176 mentioned the date of the publication of the manifesto on 23 March, 1945. While Hashim in his memoirs mentioned the date 24 March, 1945. See, **In Retrospection**, pp. 80-81. All the top ranking leaders of the Muslim League in Bengal, like Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy, Maulana Akram Khan had criticized Hashim severely. Hamidul Huq Chowdhury (1901-1992) commented that the term "manifesto" was Communist and wanted to establish that Hashim's ideas were completely influenced by Communism and that most of the proposals in the manifesto were not in accordance with Muslim League interests. **In Retrospection**, pp. 80-81.

right-wing of the Muslim League and of the Congress. The draft manifesto emphasized the ideals of Islam and Socialism. It said that the Muslims in the proposed state of Pakistan would not have any rights reserved for them except their right to mould their life according to the fundamentals of Islam; the non-Muslims would have equal rights and would be treated generously as citizens of an independent and sovereign state; election would be held under universal adult suffrage; equal opportunities irrespective of creed, caste and class; right to education—— primary education to be made free and compulsory; all monopolies and rent-receiving interests on land would be abolished; the rights of the peasants would be protected; key industries like jute and transport to be nationalized and workers would have the right to enjoy the share of the profit.⁵² There were also provisions for unemployment insurance, old age pensions, trade-union rights etc.⁵³ There would be peasant proprietorship, collective farming and co-operative marketing.⁵⁴ The manifesto was very clearly progressive and socialistic in its content and earned criticisms from the right-wing of the Muslim League particularly about his authority to bring out such a manifesto.⁵⁵

52. **In Retrospection**, pp. 80-81. Also see, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 184.

53. Abul Hashim, **Ibid.** p. 81. Shila Sen, **Ibid.** p. 184.

54. Abul Hashim, **Ibid.** p. 81 and see, Shila Sen, **Ibid.** p. 184.

55. Liaquat Ali Khan, one of the leaders of the Muslim League warned the Muslim students in Calcutta the danger of Communism to Islam and criticized Hashim for using the Muslim League platform to preach Communism. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 177. To counter these criticisms against the manifesto and his ideas Hashim took initiative to publish the weekly **Millat** from Calcutta in November, 1945. It acted as a mouthpiece for the progressive group of the Muslim League. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Ibid.** pp. 202,222.

Abul Hashim's liaison with the Communists was, in fact, somewhat close. He was brought up in a very liberal atmosphere. He had preached tolerance to other's views and had been ideologically very close to the Communists.⁵⁶ He believed in the philosophy of **Rabbaniyat**. This was where he differed with the Communists but he maintained friendly relations with them. His attitude to Communism, however, was, "support where you can and oppose where you must."⁵⁷

The right-wing of the Muslim League led by Khwaja Nazimuddin accused Hashim of being a Communist and having association with the terrorists. He was accused of preaching Communism under the cover of Islam.⁵⁸ In fact, Nazimuddin and his group had never wanted the Muslim League to be turned into a mass party. Democratization and decentralization of the party meant loss of their authority. Hashim, therefore, was their main target of criticism.⁵⁹ They attempted to oust him from the leadership of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and for this, they needed

56. Interview with Badruddin Umar, Dhaka, 29.10.95. Umar mentioned that most of his father's friends were Hindus and many of them were Communists. Also see, **In Retrospection**, p. 115.

57. **In Retrospection**, p. 54

58. **Ibid.** p. 73. In fact, the left-wing of the Muslim League had very good relation with the Communists. See, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** p. 59.

59. See, Harun-or-Rashid, "A Move for United Independent Bengal", in Sirajul Islam (ed.), **History of Bangladesh, 1704-1971, Vol. 1**, Dhaka, 1992. p. 391. Also see, **In Retrospection**, p. 40

Suhrawardy's support.⁶⁰ Suhrawardy had been a good organizer as well and was basically non-communal but was desperately after political power.⁶¹ He had wanted to be the Chief Minister and, therefore, moved away from Hashim.⁶² As the 1946 elections were approaching the cleavage between the right-wing and the left-wing of the Muslim League widened greatly. The conflict of power between Khwaja Nazimuddin, H.S. Suhrawardy, A.K. Fazlul Huq, Maulana Akram Khan and Abul Hashim, the "Big Five" of the Muslim League in Bengal politics in the 1940's came to an extreme point in the years 1945 and 1946.⁶³ Hashim, however, never craved for any parliamentary post nor did he interfere in parliamentary leadership. The Khwajas had wanted to manipulate the Muslim public

60. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh**, p. 244.

61. Badruddin Umar mentioned in the interview on 29.10.95 that it was not Suhrawardy, as was alleged, but Nazimuddin who had engineered the "Great Calcutta Killing" in August 1946. The British government however, blamed Suhrawardy for the holocaust for not enforcing Section 144 before the tension increased, and why not declaring total curfew and calling out the troops for precautions. See, V.P. Menon, **The Transfer of Power in India**, Princeton, 1957. pp. 294-295. But, Abul Hashim mentioned in his memoirs that Suhrawardy was never communal and never vindictive. See, **In Retrospection**, p. 45.

62. See, **In Retrospection**, p. 73.

63. It is interesting to note the similarity in numbers and influence of political leaders at different times and circumstances in history. "The Big Five" was dubbed to refer to the five powerful leaders of the Congress in Bengal in the 1920's. They were Tulsi Goswami, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Nirmal C. Chunder and Sarat Chandra Bose. See, Leonard A. Gordon, **Op. Cit.** p. 192.

opinion in Bengal and did not want a properly organized party. They feared Hashim's attempts to organize the party and felt that he was strengthening the party for his gains. By early 1947 Abul Hashim was kept aside by the Muslim League leaders in Bengal. Fazlul Huq and Akram Khan were up against him.⁶⁴ Even Suhrawardy did not like him any more now that he had become the Chief Minister.⁶⁵ Abul Hashim was disinterested to get involved in these shrewd power game and left for Burdwan, his home town.⁶⁶

Another most significant aspect of Hashim's political thinking was the idea of creating a United and Independent Bengal. Suhrawardy, who was then the Chief Minister, had initiated the move at a press conference in Delhi on 27 April, 1947 to form an independent and undivided sovereign Bengal.⁶⁷ Hashim had seriously and sincerely supported Suhrawardy's

64. See, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 71-72.

65. **In Retrospection**, p. 73.

66. See, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Socio-Political History of Bengal**, p. 75

67. See, Harun-or-Rashid, "A Move for United Independent Bengal" in Sirajul Islam (ed.) **History of Bangladesh, Vol. 1.** p. 401. Suhrawardy demanded a "Greater Bengal" comprising the undivided Bengal uniting the adjoining districts of Manbhum and Singhbhum, the district of Purnea from Bihar and the Surma valley of Assam depending on the right to self-determination. **Ibid.** p. 403. Suhrawardy's proposal was that Bengal should remain sovereign, independent and undivided in a divided India. Sarat Chandra Bose, the Congress leader in Bengal, and the Congress left-wing leaders supported the proposal but it received little support from either the Muslim League or the Congress. See, V.P. Menon, **Op. Cit.** p. 355.

scheme and proposed that there should be joint electorates and equal share of jobs in administration.⁶⁸ He, Sarat Chandra Bose and Kiran Sankar Roy were most serious behind the move but there was little sincere effort from the top ranking leaders of either the Muslim League or the Congress.⁶⁹ The United Bengal scheme was accepted by many Muslim leaders because Bengal was a Muslim majority province but the Hindus in Bengal were unwilling to accept such a plan. Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and also the Hindu Mahasabha had demanded partition of Bengal.⁷⁰ After the riots in 1946 the Hindus could no longer trust the Muslims.⁷¹ Muslim League

68. This Hashim declared in accordance with the Bengal Pact forged with C.R. Das in 1923. See, **History of Bangladesh, Vol. 1**, p. 404.

69. See, V.P. Menon, **Ibid.** pp. 355-356 .

70. Most Muslim League leaders like M.A. Jinnah, Nazimuddin, Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy and other Bengali Muslims favoured the idea of a united Bengal. A second partition of Bengal was not wanted by them. Suhrawardy argued that Bengalis has a common mother tongue and common economic interests. Jinnah would also have welcomed the emergence of an independent, united Bengal but on condition that it joined neither Pakistan nor Hindustan. Both Nehru and Patel, however, considered the idea against Congress and feared that a unified Bengal, led by a Muslim premier would definitely form closer alliances to Pakistan than India. See, Stanley Wolpert, **Jinnah of Pakistan**, New Delhi, 1985. (2nd. ed. 1989). pp. 238, 320-322, 398n.

71. Congress attitude during this time seemed communal to many. But Congress fear was not baseless. Hashim realized why the Hindus did not support the United Bengal scheme. He said, "the Hindus of Bengal had developed a suspicion complex from 10 years of one party Muslim ministry". See, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 233.

opinion was also divided in this respect. The Khwaja group demanded the whole of Assam but divided Bengal omitting the Hindu majority Burdwan division and including some portion of Purnea and district of Bihar while Suhrawardy and Hashim group wanted the whole of Assam and undivided Bengal with some adjoining districts of Bihar.⁷² Jinnah supported the scheme because to him the whole of Bengal was much better than a "truncated" one.⁷³ Suhrawardy's move for united, independent Bengal remained controversial since earlier when in April 1946, he had moved the resolution at Delhi for a one Pakistan state.⁷⁴ It is also essential to mention in this context that Abul Hashim, who deliberately remained absent at the open session of the Muslim League Legislators' Convention at Delhi (7-9 April, 1946) but had suggested at the persuasion of Jinnah that the Lahore Resolution could be amended by cutting out the adjective "one" and put the indefinite article "a."⁷⁵ Nonetheless, on 20 May, 1947

72. See, **History of Bangladesh, Vol. 1.** p. 406.

73. To Jinnah, however, the existence of an United Independent Bengal "would be a sort of subsidiary Pakistan", **Ibid.** pp. 411-412. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Socio-Political History of Bengal,** p. 88.

74. Z.H. Zaidi, **Op. Cit.** pp. 452-453.

75. See, **In Retrospection,** pp. 109-110. After making the amendment the resolution adopted, confirmed that "the zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North East and the Punjab, North West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North West of India namely Pakistan zones, where the Muslims are in dominant majority, be constituted into a sovereign independent state and that an equivocal undertaking be given to implement the establishment of Pakistan without delay". See, A.M. Zaidi, **Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India, Vol. 6,** New Delhi, 1979. pp. 453-454. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Foreshadowing of Bangladesh,** p. 254.

those who favoured the United Independent Bengal scheme met at Sarat Bose's house and reached at a tentative agreement signed by Abul Hashim and Sarat Chandra Bose, the terms of which included provisions for joint electorate, adult suffrage, proportionate reservation of seats for Hindus and Muslims, and for the scheduled caste Hindus, equal number of ministers from both communities in the ministry, the Chief Minister being a Muslim and the Home Minister, a Hindu.⁷⁶ Position of Gandhi for United Independent Bengal was not very clear. It seemed that he favoured the move but did not, in fact, take any initiative.⁷⁷ Suhrawardy, who had initiated the movement declared, quite dramatically, on 7 June, 1947 that "Dacca is now in Pakistan".⁷⁸ Hashim seemed to be in a false position and felt almost betrayed in his cause.⁷⁹ The Communist Party also supported the partition of Bengal.⁸⁰

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76. **In Retrospection**, pp. 153-154. Also see, **History of Bangladesh, Vol. 1.** pp. 414-415.
77. See, Kamruddin Ahmad, **Socio-Political History of Bengal**, pp. 81-82.
78. **In Retrospection**, p. 160.
79. Hashim was criticized in the press as a traitor to the cause of one Pakistan state. **The Dawn**, on 4 June, 1947 criticized him as "a snake in the grass". See, **In Retrospection**, p. 160.
80. **In Retrospection**, p. 162.

Abul Hashim's demand for an independent Bengal was in accordance to the Lahore Resolution of 1940 in which it was emphasized that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and the Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign. Hashim believed in the unification of Bengal but he neither wanted Bengal to be dominated by the West Pakistani, Urdu-speaking Muslims and neither did he want it to be a part of India.⁸¹ It was the Pakistan demand of the Bengali Muslims. But, here too, Hashim's view differed from both the Congress and the Muslim League. He believed that India was a multi-linguistic, multi-cultural nation and each of these linguistic and cultural regions was a nation and that some of the nations would be Muslim majority nations but he did not define nationality on the basis of religion as did the Muslim League in the 1940's.⁸² The creation of a sovereign Bengal was a secular demand where Muslims and Hindus would enjoy equal power and

81. Leonard A. Gordon, "Divided Bengal : Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition," **Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics**, Vol. XV1, No. 2, London, July 1978. p. 155. Gordon gave this information on the basis of his interview with Abul Hashim he had in Dacca in June, 1972.
82. Leonard A. Gordon, **Ibid.** pp. 150-155.

opportunities. But, he had failed in his mission.⁸³ After partition of Bengal and of India on 15 August, 1947 Abul Hashim stayed in Burdwan till 1950.⁸⁴ He remained member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly as the leader of the opposition.⁸⁵ When he came to Dacca in 1950 he got himself involved in the language movement demanding Bengali as the official language.⁸⁶ He was arrested during anti-government demonstrations and was in prison for 16 months.⁸⁷ Later, in 1954 he formed the **Khilafat-i-Rabbani Party** and remained outside the United Front.⁸⁸ He contested from old Dacca constituency in the elections of 1954 as a **Rabbani** candidate and was badly defeated.⁸⁹ He then continued to get more involved in his religious philosophy of **Rabbaniyat** but began to dislike the activities of his followers. He left the party in 1956 and then joined the

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83. Besides all the reasons mentioned so far for the failure of the United Bengal idea there was another reason. See, Tazmizuddin Khan, **The Test of Time, my life and days**, Dacca, 1989. p. 147 where the author mentions that the Independent or Greater Bengal idea was initially a go-ahead signal by the Muslim League High Command, later withdrawn.
84. See, **Charitabidhan**, p. 36. Also see, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 89-90. In 1950 his house at Burdwan was burnt during a riot. He sold his property and came to stay in Dacca.
85. See, **Charitabidhan**, p. 36.
86. See, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 92-94. Also see, **Charitabidhan**, p. 36.
87. See, Mofidul Huq, **Ibid.** p. 94. Also see, **Charitabidhan**, p. 36.
88. See, Mofidul Huq, **Ibid.** pp. 94-95.
89. See, Mofidul Huq, **Ibid.** p. 95. Being disappointed with the attitude of his followers he left the **Khilafat-Rabbani Party** in 1956.

Muslim League but remained practically inactive politically.⁹⁰ He, however, had an exceptionally friendly relation with Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan.⁹¹ In 1960 Abul Hashim became the first director of the Islamic Academy formed in November, 1960 in Dacca, where serious intellectual discussions and debates were arranged relating to the principles of Islam, Islamic thought and Islamic economics.⁹² Although Hashim remained a Bengal unificationist until his death and a secularist, he, however, accepted Pakistan.⁹³ He could not later accept the breakaway of Pakistan in 1971. However, he totally dissociated himself later with the idea of integration of Pakistan and came to accept Bangladesh.⁹⁴ He died in 1974.

Abul Hashim's political position in the very brief period of five years between 1943-1947 was of meteoric one. From the position of an almost

90. See, Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 95-96. He expanded his philosophy of **Rabbaniyat** and the establishment of an Islamic Socialist state in his book, **Integration of Pakistan**, Dhaka, 1967.

91. Mofidul Huq, **Op. Cit.** pp. 95-97.

92. **Ibid.** p. 96.

93. See, Leonard A. Gordon, "Divided Bengal : Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition", **Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics**, Vol. XV1. No. 2, London, July, 1978. p. 155. Gordon had an interview with Abul Hashim in Dacca in 1972 on the basis of which he wrote that Hashim was dedicated to the idea of a Bengal republic and had never wanted to be in a Pakistan dominated by West Pakistani Muslims.

94. This was the view Hashim's son, Badruddin Umar gave at the interview with me at his residence in Dacca on 29.10.95.

unknown person he turned into a front-ranking politician of the Muslim League. His organizing ability was such that he managed to transform the Muslim League into a mass party within only a period of two years. He was a great orator. His leanings towards socialism had also made him a prominent thinker in the Communist circle in Bengal. His belief in **Rabbaniyat** or Islamic Socialism made him one of the leading scholars of Islam. His firm belief in liberalism, socialism and secularism had made him a very progressive-minded leader. While at the same time his preachings of Islamic Socialism had made people to criticize him as a Communalist. This was the dichotomy in his whole political career. Abul Hashim's son, Badruddin Umar commented that his father was, in fact, "a political schizophrenic" to symbolize his contradictions.⁹⁵

95. Badruddin Umar had attempted to make a psychoanalytical study of his father's mind and thought and had found him a divided self in politics. Interview, 29.10.95.

Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury (1894-1976)

Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was born in the village of Batagram in Tippera in 1894. His father Tofazzal Ahmad Chowdhury, well known as Anu Mia Chowdhury, was a renowned **zamindar** of Tippera district.¹ Ashrafuddin was admitted to Hare School Calcutta and later studied at St. Xavier's School, Calcutta. He however, graduated from Rajshahi Government College. He then passed his Law examination from Calcutta University in 1919 and began to practice at the Comilla district court.² Being influenced by his father's strong anti-British attitude at an early age, Ashrafuddin was very much against the British rule in India.³ He had joined the Indian National Congress in 1919 and when Gandhi called for non-co-operation movement in 1921 he plunged into it. He led the Khilafat and the non-co-operation movement in Tippera in the 1920's. He was elected general secretary of the Tippera district Congress.⁴ Ashrafuddin was a

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1. Interview with Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury (1935-1991), the only son of Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury, taken in Dhaka on 12.7.88. Also, interview with Begum Rabeya Chowdhury (daughter of Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury) taken in Dhaka on 28.8.95.
 2. **Ibid.**
 3. Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, **Raj Birodhi, Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury** (Opponent of the Raj, Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury), Comilla, 1978. p. 2.
 4. **Ibid.** p. 3.

member of the Congress for about thirty years and had been the general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee from 1937 to 1941.⁵ In his long political career he had never supported the politics of separatism led by the Muslim League.⁶ He believed in secularism and his political activities all through his life was aimed at maintaining communal harmony. He was one of the pioneers of the peasants' movement in Bengal in the 1920's and was the founder president of Tippera District **Krishak Samiti**.⁷

Tippera was the political base of Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury. It was a Muslim majority area with a predominantly Muslim small holding peasantry.⁸ Ashrafuddin Chowdhury mobilized the peasants in Tippera district. He gave lead to the no-rent campaign in the district during 1920-22.

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5. Interview with Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, Dhaka, 12.7.88.
 6. Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury however, had been a member of the All-India Muslim League for a brief period in the 1920's when the Congress and the Muslim League worked together during the Khilafat and non-co-operation movement. Interview with Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury. He shifted from Congress secular politics in his later life. He joined the **Nezam-i-Islami Party** and turned to be religious leader.
 7. The Tippera District **Krishak Samiti** was founded in April, 1919 with headquarters in Comilla. In its initial stages the **samiti** was concerned with the immediate grievances of the peasants and the amendment of the tenancy law. See, Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Economy, Social Structure and Politics**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986. p. 186. Also see, Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, **Ibid**.
 8. Sugata Bose, **Ibid**. p. 183.

Tippera was mainly a jute-growing district. Slump in jute prices in 1920-21 gave reason for the peasants to join the movement against the local rent-collecting and money-lending groups.⁹ The Bengal Congress had never sanctioned a no-rent campaign because it went against the interests of the Hindu **zamindars**.¹⁰ But situation in Tippera was different. Unlike other districts of eastern Bengal where a large number of the landed gentry belonged to the Hindu high-caste, Tippera had a mainly Hindu upper-caste rent-collecting and money-lending groups.¹¹ Ashrafuddin initiated the no-rent campaign in Tippera in view of the economic distress prevailing in the district.¹² In fact, the Congress Committee at Tippera encouraged this move. Here the district Congress was under the command of Ashrafuddin Chowdhury. Under his leadership the peasant movement led by the district

9. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 186.

10. Bidyut Chakravarty, "Peasants and the Bengal Congress, 1928-1938", *South Asia Research*, Vol. 5, No. 1. London, May 1985. The Bengal Congress believed that no-rent and no-debt movements against **zamindars** would bring serious dislocations in the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims in east Bengal. pp. 39-43.

11. Sugata Bose, *Op. Cit.* p. 183.

12. The trend in the slump and boom of jute prices in Bengal regulated the nature of peasant movement in the jute-growing villages. After 1907-1912 boom in jute prices there was a sharp fall during the First World War. It was not until 1922 that prices picked up to their pre-war level. There was another brief boom which reached its peak in 1926 and then prices fell down and reached all-time low in 1933. The 1930's was the decade of world-wide slump in agricultural prices and jute price was not to recover from the slump until 1937-38. See, Sugata Bose, "The Roots of Communal Violence in Rural Bengal", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3. Cambridge, 1982. p. 470.

Krishak Samiti and the Congress merged together.¹³ In 1921 Ashrafuddin organized a strike by tea-garden coolies of Assam at the direction of C.R. Das (1870-1925). The railway and dock workers also joined this strike.¹⁴ Peasant movement under Ashrafuddin's leadership took a fierce shape in Tippera during the civil disobedience movement in 1920-22.¹⁵ Peasant agitation took the shape of a class conflict.¹⁶ But the agitation remained purely Muslim. It did not take a communal turn.¹⁷ The peasants were merely asserting themselves in order to save money in the midst of economic distress.¹⁸

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13. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.** pp. 194-195. Also see, Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** p. 3. Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was then the general secretary of both the Tippera district Congress and the Tippera district **Krishak Samiti**.
 14. Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury brought out a protest procession from Kandirpur, Comilla on this occasion. See, **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** p.3.
 15. In Tippera the local landholding and money-lending upper-class came under severe pressure from the Muslim peasantry. No taxes and no agricultural rents were paid. Assaults were made on government officers when they went to execute orders of warrants. Large crowds attacked the police in March, 1922 with clods of earth and **lathis**. See, Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.** p. 186 and also see, **Raj Birodhu, Op. Cit.** p. 9.
 16. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal**, p. 186.
 17. **Ibid.** pp. 187, 190.
 18. **Ibid.** p. 187.

When Gandhi suddenly called off the non-co-operation movement in February 1922 after the Chauri Chaura incident, Ashrafuddin was disenchanted with Gandhi's strategy of non-violence and civil disobedience.¹⁹ Though a "No-Changer" and a Gandhite, he supported the Bengal Pact initiated by C.R. Das in 1923.²⁰ Ashrafuddin supported the pact wholeheartedly hoping that it would forge communal unity. Gandhi was against the Bengal Pact and was very much unwilling to make it a national one.²¹ From then on Ashrafuddin began to move away from Gandhi's leadership. He came to believe that Gandhi's strategy was impractical in the existing situation. After C.R. Das died in June 1925 Subhas Chandra Bose

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19. Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** pp. 14-15.
 20. According to the Bengal Pact it was announced that when Congress would be in power in Bengal it would reserve 60% of all new appointments for the Muslims till such time as they achieved proper representation according to population. It was also announced that 80% of the new appointments of the Calcutta Corporation would go to the Muslims on similar terms. See, Leonard A. Gordon, **Bengal : The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940**, New Delhi, 1974 (rpt. 1979), p. 195. C.R. Das was trying to buy Muslim support. To strengthen his position in the Bengal Congress he needed the support of the Muslims. **Ibid.** pp. 190-195.
 21. **Ibid.** p. 197. Also see, **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** pp. 12-13 where the author mentions that Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury went to Bombay where he met Gandhi and pleaded him to support the pact but failed to convince him. Muzaffar Ahmad, **Kazi Nazrul Islam : Smritikatha**, Dhaka, 1973. p. 300 where the author mentions Ashrafuddin's sincere efforts to make the pact a success.

began to gain dominant position in the Bengal Provincial Congress organization.²² Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was distressed by factionalism in Congress politics and communal riots which had taken place between 1925 and 1930 in Bengal. He also disliked extreme loyalism being expressed by the Muslim aristocracy to the British rule. Ashrafuddin was disappointed to see those and preferred to choose the path of active resistance to British rule.²³ The activist philosophy followed by Subhas Bose gave him encouragement and a sense of direction to the nationalist movement.

Ashrafuddin Chowdhury was elected the Chariman of the Tippera District Board and the member of the Bengal Provincial Legislative Council in 1930. In Tippera the district Congress was also under Ashrafuddin's leadership.²⁴ The Provincial Conference of the Congress had passed a resolution in 1929 for closer ties between the peasants' and labourers' organizations in Bengal.²⁵ Ashrafuddin supported this decision and began

22. After being released from prison in 1927 Subhas Chandra Bose felt the need to take up the role of leadership left vacant by the death of Das and by early 1928 Bose became president of the Bengal Provincial Congress. L.A. Gordon, *Op. Cit.* pp. 239-241.

23. Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, *Raj Birodhi*, *Op. Cit.* p. 26.

24. He was the president of the Tippera District Congress as well. See, *Raj Birodhi*, *Op. Cit.* p. 29.

25. The nationalist youths, particularly with socialistic leanings supported this move including the demand for complete independence. Subhas Chandra Bose also began to take active part in trade union work and served as president of the All-India Trade Union Congress in 1929. See, L.A. Gordon, *Op. Cit.* p. 245 .

to mobilize the Muslim peasantry in Tippera.²⁶ During the civil disobedience movement in 1930 Ashrafuddin played a dominant role in bringing the peasants behind the movement in the district.²⁷ There was considerable economic distress among the cultivators affected by sharp fall in prices of agricultural goods in 1929 and by the year 1931 there was a general tendency of the Muslim peasantry to side with the Congress.²⁸ Meetings of the **Krishak Samiti** and the Congress were held together at different places of Tippera, particularly in the district of Comilla and in the countryside.²⁹ Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was arrested in March

26. Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, **Raj Birodhi**, *Op. Cit.* pp. 24-25.

27. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal**, *Op. Cit.* p. 194. The Commissioner of Chittagong division wanted to put an end to the participation of the Muslim peasants in the movement and he felt that except "Ashrafuddin's batch of vagabonds" there was little popularity of the movement among the mass of the Muslim peasants. However, this was his opinion until January 1931. Soon he found that the Muslim peasants had begun to rally behind Congress programme in a large number, *Ibid.* p. 194.

28. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* pp. 194-195.

29. *Ibid.* p. 195. At a meeting in Comilla on 19 and 20 January, 1931 the district **Krishak Samiti** had been revived under the leadership of Mukleshwar Rahman, an associate of Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury. The **Krishak Samiti** and Congress movements in Tippera and Comilla merged under Ashrafuddin's leadership. The members of the executive committee of the district **Krishak Samiti** were all members of the Congress Committee, most prominent being Kamini Kumar Datta, Mukleshwar Rahman, Abdul Malek, Abdul Jalil, Dharendra Datta, Basanta Majumdar and Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury being their leader in Tippera. There were other members as well, like, Abdul Wahed, Habibur Rahman, Niaran Ghosh and Krishna Sundar Bhowmick, *Ibid.* p. 195. Also see, Tanika Sarkar, **Bengal, 1928-1934, The Politics of Protest**, New Delhi, 1987. p. 132.

1930 for defying government ban on demonstrations.³⁰ Released from prison in April 1930 he attended the All-Bengal Muslim Political Conference (the **Nikhil Banga Muslim Rajnoitik Sammelan**) held in Chittagong on 18 and 19 of the same month.³¹ This conference was significant in the sense that it was organized by another prominent nationalist Muslim, Maulana Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950).³²

Nationalist movement led by the Congress on all-India level decided the political moves taken by the Congress leaders in Bengal where they were strongly anti-Gandhi. The Gandhi-Irwin pact in March 1931 had disappointed Ashrafuddin Chowdhury greatly like the other political leaders

30. Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, **Raj Birodhi**, *Op. Cit.* pp. 25-28. Ashrafuddin was released on bail in April 1930 from Comilla prison.

31. *Ibid.* p. 29. It is essential to mention that the Chittagong Armoury raid took place on the same date and the coincidence of the Conference and the raid created suspicion among officials whether the two incidents had some connection. Presence of Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury in Chittagong at this time made him a strong suspect. The Commissioner of Chittagong division met Ashrafuddin in the morning of April 19, 1930 to ascertain his involvement in the raid. The matter was, however, a surprise to Ashrafuddin who knew nothing of the incident. There was a revival of revolutionary activities in Bengal in the early years of the 1930's. Plans of uprisings were made in Chittagong, Mymensingh and Barisal. The leader of the Chittagong Armoury Raid and the guerrilla warfare from the forests was Surja Sen who was arrested in 1933 and executed the next year. See, L.A. Gordon, *Op. Cit.* pp. 247-248.

32. **Raj Birodhi**, *Ibid.* p. 29. The Conference was presided over by Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury.

in Bengal.³³ No settlement was made on the question of release of political prisoners or of complete independence. Ashrafuddin felt that running the **charkas** (spinning wheels to produce **khadi**) and giving the **harijans** (the untouchables) respect (through Communal Award and the Poona Pact in August 1932) were not enough for a nationalist movement.³⁴ He now discarded Gandhi's path of non-violence and began to follow the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. However, the **Krishak Samiti** and the Congress movement in Tippera was under complete leadership of Ashrafuddin Chowdhury. His political activity in the 1930's was confined mainly to the peasant movement in Tippera. There was propaganda against landlords and money lenders. The **zamindars** ^{and} **mahajans** became very unpopular in the districts because of their oppressive methods.³⁵ Ashrafuddin Chowdhury organized the **krishak** movement not consciously to lead a class struggle, he said, but to strengthen the nationalist movement.³⁶ He admitted that he never intended to lead any anti-feudalist or anti-landlord movement.³⁷

33. Subhas Chandra Bose and other younger nationalists in Bengal criticized the terms of the pact particularly on the ground of release of political prisoners. Those arrested for civil disobedience were released but the Bengali prisoners who were considered revolutionaries were not. L.A. Gordon, *Op. Cit.* pp. 248-249.

34. See, Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, *Raj Birodhi*, *Op. Cit.* pp. 34-35. Ashrafuddin did not like the way the caste Hindus and the untouchables were split by reservations for separate electorates provided by the Poona Pact and the Communal Award of August 1932. Ashrafuddin never believed in the provisions for separate electorates either for Muslims or for the untouchables.

35. See, Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*, *Op. Cit.* p. 195.

36. See, Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, *Raj Birodhi*, *Op. Cit.* p. 35.

37. *Ibid.* p. 35.

He wanted to make the peasant movement a part of the nationalist movement and his real aim was to attain independence.³⁸ He stood against all kinds of exploitation and oppression and, therefore, chose to take up the cause of the peasants.

On 1 May, 1931 a large procession was organized in Tippera. Some 5000 peasants and labourers came out in a procession in Comilla and assembled at the Town Hall Maidan which seemed like "a sort of Bolshie meeting."³⁹ Demands were made for limitation of debt interest to 6%, reduction of union board taxes, increasing representation of cultivators in the councils, provision for education and free legal defence in rent suits, etc.⁴⁰ **Krishak Samiti** activities in Tippera and in some other districts

38. *Ibid.* p. 35.

39. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.** pp. 195-196. There was no famine in Tippera but a serious shortage of money. Jute was sold at a very low price. **Mahajans** and banks had "dried up" and there was great demand for agricultural loans. Labour rates had also gone down to two **annas** a day in many places and many were out of work. *Ibid.* p. 196.

40. There were meetings in Tippera where it was decided not to pay interest to money-lenders. The left-wing of the Congress were also active in the district. The meeting on 1 May, 1931 demanded release of the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners - an aspect essential to note in respect of the activities of the members of the Congress left-wing, who, in fact, were less inclined to support anti-landlord, anti-**mahajan** campaigns. Subhas Chandra Bose visited Comilla the following day. It was the motive of the politicians, both of the **krishak samiti** and the Congress, to demonstrate Muslim support for the Congress. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 196.

like Noakhali, became violent.⁴¹ But these activities never turned communal.⁴² Tippera was one of the few areas in eastern Bengal which retained communal harmony till 1946.

The Government of India Act of 1935 which greatly extended franchise, opened up prospects of provincial elections. A large part of the **krishak** movement was now drawn into electoral politics. In the years 1935 and 1936 large meetings of the **Krishak Samiti** were held frequently in Tippera organized by Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury.⁴³ He delivered impassioned speeches at these meetings where he denounced **zamindari**

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41. Several incidents of decoities, burning of haystacks, stealing or killing of cattle took place between 1930-1934. The district magistrate of Tippera was so worried about the **krishak samiti** activities that he wanted to put into force the Bengal Public Security Act in the district. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 199.
42. Demonstrations in Tippera included both Hindus and Muslims who shouted **Bande-Mataram** as well as **Allah-o-Akbar**. See, Tanika Sarkar, *Op. Cit.* p. 144 . Also see, Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* pp. 200-201 where the author notes from the confidential file of the commissioner of Chittagong division for the first half of February 1936 that "Whenever a leading **krishak samiti** worker arrived, he was greeted with deafening shouts of **Bande-Mataram** and **Allah-o-Akbar**." The non-communal feature of the **krishak samiti** meetings is highlighted here.
43. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 200.

and **manajani** and upheld the Bengal Agricultural Debtor's Bill.⁴⁴ He could not contest the 1937 elections because of his prison records but he conducted the election campaign for the **krishak samiti** in the district.

In April 1936 Fazlul Huq presided over a conference at Dacca where **krishak samitis** of Tippera and Noakhali and **proja samitis** of other districts were brought together to form the all-Bengal **Krishak Proja**

44. Earlier, in 1931 Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury had resigned from the post of Chairman of the Tippera District Board and from the Bengal Provincial Council in order to join the Civil Disobedience movement. **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** p. 37. At almost all meetings he demanded abolition of the **zamindari** system, amendments to the Bengal Tenancy Act in favour of the peasants, abolition of **mahajani** system and creation of state agricultural banks, immediate implementation of the Bengal Agricultural Debtor's Act; curtailment of the powers of the Court of Wards; amendment of Debtor's Act regarding **kat** mortgages so that debts could be paid in twenty yearly instalments and adoption of all legal and peaceful means to win independence. See, Sugata Bose, **Ibid.** p. 201. **Kat** mortgages were a conditional sale of land which was given to the possession of the mortgagee in lieu of interest until the principal amount was repaid. In case the principal was not repaid within the period of limitation, the mortgaged land was sold to the mortgagee. The problem of **Kat** mortgages was acute in Tippera district. **Ibid.** p. 201.

Samiti, which came to be known as the **Krishak Proja Party**.⁴⁵ The Tippera **Krishak Samiti** remained independent of the **Krishak Proja Party**. Ashrafuddin Chowdhury contributed greatly to organize the **Krishak Proja** movement in Tippera in an extensive scale.⁴⁶ As a part of election campaign **Krishak Proja Party** conferences were held in various districts of eastern Bengal. The Tippera Conference was organized by Ashrafuddin Chowdhury at Comilla on 24 and 25 July, 1936 where he explained the reasons for immediate abolition of **zamindari** without compensation and also the abolition of the **khas mahal** system.⁴⁷

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45. The **Nikhil Banga Proja Samiti** (All-Bengal Tenants Association) was formed in July 1929 with members like Sir Abdur Rahim, Maulana Akram Khan, Maulvi Mujibur Rahman, Maulvi Abdul Karim, A.K. Fazlul Huq, A. Suhrawardy, Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin. See, Humaira Momen, **A Study of Krishak Proja Party and the Elections of 1937**, Dhaka, 1972. p. 41. In 1932 the **Nikhil Banga Proja Samiti** began to consolidate its power by bringing the district **samities** under its affiliation. All except the Tippera **Krishak Samiti** merged with the provincial body. *Ibid.* p. 42. Also see, Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.** p.202 and Jamaluddin Ahmad Chowdhury, **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** P. 37.
46. Ashrafuddin worked hard to make the **Krishak Proja** movement popular. The Tippera district **Krishak Proja** movement got both moral and material support from the Bengal Congress. See, **Raj Birodhi, Ibid.** p. 37.
47. See, **Raj Birodhi, Ibid.** pp. 38-42. The Conference was attended by Fazlul Huq where he denounced the United Muslim Party formed by landlords of Bengal in May 1936 and criticized the knights and **nawabs** like Khwaja Nazimuddin and K.G.M. Faruqui for disregarding the interests of the peasants. Also see, Sugata Bose, **Ibid.** pp. 202-203.

Muslim League in Bengal was more influenced by the Congress and the **Krishak Proja** Party leaders in the pre-election months of 1936 and early 1937. Jinnah came to Calcutta in August 1936 in order to win over the United Muslim Party and the **Krishak Proja** Party members. Fazlul Huq sent a few of the **Krishak Proja** Party members like Tamizuddin Khan, Shamsuddin Ahmad, Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury and Abul Mansur Ahmad to participate in the negotiation.⁴⁸ Their discussion failed on issues like the choice of Fazlul Huq as the future prime minister of Bengal and abolition of **zamindari** without compensation both of which being rejected by Jinnah and the United Muslim Party members.⁴⁹ Jinnah also insisted that all Muslim candidates should contest the election as Muslim league candidates which the **Krishak Proja** Party leaders could not accept. However, the results of the election of 1937 showed that the **Krishak Proja** Party had won 36 seats and the Tippera **Krishak Samiti** independency won

48. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar** (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It), Dhaka, 1968. (2nd. ed. 1970), p. 112.

49. **Ibid.** p. 121. After discussions failed Jinnah tried to persuade Abul Mansur Ahmad to accept his proposals, Jinnah could never have liked a person with such opposing views and called Ashrafuddin a "wholehogger". He advised Abul Mansur Ahmad not to be "misguided by Ashrafuddin".

5 seats.⁵⁰ The **Krishak Proja** Party proved a stronghold in Tippera district. After the elections Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury had hoped for the formation of a **Krishak Proja** Party and Congress coalition ministry. He was involved in the negotiations with Congress leaders. When the possibility of such a coalition was lost and Fazlul Huq quickly decided to form coalition ministry with the Muslim League Ashrafuddin was greatly shocked.⁵¹ The Muslim League was very much against the **proja** interest and did not believe in secular politics. As soon as Fazlul Huq's League-dominated ministry took office in March 1937 Ashrafuddin began to intensify anti-ministerial campaign.⁵² Huq's coalition ministry consisted

50. In Tippera 5 out of 10 seats were won by the Tippera **Krishak Samiti**. The Tippera **Krishak Samiti** retained a certain degree of autonomy from the **Krishak Proja** Party. The **Samiti** polled 3.83% of the rural votes. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.** pp. 205-206. The Tippera **Krishak Samiti** was a militant group within the **proja** movement but allied with the coalition ministry formed in February 1937. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1987. p. 84. Also see, Humaira Momen, **Op. Cit.** p. 63 where the author mentions that the Tippera **Krishak Samiti** won 6 seats in the rural area while Shila Sen, **Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947**, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 88-89 and Harun-or-Rashid, **Ibid.** p. 84 mention 5 seats.

51. See, **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** pp. 48-49. Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was so bewildered that he rushed to Fazlul Huq's house with professional **goonda** (Killer) and threatened to kill Huq.

52. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.** pp. 206-207. There were members of **Krishak Proja** Party like, Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, Abu Husian Sarkar, Ramizuddin Ahmad, Giashuddin Ahmad, Junab Ali Majumdar, Sahed Ali Patwari, Makbul Husain, Asimuddin Ahmed, Kazi Emdadul Huq who constantly put pressure on Fazlul Huq to consider the interests of the **proja**. See, **Raj Birodhi, Op. Cit.** pp. 51-52.

men of landed aristocracy and only two **Krishak Proja** Party men. At a meeting held on 27 March 1937 the executive committee of the Tippera **Krishak Samiti** passed a resolution urging Fazlul Huq to dissolve his ministry and form one including people who sympathised with the peasants and his role at this stage was both of "responsive co-operation" and "responsive opposition."⁵³ Ashrafuddin now began to organize numerous **Krishak** meetings where he urged the Muslim cultivators to join the Congress.⁵⁴ At Chandina in Tippera district a Congress-**Krishak** meeting was held on 2 May, 1937 which had an audience of 4,000.⁵⁵ Similar meetings were held at Brahmanbaria, Nabinagar, Laksam of the Tippera district in the month of May, same year which also had large audiences.⁵⁶ At such meetings attacks were made particularly on the Debt Settlement Boards and appeals were made to the Muslims to join the Congress.⁵⁷

53. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* pp. 206-207. Also see, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 51-52.

54. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 207.

55. Confidential review of events in Bengal in the second half of May 1937, **L/P&J/5/141 (The Bengal Proceedings, Fortnightly Reports of Governors, Chief Commissioners and Chief Secretaries)** at the India Office Library and Records, London.

56. *Ibid.*

57. See, **The Bengal Proceedings, L/P&J/5/141**. The Confidential review of events in Bengal for the second fortnight of May 1937 reported about these meetings and the references made at these gatherings. Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was made responsible for arranging these meetings. Also see, Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 207. The **L/P&J/5/141** of the second half of May 1937 also reported that public feeling in Tippera was one of unrest and the landowners and moneylenders were uneasy and anxious because of the **krishak samiti** activities there.

After the elections of 1937 different political parties like the Muslim League, the **Krishak Proja** Party, the **Tippera Krishak Samiti** and the Congress all began to compete "fiercely" to gain allegiance of the peasants.⁵⁸ There were attempts by the Muslim League to set up branches at Tippera but because of anti-Muslim League campaign by Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury, support for Congress was greater in the district.⁵⁹ The local **krishak samiti** movement "coalesced completely" with the Congress and made the peasant agitation powerful in Tippera.⁶⁰ Congress activities in Bengal did not start as a mass movement. It localised only in a few districts. Tippera was one of those districts. The significant factor was that most of the residents here were Muslims who were brought to support the Congress. Here the Congress gained a strong peasant base.⁶¹ The Muslim

58. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.** p. 206.

59. **Ibid.** pp. 206-207. Also see, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, Monday, 5 April, 1937.

60. See, **L/P&J/5/141**. Review of events in Bengal for the second fortnight of June 1937 which reported that almost every meeting of the **Krishak Samiti** was addressed by Congress leaders and ^{resembled} purely Congress gatherings. Some **Krishak Samitis**, like those of Faridpur, Bakarganj, Dacca, and Chittagong, however, warned the cultivators from being misled into an alliance with Congress. **L/P&J/5/141**, second fortnight of June, 1937. **Krishak Samitis** in some areas like those of Khulna, Murshidabad, Nadia and the 24 Parganas were formed on communistic lines. See, **L/P&J/5/141**, Confidential review on events in Bengal for the first fortnight of June, 1937.

61. The Congress, in fact, was mainly an urban organization and in general, the Congress movement did not appeal to the rural masses. But in Tippera the Congress had a "really strong support among Moslems." See, Sugata Bose, **Ibid.** p. 211.

League was also increasing its propaganda in Tippera. Its intention was primarily to gain support for the Muslim League ministry as against the Congress. Fazlul Huq made political tours at places like Noakhali, Tippera and Mymensingh and tried to establish that the peasant disturbances and **Krishak proja** agitation were instigated by the Congress.⁶² During 1938 the Congress-**Krishak** rural campaign was also strong. The return of the ex-detenus to Tippera gave new life to the Congress and anti-ministerial party.⁶³ Ashrafuddin organized several **mofussil** meetings where he appealed to the Muslims to join the Congress and to maintain communal harmony.⁶⁴ At several meetings and conferences in Tippera and other

62. See, **L/P&J/5/141**, Confidential review of events in Bengal for the first half of November, 1937. Report from the Secretary to the Governor of Bengal to the Secretary of State for India. Also see, **L/P&J/5/141**. Confidential review of events in Bengal for the first and the second half of December, 1937. See, the **Assembly Proceedings, Bengal Legislative Assembly, Vol. LII-No. I**. Calcutta, Third Session, 16 February, 1938. Several members of the assembly criticized the huge expenses for those tours. Besides, they also accused the chief minister for creating disruption and chaos at those meetings because his speeches were aimed against those members of the **Krishak Proja** Party who did not support the coalition ministry. The tour of Tippera and Comilla was particularly mentioned because here Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was not allowed to speak at a meeting. There were also clashes between peasants and Muslim League supporters. **Ibid.** pp. 193-195.

63. Sugata Bose, **Ibid.** p. 211.

64. See, **L/P&J/5/142**. Public and Judicial Department. Bengal Governor's Report. Confidential. First fortnight of February, 1938.

places of Comilla in 1938 he took up the question of remission of the Damodar canal rate which was unusually high, decrease of land revenue and rent, capture of local bodies by the Congress, formation of Congress committees in every village, etc. ⁶⁵ It was from this time onwards that Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury was treated by his community as an "outcast". In his speech at Noakhali on 13 June, 1938 he criticized the Muslim League ministry for doing nothing substantial for the masses and not taking a bold stand for passing the tenancy act. He admitted that he had done nothing wrong to his co-religionists by joining the Congress. He admitted in the course of his speech that he would fight for freedom till death "as a humble soldier of the Congress."⁶⁶ It should be noted that at that time he was the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee.

In Tippera there was a struggle for influence over the agriculturist population. There was the Congress-Krishak coalition on the one hand and the Muslim League on the other. The activity of the Muslim League in the districts was also increased so that the **Proja** party gradually dwindled and

65. See, **L/P&J/5/142**. First half of January, 1938. Also see the **Assembly Proceedings, Bengal Legislative Assembly, Third session. Vol. LII-No. 5**, Calcutta, 1938. See the debates on construction of canals and the realisation of canal taxes.

66. See, **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, Calcutta, Tuesday, 14 June, 1938.

the mass contact policy of the Congress could also be stopped.⁶⁷ There was also the Congress Socialist party organized by the ex-detenus who were against Fazlul Huq's **Proja**-League coalition ministry and communist in character.⁶⁸ Besides, a split in the district **krishak samiti** had already taken place in Tippera in the mid-1930's.⁶⁹ One group was led by Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury and his close associate Abdul Malek. They were pro-Congress.⁷⁰ The other group was pro-communist and was led by Asimuddin and Yakub Ali.⁷¹ The Bengal Provincial **Kisan Sabha** (BPKS)

67. See, **L/P&J/5/142**. Confidential. First half of February, 1938. Some 300 Muslim students held an anti-Congress demonstration at Comilla on 31st of January 1938 where they publicly burnt the effigy of Sri and Lotus (Hindu religious symbols) and passages from the novel **Anandamath** (by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee) and other novels. Also see, **L/P&J/5/142**. Confidential. Bengal Governor's Situation Report, dated 5 May, 1938.

68. Reports on the activities of this newly formed group were numerous in the confidential review of the political situation in Bengal. See, **L/P&J/5/142**. First half of January 1938. Also see, **L/P&J/5/142**. The agrarian meetings of this group did not interfere with **zamindari** collection or **khas mahal**. This group infiltrated socialistic ideas among youths and students and incited the agricultural population against imperialism and capitalism.

69. Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal**, *Op. Cit.* p. 203.

70. *Ibid.* p. 203. Also see, **Raj Birodhi**, *Op. Cit.* p. 52.

71. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 203.

was set up in April 1936 by the Congress-left and several conferences were held in Comilla.⁷²

During 1939 and 1940 left-wing agrarian agitation intensified, particularly in Tippera, geared up further by Subhas Bose's tour of the district in November, 1939.⁷³ There were also continued efforts to form **Krishak Samitis** and Congress committees in every union and to unite the

72. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 203. Also see the L/P&J/5/142. Confidential report dated 8 March, 1938 which mentioned about the peculiar condition in Tippera district where the Congress had a large Muslim affiliation and where two strongly opposing factions competed for agrarian support. The **Kisan Sabha** included members of the peasant proprietors of land, tillers of land and **bhagchasis** and landless wage earners. In a very short time the **Kisan Sabha** gathered a large support but the Congress did not want its members to join the **Kisan Sabha** on the plea that it involved violence. The Muslims were also discouraged to join it by the Muslim League propaganda that it was another organization of the Congress to deceive the Muslims. See, Abul Hayat, **Mussalmans of Bengal**, Calcutta, 1966. pp. 70-72. Also see, the L/P&J/5/142 which reported in the first fortnight of May, 1938 that Ashrafuddin's support for the **Kisan Sabha** "was not so open or effective." The L/P&J/5/143 dated 19 December 1938 also reported that very few Muslims attended their conferences.

73. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* pp. 211-212. Also see, **Raj Birodhi**, *Op. Cit.* pp. 56-58 where it is mentioned that Subhas Bose was taken ill and could not preside at the meeting. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was then asked by Ashrafuddin to preside. See, **Raj Birodhi** p. 56. The author notes that Maulana Azad was very critical of the Bengal Congressmen.

74. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 212.

factions of the district **Krishak Samiti**.⁷⁴ By 1940 these attempts of mass campaign came to a halt. The Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act, 1938; the Agricultural Debtor's Act (1935) was put into operation in 1938; the Money-Lender's Act of 1940 made Huq's ministry very popular among the masses.⁷⁵ Although the tenants, ryots and under-ryots were not given propriety rights of their holdings and nothing was done with a view to restricting jute production and fixing minimum price of jute, the above acts brought great relief to the peasants.⁷⁶ Any attempt to bring down Huq's ministry was treated in East Bengal as a betrayal to the cause of the Muslims and the peasantry.⁷⁷

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75. By the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act of August 1938, the landlord's fee, known as **salami**, the right of pre-emption, the right to realize rent by certificate procedure and the realisation of illegal cesses called **abwabs** were abolished. Tenants were given the right to recover deluvial land within twenty years on payment of only four years rent. The rate of interest on arrears of rent was reduced from 12 ½% to 6¼%. The Act also suspended for ten years the enhancement of rents of tenure-holders and ryots by the landlords. The Agricultural Debtor's Act created thousands of debt settlement boards in the villages. The second amendment of the Agricultural Debtor's Act covered all types of loan and was extensively enforced. The Bengal Money-lenders Act of 1940 made it obligatory for all money-lenders, i.e. the **mahajans** to obtain trade licences after registering themselves with the government. The maximum rate of interest for secured and unsecured loans was fixed at 6% and 8% respectively. See, Shila Sen, *Op. Cit.* pp. 102-103. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, *Op. Cit.* pp. 110-111.
76. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal, Op. Cit.* p. 213. Also see, Shila Sen, *Ibid.* p. 103.
77. Shila Sen, *Ibid.* pp. 102-103. Also see, Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p.213.

In Tippera, however, misery of the peasants was severe in 1940-1941.⁷⁸ World War II had started in September, 1939. Jute price continued to be weak in relation to the price of food grains and inflation was also very high.⁷⁹ Collection of dues in Tippera was very poor in 1940-1941 because the peasants could not sell their jute crop.⁸⁰ Price of rice continued to rise and there was also cyclone and floods which damaged much of jute and paddy in 1941.⁸¹ The Forward Bloc, which included the left-wing Congressmen and the members of the Communist Party of India started relief *samitis* and organized large-scale hunger marches demanding food and work.⁸² Communal situation was also worse in Bengal in 1941 but Tippera remained calm because of the secular attitude of the leaders there.⁸³

78. *Ibid.* pp. 214-215.

79. *Ibid.* pp. 214-215.

80. *Ibid.* p. 214.

81. *Ibid.* p. 215.

82. *Ibid.* p. 215. Peasant distress was such that in May 1941 the tenants forcibly cultivated the *khas* lands of the *zamindars*. There were illegal paddy cuttings and the Chittagong Divisional Commissioner apprehended *goondaism*. *Ibid.* p. 214. There were also reports of deaths from starvation. *Ibid.* p. 215.

83. *Ibid.* pp. 215-217. Communal situation in Tippera remained calm in 1941. In April 1941 Hindus from Raipura and Shibpur thanas of Narayanganj subdivision fled to Tippera district. The Commissioner of Chittagong division wrote that despite huge influx of refugees from Dacca, communal relation in Tippera was "surprisingly good". "The really hopeful thing in Tippera", he wrote, "is that leaders of both communities are moderate minded people." See, Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 217.

Mass arrests of nationalist leaders, particularly of those who were more militant between 1940 and 1942 brought the **krishak** movement in Tippera to a halt.⁸⁴

Until 1941 when Ashrafuddin was imprisoned for long five years at the Buxa Special Jail, Jalpaiguri, his political career was mostly allied with the radicals. He had chosen to fight for the cause of the peasants but retained a certain degree of autonomy from the **krishak Proja Samiti**. He kept an independent strategy for the movement run by the Tippera **Krishak Samiti**. He believed in non-communal politics and, therefore, retained his allegiance to Congress. But, by the late 1930's he began to dislike the dictatorial attitude of the Congress High Command and particularly, of Gandhi. At the Bogra district conference on 20 and 21 May 1939 Ashrafuddin made a long speech where he stated the reasons for his dislike of Gandhi's policies.⁸⁵ He expressed his disenchantment at Gandhi's civil disobedience movement and the creed of **ahimsa**.⁸⁶ He also criticized Gandhi's support for Communal Award and the provision of reservation of seats which, he believed, had divided the communities and had greatly broadened the cleavage.⁸⁷ Like Subhas Chandra Bose he believed that war was to begin and it was the right moment to attack the imperial power.⁸⁸ He criticized the Congress

84. **Ibid.** p. 213.

85. See, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 60-62.

86. **Ibid.** pp. 60-61.

87. **Ibid.** p. 61.

88. **Ibid.** p. 64.

leaders for not willing to take that opportunity.⁸⁹ He felt that it was practical to follow any path to attain freedom from colonial rule even if it was a violent means and rejected the path of spiritual salvation of Gandhi.⁹⁰ He preferred the path of armed struggle and direct warfare against the British in India as was chosen by Subhas Bose.⁹¹ Bose had already formed the Forward Bloc in the later part of 1939 and for the next one year he toured the country trying to gain support for his party.⁹² During this time Ashrafuddin became the closest associate of Bose and had worked for him carrying out secret missions.⁹³ He toured with Bose places like Assam, Bombay, Nagpur, Delhi, the United Provinces, Madras, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Ramgar, Dacca to create support for the Forward Bloc and to get men, munitions and money to promote India's struggle for freedom.⁹⁴ Ashrafuddin was not clearly a revolutionary leader himself or a member of the Indian National Army Bose formed during the war, but helped him in his attempt. He had joined hands with Bose although knowing that Gandhi had a strong dislike for him. Ashrafuddin was still then the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The Congress High Command expelled him from the party in 1940.⁹⁵ Although Ashrafuddin supported Bose he was much against Bose's attempt to make alliance with the Muslim League in 1940 regarding the election to the Calcutta

89. *Ibid.* pp. 61-62.

90. *Ibid.* p. 61.

91. *Ibid.* pp. 63-64. Also see, Leonard A. Gordon, *Op. Cit.* pp. 276-278.

92. See, Leonard A. Gordon. pp. 276-278.

93. *Raj Birodhi*, p. 71.

94. *Ibid.* p. 64.

95. *Ibid.* pp. 64,84.

Corporation.⁹⁶ Ashrafuddin opposed Muslim League demand for partition based on the "two-nation" theory and tried to convince Bose not to ally with the Muslim League which to his opinion, was a purely communal party.⁹⁷

Ashrafuddin was arrested in 1940 while he was attending a Workers' Conference at Kachar near Assam.⁹⁸ He was under house arrest for sometime but escaped one night.⁹⁹ He was arrested again in 1941 when he was speaking at a gathering in Chittagong with other left-wing leaders.¹⁰⁰ By early 1941 Subhas Bose had also slipped secretly out of India never to come back.¹⁰¹

96. **Ibid.** p. 67.

97. Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** p. 194. As relation between Fazlul Huq and the Muslim League High Command and Jinnah got strained from mid-1940 Huq made attempts to make alliance with Sarat Chandra Bose and other Hindu leaders, like those of the Forward Bloc, the Hindu Mahasabha and others to form a Progressive Coalition ministry in December, 1941. Also see, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 127-134 and Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 127-140.

98. **Raj Birodhi**, p. 64.

99. **Ibid.** p. 72.

100. **Ibid.** pp. 73. Bose's followers were dubbed "pro-fascist". Ashrafuddin was charged on the ground that he was an active member of an organization the object of which was to overthrow the government by armed revolution. Other left-wing leaders like, Sudhangshu Bimal Dutta, Troilakya Chakravarti were also present at the meeting.

101. Subhas Bose was also arrested in July, 1940 and was under house arrest in December, 1940. Early on 17 January 1941 he left India secretly and never came back. Leonard A. Gordon, **Op. Cit.** pp. 286, 278. Bose fled to Berlin via Kabul and Moscow, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 67-68.

By the time Ashrafuddin came out of prison in December 1945 most **Krishak Proja** leaders had joined the Muslim League.¹⁰² By March 1940 when elections were to be held Muslim League was the most popular party and the creation of Pakistan was the only demand of the Muslims. When Ashrafuddin came home from jail in December 1945 he was attacked by Muslim youths in front of his house. They pelted him with stones and called him a betrayer, a "**kaumi gaddar**" meaning, traitor to the nation, as they called all the nationalist Muslims.¹⁰³ Ashrafuddin was surprised and shocked to see Muslims becoming so violently communal.

By the time of the elections the **Krishak Proja** members had either joined the Congress or the Muslim League.¹⁰⁴ The nationalist Muslims were cornered and they had little hope to win the elections. There was very little support from the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee for the

102. Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 195. Also see, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 243-244 and Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal**, p. 220.

103. See, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 103-104. Ashrafuddin Chowdhury had been treated as a betrayer to the cause of the Muslims since the mid-1930's, particularly from 1938 onwards when he began to criticize the Proja-League coalition ministry. His association with the Congress and later, with Subhas Bose and the Forward Bloc had also earned him that abuse from the Muslim League followers. Also see, Sugata Bose, **Ibid.** p. 221.

104. Muslim League Conferences were held in large numbers at **mofussil** towns and Muslims joined the party in thousands. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 192.

Congress Muslims.¹⁰⁵ The condition of the nationalist Muslims at this stage was such that they were left out the mainstream politics.¹⁰⁶ So long they had identified themselves with the **Krishak Proja** movement in Bengal and had got moral and material support from the Congress. Now that the ideology of Pakistan gained a mass support and all hope for a Hindu-Muslim unity had withered away Congress seemed reluctant to stand by the side of the nationalist Muslims. Ashrafuddin Chowdhury organized a meeting of the **Nikhil Banga Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind**, a non-communal and pro-Congress party, at his village Shuagazi in Tippera on 9 February, 1946.¹⁰⁷ The

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105. **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 104, 163-164. Letter from Ashrafuddin Chowdhury to Acharya J.B. Kripalani, the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee, dated 9.12.45 reveal the relation between the nationalist Muslims and the Congress leaders in 1945-1946. **Ibid.** pp. 163-164.
106. Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 198-199. It is interesting to note that Subhas Bose had remarked as early as in 1940 that there was no hope to gain anything from the nationalist Muslims. See, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 195-196. Communal relation got worse with the popularity of the Muslim League demand for Pakistan and there remained very little hope for the nationalist Muslims to carry on secular politics.
107. See, Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal**, p. 222. Also see, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 104-109. The **Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind** was also divided. There was the **Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Bangla** which was a pro-Muslim League organization, launched in October, 1945 and acted as a significant mobilizing agency for the League. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 215, 227. The pro-Congress **Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind** was revived in Bengal by nationalist Muslim leaders like Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950), a KPP leader and member of the Bengal Assembly in 1937 and Dr. Sanaullah, also member of the Bengal Assembly elected as an independent candidate. Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p.214. Meetings and conferences of the nationalist Muslims were held in 1944 at Delhi and in several places of Bengal to upheld the formation of a national government. See, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** pp. 199-200.

meeting was addressed by Maulana Husain Madani who strongly declared that the Hindus and Muslims were not two nations but one and belonged to one state.¹⁰⁸ The demand for Pakistan was opposed at the conference.

In the elections of March 1946 those **krishak samiti** leaders at Tippera who had not joined the Muslim League had lost their seats to the League candidate.¹⁰⁹ The two nationalist Muslims, Ashrafuddin Ahmad Chowdhury and Syed Nausher Ali who contested the election on Congress ticket failed to win any seat.¹¹⁰ The Muslim League supporters had led violent attacks on the nationalist Muslims during election campaigns.¹¹¹ Demand for partition led to such frenzy among Muslims that they adopted

108. See, Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* pp. 222. Also see, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 108-112. There was disturbance at the conference and assaults were made on the nationalist Muslims by the Muslim League supporters. Ashrafuddin also led his forces and challenged the League activities at the meeting. See, **L/P&J/5/153**, Confidential report on the political situation in Bengal in the first half of February, 1946.

109. Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 222.

110. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 231-232. Also see, Sugata Bose, *Ibid.* p. 222. The Congress supported Muslim groups like the **Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind** (JUH), the Muslim Parliamentary Board (MPB) and the Nationalist Muslims (NM) who contested for 9 assembly members (3 from each group). All failed to win any seat. The **Krishak Proja** Party, however, managed to win only 4 seats, 2 of those by Fazlul Huq himself. See, Harun-or-Rashid, *Ibid.* p. 231.

111. See, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 112-113 where the author gives a vivid description of their violent activities and the extent of their assaults.

any means to attain that. Defeat of the nationalist Muslims in the 1946 elections and the clamour for Pakistan revealed to them the futility of their efforts and the great sacrifices they had made during their whole political career.¹¹²

Ashrafuddin Chowdhury, however, remained firm in his belief in secular politics and continued to pursue the Congress leaders to avert partition. He believed partition of India would fragment the large community into three small sections making them weaker in every respect.¹¹³ He hoped that the Muslim League leaders would realize that and expected that the Congress leaders would find a way out to avoid partition. He hoped that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sarat Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, J.B. Kripalani and above all, Gandhi would take initiative in this respect. But, Ashrafuddin observed that like the Muslim League leaders the Congress High Command had also become communal.¹¹⁴ He wrote

112. See, **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 126-127.

113. Like Subhas Chandra Bose, he also believed that "one India was a geographical fact and a historical necessity." **Ibid.** p. 157. Ashrafuddin Chowdhury pointed out that Pakistan would be economically a very weak state. Sind and the NWFP were unable to run their provincial governments with their own income. Besides, most of the Muslims in India were poor and the government would be forced to tax those poor Muslims. Defence of the country would be at risk because the two wings were a thousand miles apart. **Ibid.** pp. 138-139.

114. **Raj Birodhi**, pp. 115-116. Also see, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** p. 258. Both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha leaders began to apprehend that united and one Bengal of which Suhrawardy, the Chief Minister of Bengal and other leaders were talking of, would actually mean Muslim domination over Hindus. Bengali Hindus were fearful of an independent Bengal.

repeatedly to the Congress leaders reminding them of their pledge for keeping India united. But, Congress rejection of compulsory groupings of the so-called Pakistan provinces and the three-tier constitutional scheme presented by the Cabinet Mission (1946) led to a disastrous consequence.¹¹⁵ The Muslim League called for Direct Action Day to be observed on 15 August, 1946. Although the League's Direct Action was not aimed at any political party or any community of India, provocation from some leaders of both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha led to the massacre at Calcutta, known as the Great Calcutta Killing on 16 August, 1947.¹¹⁶ Communal riots followed in places like Noakhali, Tippera, Bihar and other regions of Bengal.¹¹⁷ So long under Ashrafuddin's leadership no communal riot had occurred in Tippera. In October 1946 Noakhali and Tippera had become violent spots of communal riots which shattered

115. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 255-257.

116. See, Harun-or-Rashid, **Op. Cit.** pp. 259-261. The Direct Action Day was initially aimed at protesting against the British government's "bad faith and giving way to Congress." **Ibid.** p. 256. Jinnah accused the British government of such attitude when the Viceroy issued a statement on 26 June, 1946 that Congress had accepted the long-term plan and that both the Muslim League and the Congress should form a temporary caretaker government in order to form the proposed government at the centre which Jinnah opposed strongly and felt betrayed. In fact, Suhrawardy was held responsible for the situation. He had declared 16 August a holiday which was viewed as politically motivated to obtain a large gathering at the public meeting. His continued presence at the police control room on that day with many of his Muslim League associates also led to doubts about his impartiality. **Ibid.** pp. 258-259. Also see, Shila Sen, **Op. Cit.** p. 215.

117. Harun-or-Rashid, **Ibid.** pp. 260-261.

Ashrafuddin's hope for any communal settlement in a united India.¹¹⁸ In Bihar many innocent nationalist Muslims were slain in the riot and nationalist Muslims were attacked in Calcutta and other places of Bengal. Ashrafuddin was attacked by the Muslim mob in 1940 and forced to take shelter at a Marwari house.¹¹⁹ Still he hoped for a united India.¹²⁰ He wrote to leaders of the Congress like Jawaharlal Nehru and J.B. Kripalani

118. Tippera and Noakhali were Muslim majority areas. Hindu shops were looted, houses burnt, women abducted, some wealthy and prominent men were murdered and many Hindus were forcibly converted. See, Sugata Bose, **Ararian Bengal**, pp. 226-227. The district magistrate here, however, pointed out that riots here took place because of political situation in the country, the Great Calcutta Killing in August and the acute economic distress after the middle of 1946. Jute price went very low, price of rice was very high and supply situation was also bad. Together, the situation in Tippera and Noakhali was one of "extreme anxiety". Sugata Bose, **Ibid.** pp. 224-225.

119. Interview with Begum Rabeya Chowhdury taken in Dhaka on 28.8.95.

120. Even in the midst of this situation Ashrafuddin called a three-day conference of the nationalist Muslims at Shuagazi, Tippera where those present, resolved strongly the need for a united India. See, **Raj Birodhi**, p. 124.

in 1947 to stop India being divided.¹²¹ He even went to Delhi to meet Gandhi hoping that he would be able to stop partition.¹²² Futile in his attempts and disappointed, he wrote at one point that "the Congress High Command has let us down."¹²³

After partition in 1947 Ashrafuddin decided to live in East Pakistan and came to terms gradually with Pakistan as his new homeland.¹²⁴ He never repented that he was a nationalist Muslim. In the 1950's Ashrafuddin carried on his political career on a very different line. He joined the **Nizam-i-**

121. **Ibid.** pp. 119-120 where the author reproduced the letter written to Ashrafuddin Chowdhury by J.B.Kripalani (the President of the AICC, 1946-1947) dated 13 May, 1947 in reply to Ashrafuddin's letter to him written on 30 April 1947 that although the Congress had believed in Indian unity it had nothing to do in the face of Muslim demand for Pakistan. It was the Muslim League which represented the bulk of the Muslims. The nationalist Muslims had no hold on them. If the bulk of the Muslim community demanded partition, the Congress had no way to resist it. It could not be resisted by non-violent means. Congress did not believe in violence. Therefore, what the Congress wanted was "to rescue as many areas as possible from the threatened domination of the League and Pakistan". He also wrote, "the division of India is not our seeking. The sin of it must lie on the shoulders of the Muslim League that has misguided the Muslim community." Also see, Sugata Bose, **Agrarian Bengal**, pp. 230-231.

122. **Raj Birodhi**, p. 124.

123. **Ibid.** p. 123. Also see, Sugata Bose, **Ibid.** p. 231.

124. Interview with Begum Rabeya Chowdhury.

Islam party in 1953.¹²⁵ It seemed strange that such a secular person should join a religious party like this but to be religious did not mean to be communal. He could not morally accept Muslim League politics and had not forgotten the shock of communal violence and partition. The only option he saw was to join the **Nizam-i-Islam** party. He was a deeply religious person and offered his prayers regularly, had beards and dressed like a devout Muslim all through his life.¹²⁶ He believed that a truly religious person could never hate other religions. However, he contested as a **Nizami-i-Islami** candidate for the Provincial Assembly elections in March 1954 and got elected from Comilla constituency.¹²⁷ His victory and the victory of the United Front in the election symbolized to him the hope for secular politics

125. The party was founded in August 1953 by the orthodox **ulemas**. It was an anti-Muslim League party. See, Ranglal Sen, **Political Elites in Bangladesh**, Dhaka, 1986. p. 89.

126. Interview with Begum Rabeya Chowdhury, Ashrafuddin's daughter who recalled that her father always used to say that those who were religious in the real sense never criticized other religions and never became dogmatic or fanatic.

127. Ranglal Sen, **Ibid.** p. 128.

in East Pakistan.¹²⁸ Ashrafuddin took oath and became minister of a small cabinet of three members of the United Front ministry of Fazlul Huq.¹²⁹ He was the minister for Education. After the fall of the United Front ministry he was not much involved in politics. After the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 he came to terms again with his new identity just as he came to terms with Pakistan in 1947.¹³⁰ He died on 25 March, 1976.¹³¹

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128. **Ibid.** p. 127. The Muslim League faced a severe defeat in the elections of 1954.
129. Rangalal Sen, **Ibid.** p. 128. Also see, Abul Mansur Ahmad, **Op. Cit.** pp. 334-335. On the 15th. May 1954 another ten ministers were included in the United Front cabinet.
130. Interview with Rabeya Chowdhury.
131. **Ibid.**

CHAPTER -3 : RADICAL - HUMANIST

Muzaffar Ahmad (1889-1973)

Born in a lower middle class family in the island of Sandwip in Noakhali district in August 1889 Muzaffar Ahmad was brought up in a distressed environment.¹ Due to intense poverty his early education was hampered. He studied at the Sandwip Middle English School between 1905 and 1910 and at the Noakhali Zilla School from 1910 to 1912 from where he passed his Matriculation Examination in 1913.² He then got admitted to the Hooghly Mohsin College and later to the Bangabashi College in Calcutta.³ He was, however, unsuccessful in his Intermediate Examination and gave up college education.⁴ He then looked for jobs. He did several jobs, mostly journalistic, and each for a very short time.⁵ He had got involved in politics at a very early age and had participated in several meetings and demonstrations mostly of religio-political nature.⁶ He became attracted to revolutionary politics but did not join any particular

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1. Muzaffar Ahmad, **Amar Jibon O Bharatiya Communist Party, 1920-1929.** (Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920-1929), Dhaka, 1977. pp. 1-2. Also see, S.P. Sen (ed.) **Dictionary of National Biography,** Calcutta, 1972. Vol. 1. p. 24.
 2. See, S.P. Sen (ed.) **Dictionary of National Biography,** Calcutta, 1972. Vol. 1. p. 24.
 3. **Ibid.** p. 24.
 4. **Ibid.** p. 24.
 5. **Ibid.** p. 24.
 6. See, **Amar Jibon O Bharatiya Communist Party,** pp. 7-8. Muzaffar Ahmad did not get involved in Swadeshi Movement (1903-1908). He mentioned that he had participated in various meetings and demonstrations of the Muslims. He was a very religious person then and used to offer prayers regularly.

party. He took part in political meetings and demonstrations organized by the extremist parties.⁷ He was thrilled by the news of the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 and got interested in Communism.⁸ While continuing to work as a journalist he started reading extensively on western ideas of liberalism, democracy and communism, on Marxism and on Leninism.⁹ He founded the **Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samity** (The Bengali Muslim Literary Society) in 1918 of which he was Assistant Secretary and edited its monthly journal, **The Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Patrika**.¹⁰ In 1920 he brought out the **Navajoog** jointly with Kazi Nazrul Islam, who also held radical views on politics and society.¹¹

7. Muzaffar Ahmad, **Ibid.** pp. 7 - 8.

8. **Ibid.** p. 13.

9. **Ibid.** pp. 74-75.

10. **Ibid.** pp. 19-23. The journal was non-communal. The journal continued to be published from Calcutta till 1923 See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Samayikpatre Jiban O Janamat, 1901-1930** (Public Opinion as Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977. p. 436 Also see, Abul Fazl, "Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad", **Uttaradhikar**, 2nd. year, January-March, 1974. Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1974.

11. Muzaffar Ahmad, **Ibid.** PP. 71-72. The **Navajoog** was published as a daily from Calcutta. The journal was financed by the rising Muslim middle - class political leader of the time, A.K. Fazlul Huq but it lasted for only a year. Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Op. Cit.** pp. 438-439.

By this time Muzaffar Ahmad had decided to take up politics as his career.¹² He was seriously drawn to Marxism and began to establish contact with Communist organization outside India.¹³ Educated Bengali youths went out of the country. They got interested in Communist ideas. Basically Bengali youths were inclined to extremist movement. They had made efforts from outside to overthrow colonial rule in India. These youths were attracted to Marxism. M.N. Roy was drawn by the Communist movement and the ideology. So was Muzaffar Ahmad. M.N. Roy had initiated the formation of Communist Party of India at Taskent on 17 October 1920.¹⁴ Muzaffar Ahmad established contact with the third Congress of the Communist International at Moscow through M.N. Roy.¹⁵

Success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in October 1917 had encouraged the growth of labour movement in India. The industrial workers had become restive and there had been numerous strikes in the years between 1918 and 1921 particularly of the tea coolies and the transportation

12. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Ibid.* p. 23.

13. *Ibid.* p. 24.

14. *Ibid.* pp. 24, 106. Also see, Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959. p. 35.

15. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Ibid.* p. 24.

unions in eastern Bengal.¹⁶ Labour unions had been formed in Madras, Ahmedabad and Calcutta during this period. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in 1920.¹⁷ Around 1922 and 1923 when C.R. Das (1870-1925) was trying to form the Swaraj Party, Muzaffar Ahmad presided over the All India Trade Union and attempted to influence the Congress to take greater interest in the economic upliftment of the masses.¹⁸ Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945?) was also involved in trade union movement during this time. In the 1930's when he was the president of the BPCC Muzaffar Ahmad was the vice-president. Indian Communist Party was then at its early stage. The chief contact and organiser of the Communist Party of India was Muzaffar Ahmad. Throughout the 1920's M.N. Roy, the architect of Communist Party in India, had called for the formation of Peasants' and Workers' Party within the Congress.¹⁹

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16. Leonard A. Gordon, **Bengal. The Nationalist Movement : 1876 - 1940**, New Delhi, 1974 (rpt. 1979), pp. 180, 343. Also see, Overstreet and Windmiller, **Op. Cit.** p. 37. There were large number of strikes and Government report listed 106 strikes affecting 170,000 employees in Bengal in the last six months of 1920. The Indian National Congress had openly supported these strikes and encouraged leading Congressmen to take active part in labour disputes and the organization of industrial workers. Leonard A. Gordon, **Op. Cit.** p. 180. And see, J.H. Broomfield, **Elite Conflict in a Plural Society : Twentieth Century Bengal**, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968. pp. 184-185.
17. Overstreet and Windmiller, **Ibid.** p. 37. Also see, Sankar Ghose, **Political Ideas and Movements in India**, Calcutta, 1975. p. 298.
18. Leonard A. Gordon, **Op. Cit.** p. 190.
19. Leonard A. Gordon, **Op. Cit.** p. 255.

Muzaffar Ahmad had been actively involved in the peasants' and workers' associations in Bengal and other provinces. **Kisan Sabhas** and various peasant organizations were formed in Bengal, Punjab and the Uttar Pradesh between 1919 and 1927.²⁰ Gandhi had called for the non-co-operation and civil disobedience movement but after the Chauri Chaura incident he suddenly called it off in February 1922. This had greatly disappointed the left-oriented youths in India.

Roy and his followers, at this stage had hoped that mass participation in Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, if channelled in that direction could be directed against the bourgeoisie. He had advised the communist followers in India to capture the various organs working with the Congress.²¹ Roy later realised that Gandhi's movements were petty bourgeois as well as bourgeois, because he had, most of the time called off non-co-operation movements when the proletariat were about to capture it.²² Roy had, in fact, overestimated the strength of the proletariat in India and also failed to realise that the so-called proletariat in India was not yet formed in a conscious, unified and militant form.

20. See, Sankar Ghose, **Op. Cit.** p. 310.

21. Leonard A. Gordon, **Ibid.** p. 255.

22. **Ibid.** p. 255.

Muzaffar Ahmad had followed Roy's directions. In 1924 he got arrested for Cawnpore Conspiracy Case.²³ Government of India was strictly against any communist activity and therefore arrested Muzaffar Ahmad and others like Sawkat Usmani and Sripath Amrita Dange only because of their association with The Communist Internationale. In fact, there was no such conspiracy to overthrow the British government in India or any plan for sabotage.²⁴ There was, of course, direction by the fifth Congress of the Communist Internationale in 1924 that the Indian Communists should reorganize the trade union movement "on a class basis and purge it of all alien elements."²⁵ Although the Congress did not want to emphasize class conflict, neither did it want to encourage the communist direction, several conspiracy cases were instituted against communist elements during and after the non-co-operation movement.²⁶ Muzaffar Ahmad was first charged of involvement in the Peshawar Communist Conspiracy Case in 1922 but was later retrieved.²⁷ He was then arrested in May 1923 on suspicion of conspiring against the British government and then again in April 1924. He was released in September 1925 on medical grounds. Towards the end of the 1920's many

23. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Amar Jibon O Bharatiya Communist Party*, *Op. cit.* pp. 73-74.

24. *Ibid.* pp. 73-74. S.A. Dange was from Bombay, and Shawkat Usmani was from the Uttar Pradesh.

25. Sankar Ghose, *Op. cit.* pp. 299-300.

26. *Ibid.* p. 300.

27. *Dictionary of National Biography. op.cit.* p. 25.

strikes took place in some of the big cities of India, particularly in Bombay and Calcutta.²⁸ World wide economic depression was going on. Peasants, workers of mills and factories, dock workers and labours were involved in such strikes. The then Viceroy, Lord Irwin believed that those strikes were instigated and promoted by the communists from abroad.²⁹ In March 1929 the government arrested several communists to trial in a case which came to be known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case. Muzaffar Ahmad, Shawkat Usmani, S.A. Dange, Philip Spratt and Benjamin Francis Bradley were brought on charge of overthrowing the capitalist and imperialist power in British India.³⁰ There was "red scare" in India about the Communists as in other capitalist countries of the world as in the United States under President McCarthy. It was from his time that Muzaffar Ahmad became known to the Bengalis as one of the leading figures of the communist movement in India. He was released in 1936.

Spread of communist ideas in Bengal in the 1930's was a significant aspect in a society which was still then very much feudalistic. India was not

28. Sankar Ghose, **Op. Cit.** pp. 448 - 449.

29. Sankar Ghose, **Ibid.** pp. 448-449.

30. C.H. Philips, et.al. **The Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858 to 1947. Select Documents**, London, 1962. p. 201. The British Government passed the Public Safety Ordinance in 1929 introduced under the Governor General's special power. See, **Ibid.** pp. 258 - 263 about the charges made against those arrested and the judgement of the case.

a capitalist country yet and therefore, an obvious question arose regarding the logic behind preaching Marxism in a semi-feudal society like India. The role of the bourgeoisie in India as in other countries was similar, only in India the bourgeoisie was mostly the **zamindars** who protected their interests. Gandhi, who had led the nationalist movement was not much in favour of the proletariat as such. Congress was very much dependent on financial assistance of the mill owners and capitalists. Besides, India was divided by castes, religion and culture. With such a diverse background, India, in a colonial state seemed too unrealistic a country for application of Marxist theory. Even though Lenin had bypassed Marxist theory by successfully carrying out the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 it was almost like importing Lenin's theory and applying it to India. Trotsky's idea of "exporting revolution to other parts of the world", particularly those under colonial rule, was applied in India by the communists but it was M.N. Roy who mainly guided and directed them in forming the communist strategy in India at various times. In Bengal, particularly, extreme ideas always attracted the younger generation. A large number of educated youths in Bengal were involved in terrorist movement since early twentieth century. Communist ideas were considered extreme in Bengal. As the terrorist movement began to die out by the mid - 1930's due to government repressions through various acts, communism began to get spread among the youths as an alternative driving force to change the fate of the nation. To them ideas of communism was associated with liberal thought of the west. Religious tolerance and secularism were also significant aspects associated with communism and very much relevant to contemporary politics in India.

Although attempts of establishing the demands and rights of the peasants and workers had started by the early 1920's such attempts were comparatively very slow and insignificant because India was under imperialist rule. Ideas of communism and secularism, however, attracted large number of youths in India but very few Muslims got interested. Anti-god and anti - religious aspect of communism, risk of losing government jobs were reasons which shuddered them from joining the communist party. Besides, most Muslims, particularly in Bengal were poor peasants. Socio-economic structure in India was almost similar to that in Russia. Proletariat in Marxist term were industrial workers. Russia was a purely agricultural country before the Bolshevik revolution took place. But Lenin had mobilized the peasants, the war - affected soldiers and the workers together. In Bengal, to mobilize the proletariat meant mobilizing the peasants which was difficult to do on communist lines. Besides, the existence of **Krishak Samities** and the **Krishak Proja Party** in Bengal had lessened the significance of communist propaganda among large majority of population in the province. The Bengal Tenancy Amendment Acts between the years 1938 and 1940 had to a great extent fulfilled the demands of the peasants. However, communist ideology was getting popular among those who held radical views to change the society. Muzaffar Ahmad and Kazi Nazrul Islam were the two prominent Muslims in the 1930's and the 1940's who attempted to propagate the ideals of communism, equality, secularism and humanism. In the decades when most Muslims were drawn towards political separatism their views in respect of society, religion and politics set a very radical trend.

Fear of domination by the Hindu majority led to the growth of Muslim separatist movement. The "two -nation" theory of the Muslim League was made popular in the 1940's to such extent that partition of India, had become inevitable. The Communists of India, though secular in ideological sense, supported the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslim on principle of self-determination. In the 1940's the Communists had developed a multinational theory. They asserted that each nationality should have the right to secede from the Indian Union.³¹ They, therefore, supported the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. In 1944 M.N. Roy prepared a draft constitution on behalf of his party then named the Radical Democratic Party, in which he proposed a federal state where the units of the federation would be "autonomous".³² Roy and the Communist Party of India had supported the British war effort because to them, it was a war against fascism.³³ Gandhi and the Indian national Congress had started the 'Quit India' movement in 1942, which the members of the CPI had opposed and it was on this issue that the CPI broke off with the Congress Socialist Party (The CSP).³⁴ However, as the CPI had switched to the "peoples' war" line in 1941 and supported the right of various "nationalities" of India on grounds

31. Sankar Ghose, **Op. Cit.** p. 194.

32. Nirmal Chandra Bhattacharyya, **Social and Political Ideas of M.N. Roy**, Calcutta, 1980. pp. 50-51.

33. Sankar Ghose, **Op. Cit.** pp. 423, 462 - 463.

34. Sankar Ghose, **Op. Cit.** pp. 256 - 257. The CPI was a small and determined group within the CSP between 1935 and 1941. Also see, J. Patrick Haithcox, "Left wing unity and the Indian Nationalist Movement: M.N. Roy and the Congress Socialist Party", **Modern Asian Studies**, Vol.3, Cambridge University Press, 1969. pp. 21-49.

of separate language, culture and tradition to form separate states, the party and its members came in direct conflict with the ideology of the Congress and in the years after partition the Communist Party of India had to pay the price for it.³⁵ In March 1948 Kiron Sankar Roy, the minister of Bengal had ordered the police to seize arms from the Communists under the Public Safety Act, and banned the party in Bengal. Official newspapers of the party in West Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh were also banned and prominent leaders like S.A. Dange, Jyoti Basu and Muzaffar Ahmad were arrested.³⁶

In Bengal, Muzaffar Ahmad had become a well-known communist figure after the Meerut Conspiracy Case Trial in 1929. The trial had countrywide political significance.³⁷ The Communist Party of India also changed its strategy in the mid - 1930's. The British government had banned the party in July 1934. In 1936 the party direction was to join the Congress Socialist Party following the policy of the United Front against

35. See, Sankar Ghose, **Socialism and Communism in India**, Calcutta, 1971. pp. 315 - 316.

36. Sankar Ghose, **Op. Cit.** p. 466.

37. See, C.H. Philips (ed.) **Select Documents on the History of India and Pakistan, Vol. IV.** The Evolution of India and Pakistan. London, 1962. pp. 258 - 263.

imperialism.³⁸ However, by December 1939, there was strained relation between the CPI and the CSP leaders. The Communist Party of India had adopted the policy of taking up the leadership of the socialist movement by capturing important posts in the Indian National Congress, the All India Trade Union Congress, the All India Kisan Sabha and the Students' Federation.³⁹ In 1940 the Congress Socialist Party therefore, expelled the communists. From 1940 onwards the CPI took different strategy from that of the CSP and The Indian National Congress. World War II had started in 1939 and the Communist Party of India's decision was to support the British war effort. Later, in the mid - 1940's, the party supported self - determination of states.

Muzaffar Ahmad's role in Bengal, as a Communist leader in the backdrop of the international communist strategy^{was} led by the Comintern in Russia on the one hand and by M.N. Roy, on the other. Particularly the late 1930's was mostly restricted to meetings and the preaching of communist ideology in the agrarian sector and among the trade unions. In 1938 he attended meetings, mainly agrarian, in Dinajpur, where he spoke against imperialism and capitalism.⁴⁰ Kalipada Sen, another Communist leader from Calcutta was also present in this meeting. The government accused

38. See, Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, **Communism in India**, California, 1959. pp. 155-156. Also see, Sankar Ghose, **Socialism and Communism in India**, *Op. Cit.* pp. 312 - 313.

39. Sankar Ghose, **Socialism and Communism in India**, *Op.Cit.* p. 313.

40. **L/P+J/5/142, Bengal Governor's Report. Confidential : Review of events in Bengal for the fortnight of February, 1938. Public and Judicial Department.**

them of inciting the agricultural population and attempting to indoctrinate them towards communism.⁴¹ It is essential to note that these meetings were directed against landlords and against British imperialism but did not consider matters like distribution of **Khas mahal** or collection of rent by **zamindars**.⁴² The members of the Communist Party wanted to treat peasants as part of the proletariat, but there was a basic controversy whether they could be treated as proletariat in the strictest Marxist sense. However, in Bengal, as in other parts of India, most communists and socialists belonged to upper - class and basically the bourgeoisie. They were more attracted to the Communist ideology and were mostly active in preaching it rather than putting it into practice. Whereas, the **Krishak Proja Party** in Bengal, though a short - lived party and formed as an alternative political platform to contest the 1936 elections, had fulfilled most of its election pledges concerning the **Krishak** and the **Proja**. Communist activities among the workers was mainly restricted to the Trade Union Congress which worked in alliance with the nationalist political movement in India.⁴³ The Trade Union Congress controlled by the Communist Party of India was banned in 1934. The Meerut Conspiracy Case judgement in January 1933 had provided transportation for life for Muzaffar Ahmad. Communist

41. **Ibid.**

42. **Ibid.**

43. Sankar Ghose, **Socialism and Communism in India. Op.Cit.** p. 60.

leaders had to remain underground for most of their working life and Muzaffar Ahmad was no exception. The Meerut Case had brought him popularity and respect as a Communist worker among the younger generation in Bengal. The Communists in India were in favour of the Allied powers in their war against fascism, but had to face opponents inside the country. There had been clashes between the Communists and the Muslim League in Eastern Bengal, in Calcutta and in the industrial areas between the Communists and the Congress workers.⁴⁴ The Communists recruited volunteers known as Red Guards from among workers in industrial areas.⁴⁵ There was also Communist involvement in the **tebhaga** movement in districts like Midnapore, Nadia, Jessore, Dinajpur, Pabna, Mymensingh, Faridpur and Chittagong.⁴⁶ The Communists made intensive propaganda among the **bargadars**. They were also active in the whole of 1946 in Jessore, Khulna, Rangpur, Pabna and Mymensingh. The Muslim League was not in favour of this movement, neither were the Hindu **zamindars**. There were fears of communal riots because most **bargadars** were Muslim and the majority of the landlords were Hindus.

44. L/P+J/5/153, (10R POS 3518) **Bengal Fortnighly Reports of Governors, Chief Commissioners and chief Secretaries, January 1946-December 1946.**

45. **Ibid.**

46. **Ibid.** The **tebhaga** movement was a widespread agitation by the cultivators demanding two-thirds of the produce.

Since most of the Communist leaders had to work from hiding, and since Muzaffar Ahmad was one of those who was sentenced to life in the Meerut conspiracy case judgement, most of his activities were secret. Although he was released in 1936 he was more involved in indoctrinating the younger generation. It must be mentioned here that unlike most Communist leaders who came from upper - class, Muzaffar Ahmad was an exception. He came from a poor family and was completely a self-made individual who dedicated his life to an ideology intended to improve the condition of the poor and exploited peasants and workers. He was one of the few Bengali Muslim youth who, in his early life had accepted Communism and had remained so till the end of his life. He is popularly known as "Comrade" Muzaffar Ahmad. One of his close associates was poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. Muzaffar Ahmad was as an individual, non-communal and humanitarian, who dedicated his life for the doctrine he so strongly believed. In Bengal, he represented a trend that was contrary to the dominating trend of religious politics in the 1940's. It is, however, sad that after such great sacrifices the Communist Party of India could gain so little in the years before partition. The fact was that the Indian revolutionaries were never united and they were jealous and suspicious of each other.⁴⁷

47. See, Overstreet and Windmiller, *Op.Cit.* p. 36.

Besides, M.N. Roy's shiftings in determining the party strategy in India also created dissension in the party. Muzaffar Ahmad's memoir clearly indicate specific problems of working inside the country at Roy's direction, who most of the time remained abroad.⁴⁸ It is disappointing that his memoir reveal very little of his political activities and involvement in the Communist movement particularly in his later life.

48. Muzaffar Ahmad, **Amar Jibon O Bharatiyo Communist Party, 1920-1929** (My Life and the Communist Party of India, 1920-1929), Dhaka, 1977.

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976)

An analysis of Nazrul Islam's works would help us to understand the complexities of Bengali Muslim society and politics in the years between the two world wars. Nazrul embodied the spirit of the age. His works represented the variety, conflict and the fusion of diversified ideas that existed in Bengali society in the first half of the twentieth century. Nazrul started writing in 1919 when he was only twenty years of age and still stationed at Karachi as a sergeant with the 44th. Bengal Regiment of the British Indian Army. He returned to Calcutta in March, 1920 when his regiment was disbanded and took up journalism as a career. He continued writing poems, short stories, novels and songs seriously and almost with a spontaneous zeal.

Nazrul's arrival in Bengal was at a time when the province was going through a period of transition. The after-war years were marked with social tension, inflation and unemployment. Gandhi's non-co-operation movement after the Jalianwallah Bagh massacre (1919) and the failure of the movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident (1921) had disillusioned the Bengal Congress leaders. The nationalist leaders were divided into several factions. C.R. Das had rejected Gandhi's leadership and had challenged his position as the leader of the nationalist movement on the all-India level. The extremist elements led the terrorist movement against the British government. The Muslims in Bengal in general as in the other provinces of India, supported the Khilafat movement (1919-24) in order to protect the Caliphate in Turkey. They gave priority to their religious identity and considered themselves Muslims primarily but were still not conscious of

nationalism in the territorial sense of the term. They identified themselves with the Muslim community of the world, the Muslim **ummah**. Protection of the Caliphate symbolised to them protection of the religion of Islam. With the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 the Khilafat movement subsided.

In Bengal, extremist politicians were active since the Swadeshi movement which started around 1903. Repressive measures during the first world war managed to bring the terrorists under control. As the war ended, the extremist nationalists joined Gandhi's non-co-operation movement with the hope that some political concessions could be achieved from the British government. But, as the movement failed, the extremists were disappointed with Gandhi's strategy and were impatient to resume their terrorist activities. A section of the younger generation, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 was secretly preparing to organize a group on Communist ideology. The Muslims, too, were disenchanted and frustrated. In Bengal, an emerging group of English educated Muslims under the leadership of A.K. Fazul Huq began to participate in provincial politics.

For the Bengali Muslims, the 1920's marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new. Nazrul Islam arrived in 1920 in the midst of a diversified socio-political milieu. In the realm of literature, two broad trends existed among the Bengali Muslim writers since the last decade of the nineteenth century. One group of writers which included Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859-1931), Mohammad Mozammel Huq (1860-1933), Munshi Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed (1862-1933), Mohammad Moniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950) were Pan-Islamists. They dreamt of reviving the past glory of Islam through recounting the lives of Muslim heroes and saints

including Prophet Muhammad. They were aware of the destitution of the Muslims in socio-economic and political spheres and wanted to salvage them from that condition by reminding them of their glorious past. They also felt the need to educate the Muslims and sought to make the Bengali language more Islamic by the use of Arabic, Persian and Urdu words. The other group included politically and socially conscious writers like Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894-1970), Kazi Motahar Hossain (1897-1981), S. Wajed Ali (1890-1951), Abul Fazl (1903-1983), Humayun Kabir (1906-1969), Abdul Qadir (1906-1984) and others. They believed that for the Bengali Muslims, Bengali was to be their mother-tongue and their medium of expression in every respect. On the question of Bengali Muslim identity, which was a controversial subject since the late nineteenth century this group of intellectuals believed that they were Bengalees first and Muslims second. They were critical about the Pan-Islamic movement and inspired by the idea of Bengali nationalism rather than Muslim nationalism, they advocated communal harmony.

Nazrul Islam belonged to the latter group. He embodied the progressive, secular and humanist trends. He appeared suddenly and astonishingly as a comet and established himself as a poet and a writer. He represented a trend quite radical for his time. He startled the Bengali Muslims with his somewhat revolutionary views and bold writings. With his liberal and humanistic approach, he preached communal harmony and called for the establishment of a society free from all kinds of oppression and exploitation. Even the enlightened group of Bengali Muslim writers had not yet declared so openly and directly the need for wiping out social orthodoxy, religious conservatism, inequality and poverty. Nazrul's bold attack on the

very citadel of orthodox Islam was sudden and new. No other writer before him had made such a frontal attack on conservatism.¹ Nazrul made a tremendous impact on the Bengali Muslims and Hindus alike. The radicals, particularly, acclaimed him as the "rebel poet" or the "poet of revolution".²

1. Only Delwar Hossain Ahmed (1840-1913), in the previous century was strongly critical of the orthodox Muslims for their religious and social conservatism. He analysed the causes of social and economic backwardness among the Bengali Muslims and came to the conclusion that fruitless harping on their past glory, religious orthodoxy, extravagance, shunning of English education contributed greatly to their degeneration. But Delwar Hossain Ahmed wrote in English which limited the impact of his writing to a small section of People in Bengal. See, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, **Bangladesh, Tradition and Transformation**, Dhaka University Press Ltd., 1987, p. 76.

2. Kazi Nazrul Islam was born on 24th. May, 1899 at Asansole in the district of Burdwan. He did not have much formal education. He came of a very poor family and when he was only eight years old, his father died in 1908. He had to earn his livelihood at that early age by calling prayers at his village mosque, by writing songs for the wandering professional singers known as the **lettos** and later by working at a bread factory. Financed by a police Sub-Inspector named Kazi Rafizullah who took pity on Nazrul, he had a few years schooling. At the age of eighteen he joined the British Indian Army and was gradually promoted to the grade of sergeant in the 44th. Bengal Regiment. See, Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani** (Life of Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam), Dacca University, Dacca, 1972, pp. 1-62.

Soon after returning from Karachi in 1920, he met Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta and was influenced by communist ideology.³ Nazrul Islam did not get affiliated to the Communist Party. He could not adhere to any party discipline. He believed in revolutionary changes in the society where exploitation of the poor by the rich would end, where people of all castes and creeds would enjoy equal treatment, where religious orthodoxy and social conservatism would shed all extremities. Nazrul Islam was neither a philosopher nor a politician. He did not either fall into the category of the intelligentsia because he was guided more by emotion than by reason. He was a humanist who believed in the excellence lying in the heart of all human beings. Above all, he was a poet who wrote plainly and spontaneously with extreme emotion and excitement against all oppressions, exploitation, conservatism and hypocrisy.

3. Communist influence among Bengali Muslims in Calcutta was little. Names of a couple of them include at this stage Muzaffar Ahmad and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Muzaffar Ahmad (1899-1973) was a founding member of the Communist Party of India. Nazrul shared a room with him at 32 College Street, Calcutta after returning from the 44th. Bengal Regiment in 1920. In August 1922 Muzaffar Ahmad helped to bring out a Bengali left-wing paper named the **Dhumketu** (the Comet) edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam. See, Muzaffar Ahmad, **Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha** (Memoirs of Kazi Nazrul Islam), Dhaka, 2nd ed. 1976, p. 45. Also see, Rafiqul Islam, *op. cit.* pp. 27, 47 where the author mentions that Nazrul came in close contact with the terrorist movement through his friendship with members of the extremist political organization, particularly the **Jugantar**.

Nazrul Islam worked in the **Navajoog** (New Age or New Era) a newspaper which was brought out by the popular Bengali Muslim politician A.K. Fazlul Huq around 1920-21.⁴ In it, he spoke out boldly for relieving the problems of the labourers and agriculturists of Bengal. Around 1922 Nazrul began to work as the editor of the **Dhumketu** (the Comet) in which he openly demanded complete independence of India.⁵ Both the extremist and moderate nationalist leaders of Bengal in the 1920's talked of

4. **Navajoog** (New Era), a daily newspaper first published in May, 1920 which ceased to publish after a year. The paper was financed by A.K. Fazlul Huq. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Samayikpatre Jiban O Janamat; 1901-1930** (Public Opinion As Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977, p. 438.

5. The **Dhumketu** was a bi-weekly paper and had the largest circulation in Calcutta. See, Rafiqul Islam, *op. cit.* p. 248. Also see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, *op. cit.* p. 440. The **Dhumketu** expressed strongly anti-British opinions for which Nazrul, the editor, was arrested and put to jail on 23rd. November, 1922. The **Dhumketu** was first published on 12th. August, 1922 and was originally intended to preach communist ideology but in practice it became the mouthpiece for extremist politics. Rafiqul Islam, **Jibani**, *op. cit.* pp. 238-239, 283.

complete independence but none did yet so boldly demand it as Nazrul did.⁶ Nazrul was swayed much by emotion in his writings and his bold and direct language attracted and inspired the younger generation of the Bengalees. After the failure of Gandhi's non-co-operation movement (1919-1922) there was a lull in the political atmosphere of the country. Nazrul wanted to revive the revolutionary spirit by encouraging the terrorist and extremist groups although he was not a member of any of those. Neither did he participate in any of their activities. Nazrul was critical of Gandhi's non-co-operation movement and his preaching of spinning cotton and weaving **khadi** at home in order to boycott foreign cloth. Nazrul considered Gandhi's strategy a failure. Nazrul's opinion was that Gandhi's principle of non-violence or **Ahimsa** no longer created inspiration among the general people who alone, he believed, could put life to the nationalist movement. By 1921 Gandhi's

6. Most of the political leaders of Bengal like Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925), a moderate nationalist leader and Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), an extremist nationalist demanded self-government for India, while Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932) another popular extremist leader demanded Dominion Status for India. Since 1911 he propagated the idea of Imperial Federation, a pan-Indian federation. See, Sankar Ghose, **Political ideas and Movements in India**, Calcutta, 1975, p. 33. Also See, Leonard A. Gordon, **Bengal : the Nationalist Movement 1876-1940**, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 99, 169, 171.

calls for non-violence and non-co-operation were regarded as failures by the Bengalees.⁷ Although Nazrul had praised Gandhi in his songs like the "Charkar Gan" (Song of the **Charka**, the spinning wheel) and

7. The extremist members of both the "Anushilan" (formed in 1902 and Dacca based) and the "Jugantar" (formed in 1906 and mainly Calcutta based) who believed in the method of terrorism, rejected Gandhi's method of non-violence. See, Suprakash Roy, **Bharater Baiplabik Sangramer Itihas** (History of the Indian Revolutionary Struggle), Vol.1, 2nd.ed. Calcutta, 1980, pp. 153, 156, 368. These organizations took part in anti-Congress propaganda. Besides, the Bengal leaders, particularly, C.R. Das (1870-1925) also rejected Gandhi's political programmes and stood strongly against Gandhi's involvement in Bengal politics which was another reason why Gandhi's strategy was unacceptable to most Bengalees. Also see, J.H. Broomfield, **Elite Conflict in a Plural Society : Twentieth Century Bengal**, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968. pp. 146-168. Gandhi's programme of **Satyagraha** and the weaving of **Khadi** at home failed to gain support in Bengal, **Ibid.** pp. 168, 220, 231. Broomfield also pointed out that the Bengali **bhadralok** had resented Gandhi's involvement in Bengal politics because his strategy of non-co-operation, **Satyagraha**, boycott and spinning of **Khadi** all needed mass participation which they feared. They apprehended that participation of the masses, particularly rural, would destroy their economic and social dominance. **Ibid.** pp. 224-225. Also see, Leonard A. Gordon, **op. cit.** pp. 173-182.

"Banglai Mahatma" (the Mahatma in Bengal) around 1924 ⁸, only a year later, in 1925, he wrote "Sabyasachi" (the Ambidexter) in which he pointed out the futility of Gandhi's strategy. He wrote,

"সুতা দিয়ে মোরা স্বাধীনতা চাই, বসে' বসে' কাল গুনি!
জাগো রে জোয়ান! বাত ধরে গেল মিথ্যার তাঁত বুনি!" ⁹

("We want independence by means of cotton thread,

Counting years just waiting !

Rise up, you youth ! We are getting rheumatic*

Sitting at fruitless weaving !")

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8. Verse book, **Bisher Banshi**, See, Abdul Qadir (ed.) **Nazrul Rachanabali**, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1966. Vol. I pp. 88-89. **Banglai Mahatma**, a song compiled in the **Fani Manasha**, verse book. See, Abdul Qadir (ed.) **Rachanabali**, Vol. 11, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1967. pp. 65-66.
9. Nazrul Islam, **Sabyasachi** (The Ambidexter), composed in 1925 and compiled in the **Fani Manasha**, a verse-book by Nazrul. See, **Rachanabali Vol. 11, Ibid.** pp. 53-54. *(Rheumatic here symbolizes the futility and paralysing effect of weaving **Khadi** to attain **Swaraj**). The word **Sabyasachi** bears a Hindu image, referring to the mythical warrior Arjuna in the epic **Mahabharata**. Nazrul's poem reflected the contemporary opinion in Bengal rejecting Gandhi's political programmes. Nazrul also wrote against **Swaraj** and considered it a very moderate demand. The extremists also considered Gandhi's swaraj "a political chimera". See, Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani**, *op. cit.* p.237 where the author quotes from Nazrul's writing in the **Dhumketu**, 13th. issue, October 13, 1922. Also see, J.H. Broomfield, *op. cit.* p. 152. And see, Leonard A. Gordon, *op. cit.* p. 171.

Nazrul was also critical of the participation of Bengali Muslims in the Khilafat movement and of their constant harping on their links with Turkey and the Arab world. This, he believed, had created in them a feeling that they were aliens in Bengal. This attitude further contributed to establish in their minds a feeling that their identity in Bengali was as Muslims and not as Bengalees. This was a very unrealistic attitude since most Muslims in Bengal were of indigenous origin. In short, Bengali Muslims were suffering from an identity crisis. Nazrul tried to evoke in the minds of the Bengali Muslims that they were Bengalees as a nation and that religious exclusiveness would lead to a more bleak future. In the **Dhumketu**, Nazrul wrote in 1922,

"----- দাড়ি রেখে, গোস্ত খেয়ে নামাজ রোজা করে
যে খিলাফত উদ্ধার হবে না দেশ উদ্ধার হবে না তা
সত্য মুসলমান কামাল বুঝেছিল; -----
ও সব ধর্মের ভাঙ্গামী দিয়ে ইসলাম উদ্ধার হবে না ,
ইসলামের বিশেষতঃ তলোয়ার, দাড়ি ও নয়, নামাজ রোজাও
নয় |-----"10

(".... that neither the Caliphate nor the country can be protected by keeping beards, eating meat, fasting and praying. The true Muslim Kamal understood that;.....
.....Islam cannot be salvaged by those religious hypocrisies. Islam's symbol is the sword, neither beards nor prayers and fasts.")

10. Nazrul Islam, "Kamal", **Dhumketu**, 1st year, 14th issue, October 17, 1922. Quoted from Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani**, *op. cit.* p. 270.

Nazrul praised Mustafa Kamal's steps to modernize the society in Turkey by abolishing the Caliphate in 1924. Nazrul attempted to inspire the Bengali Muslims to bring similar changes in Bengal as well. Earlier, in 1920, Nazrul had composed several poems on Islamic and Perso-Arabic themes like "Kamal Pasha", "Anwar", "Shatt-el-Arab"¹¹ "Qurbani" (Sacrifice), "Muharram"¹² "Fateha-i-Do'Azdaham"¹³, "Kheya Par-er Tarani" (Boat to cross the river) which extolled the past glory of the Muslims and at the same time expressed regret and disappointment at the subsequent degeneration of the Muslims, particularly in Bengal. In "Anwar" and "Kamal Pasha", Nazrul evoked the Muslims of India to arise from the state of slumber. He criticized them for their cowardice and conservatism which, he believed, had turned them into 'tame creatures'.

11. "Shatt-el-Arab", a river in Mesopotamia, (modern Iraq and Iran) formed by the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

12. "Muharram", a religious ritual symbolizing mourning of the Muslims. The first ten days of the lunar month of **Muharram** is the time for the observance of this ritual. Though it is mainly a Shia practice, the Sunnis also participate in it. In rural Bengal it assumed the form of folk festival commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husain, grandson of Prophet Muhammad. Nazrul Islam, **Agni-Vina, Rachanabali, Vol.1, op. cit.** pp. 48-50.

13. "Fateha-i-Do'Azdaham", a religious festival of the Muslims held on the birth and death anniversary of Prophet Muhammad which both fall on the same date, the 12th. of the lunar month **Rabiul Awal**. Nazrul Islam, **Bisher Banshi**, verse book, **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 65-67.

Nazrul wrote in "Anwar",

"দুনিয়াতে মুসলিম আজ পোষা জানোয়ার!" 14

("The Muslims in the world today are tame creatures!")

Nazrul was the precursor of Muslim renaissance in Bengal. He praised the reform movement by Kamal Pasha and contrasted that to the degeneration of the Muslims in Bengal and the whole of India. In the same poem he wrote,

"কে বলে সে মুসলিম - জিত ধরে টানো তার ।

বেঈমান জানে শুধু জানটা বাঁচানো সার ।

আনোয়ার দিক্কার

কাঁধে ঝুলি ভিক্ষার -

আনোয়ার - শুরু যার স্বাধীনতা শিক্ষার,

যারা ছিল দুর্দম আজ তারা দিক্কার ।

আনোয়ার দিক্কার ।" 15

14. Nazrul Islam, "Anwar" compiled in the **Agni-Vina** (Verse book), **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. *op. cit.* pp. 34-37.

15. **Ibid.** p. 36. Nazrul despised Anwar Pasha, brother of Kamal Pasha of Turkey for his betrayal to the cause of the Muslims. Instead of participating in the anti-British revolt in the North West Frontier Provinces, he had joined the counter-revolutionaries backed by the British hoping to set up an independent government for himself in Turkey. Besides, Anwar Pasha was a Pan-Islamist who did not support the secular and progressive reforms of Kamal Pasha. The poet held anti-imperialist and secular views. Therefore, he despised Anwar but praised Kamal Pasha. See, Rafiqul Islam, **Jibani**. pp. 183-187.

("Who says he is a Muslim; tear his tongue apart.
Traitor he is; knows nothing but saving his own life.
Despicable Anwar
With sword who had once been taught to protect independence,
Has alms-receiving bag on his shoulder -
Those who are undaunted carry the helm today,
Worthless Anwar.")

To revive the courage and the lost pride of the Muslims, Nazrul wrote "Shatt-el-Arab". Through this poem Nazrul tried to arouse the conscience of the Muslims of Bengal and urge them to make attempts to come out of their hapless impasse. What was new about Nazrul's call for Muslim revival in Bengal was that his precursors had reminded the Muslims of their past glory looking to the past, while Nazrul looked to the future for such revival.¹⁶

Nazrul wrote the poem "Qurbani" (Sacrifice) as a protest against communal strife between Hindus and Muslims over the slaughter of cows. The poem is based on the biblical story of the attempt by Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael when God ordered him to do so in order to test his faith.¹⁷

16. Nazrul Islam, *Agni-Vina*, verse book, *Rachanabali*, Vol.1, *op. cit.* pp. 42-43.

17. The story is narrated in the *Genesis*, Chapter 16. See, Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 7, Macmillan, New York, 1987, p. 296.

Also mentioned in the *Quran*, Surah 2 :125, 2: 127. See, *Shangkhito Islami Bishwakosh*, Vol. 1 (Short Encyclopedia of Islam), Vol. 1, Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, 1982, pp. 200-201.

Nazrul used the symbol of love implied in the story to point out that one's patriotic fervour should be so as to make one sacrifice one's life and the lives of one's dear ones for the love of the motherland. Religious squabbles on such petty issues like the slaughter of cows only exposed religious orthodoxy and narrow-mindedness.¹⁸ Nazrul believed in secularism and therefore, criticized both Muslims and Hindus for their intolerant attitude to each other. Nazrul wrote a satiric poem, "De gorur ga Dhuye" (wash the cow's body) which became a popular phrase to those who opposed communalism and hated killings just for this reason. The poem is a comic chorus but carries severe criticism of the Hindu attitude of "touch-me-not" and the exclusiveness created by the two communities in their dresses and appearances, for instance, Muslim men grow beards and wear **pyjamas** and **topi** (caps) while the Hindus wear **dhoti** (loin-cloth) and grow **tikis** (a tuft of hair on the shaven head to mark holiness, particularly by the priests.) Nazrul uttered the phrase **De gorur ga dhuye** frequently as a satiric taunt of the communalists, both Hindus and Muslims, who made a political and religious issue over the slaughter of cows.¹⁹

The **Dhumketu** edited by Nazrul Islam expressed protests against oppressions of all kinds. Nazrul strongly urged the destruction of everything

18. The Muslims slaughter cows on religious festivals and on other occasions because they eat beef, while the Hindus worship the cow as one of their deities.

19. Nazrul Islam, "De Gorur ga dhuye". **Rachanabali**, Vol. 11, op. cit. pp. 431-433.

that went against the welfare of common man and wrote boldly against all kinds of exploitation ---- religious, political and economic. He wrote:

"---পুড়িয়ে ফেল ঐ প্রাসাদের উপর যে নিশান বুক ফুলিয়ে
দাঁড়িয়ে তোমাদের উপর প্রভুত্ব ঘোষণা করেছে । ভেঙ্গে ফেল
ঐ প্রাসাদ শৃঙ্গ । বল আমি আছি । আমার সত্য আছে ।
বল আমরা স্বাধীন । আমরা রাজা । বিজয় পতাকা
আমাদের ----- " 20

("..... Burn down the flag that stands so proud on that
palace roof announcing lordship over you. Pull down that
palace tower. Say, here I am. The truth is in me. Say,
we are free ! We are the rulers. The flag of victory
is ours,)

Earlier, Nazrul wrote "I am the Soldier" in the **Dhumketu** where he pointed out that there were too many leaders in Bengal but no commander; no one to strike the blow against the enemy.²¹ To Nazrul British government was not the only enemy. Anyone who oppressed innocent people in the name of religion or politics was the real enemy. Nazrul's revolutionary and radical attitude was very boldly expressed in his poem the "Vidrohi" where he revolted against all religious and social barriers. By

20. Editorial of the **Dhumketu** , November 3, 1922. Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani, op. cit.** p. 276.

21. Nazrul Islam, editorial of the **Dhumketu**, 1st year, 18th. issue, October. 31, 1922. See, Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani, op. cit.** pp. 275-276.

this poem alone he had inspired, though not directly, the younger generation, particularly the extremists. Through this poem he declared himself as the embodiment of the rebel spirit in him. He wrote :

"-----
আমি চির দুর্দম, দুর্বিনীত নৃশংস,
মহা - প্রলয়ের আমি নটরাজ, আমি সাইক্লোন, আমি ধ্বংস !
আমি মহাভয়, আমি অভিশাপ পৃথ্বীর,
আমি দুর্বার,
আমি ভেঙে করি সব চুরমার !
আমি অনিয়ম উচ্ছৃঙ্খল,
আমি দলে যাই যত বন্ধন, যত নিয়ম কানুন শৃঙ্খল !
----- " 22

("I am ever turbulent, arrogant, cruel,
I cause the destruction of the universe, I am
the cyclone, I am the annihilator!
I am the great fear, I am the accursed of the earth,
I am beyond all restraint,
I break all things to pieces !
I am disorderly and dissolute,
I trample down all ties, norms, rules and regulations !")

In the first issue of the **Dhumketu** Nazrul wrote :

"আমি যুগে যুগে আমি, আসিয়াছি পুনঃ মহাবিপ্লব হেতু
এই স্রষ্টার শনি মহাকাল ধূমকেতু ।" 23

22. Nazrul Islam, "Vidrohi", See, **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1. pp. 7-12. Quoted from **Ibid.** p. 8. Nazrul here used the image of the dancing Shiva (Natraj), the symbol of destruction in Hindu mythology.

23. Nazrul Islam, "**Dhumketu**" (the Comet), **Rachanabali**, Vol. 1, *op.cit.* p.19.

(I come in every era, I have come again to create an upheaval,
I am the age-old comet, this creator's recalcitrant.")

He continued,

"আমি জানি জানি ঐ স্রষ্টার ফাঁকি, সৃষ্টির ঐ চাতুরী,
তাই বিধি ও নিয়মে লাখি মেরে, ঠুঁকি বিধাতার বুকে হাতুড়ি
আমি জানি জানি ঐ ভূয়ো ঈশ্বর দিয়ে যা হয়নি হবে তা'ও
তাই বিপ্লব আনি, বিদ্রোহ করি, ----- "24

(" I know well the creator's deception and the tricks
of his creation,
So I hammer on the creator's chest,disregarding all
rules and conventions,
I know, I know very well that such things could be done
which the fake god could never do !
So I bring revolution, so I revolt ,.....")

The orthodox Muslims in Bengal reacted strongly to Nazrul's use of such language. The **Islam Darshan** criticized Nazrul's poems, particularly, the "Dhumketu" as very un-Islamic and openly called him an atheist.²⁵ Nazrul was also criticized for using Hindu symbols and the names of Hindu gods and goddesses in his writings. The conservative section of the Muslim community termed Nazrul's writings blasphemous and feared that his ideas

24. **Ibid.** p. 20.

25. The **Islam Darshan**, a monthly journal published from Calcutta by the conservative section of the Muslim community in Bengal. The journal was first published in 1920 and continued till 1926. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **op.cit.** p. 438.

would misguide the younger generation of Bengali Muslims. This orthodox group warned Nazrul to give up un-Islamic expressions. Munshi Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed wrote in the **Islam Darshan** under the caption. "Loke-ta Mussulman na Shaitan?" (Is the man a Muslim or a Satan ?),

The **Dhumketu** is exhibiting itself as a real comet in the Muslim world. The poem "Vidrohi" (the Rebel) published in the **Moslem Bharat** has exposed Kazi's magic. The **Dhumketu**, in every issue has been erupting venom against sacred Islam. This lively youth has never received Islamic teaching and this has been clearly exposed in every line of his writings. His brain is intoxicated with Hinduism. The unfortunate youth did not get the company of any religious person; had he got that he would at least not have attacked Islam with such spiteful language. His writings might be too powerful, he might be a famous poet, but there is no reason for the Muslims to be proud of him. -----The worst thing is that this ignorant youth is still declaring himself a Muslim. ----- Does this villain know the meaning of Islam ? This villain has surpassed even the atheists. Has he thought that God is like Rama, Krishna or Nanak, Chaitanya or Christ that he can threaten Him ? The man has descended as a complete satan. We hate to talk of him. -----"26.

26. Nazrul Islam's poem "Vidrohi" (the Rebel) was composed in December, 1921 compiled in the **Sanchita**, a verse book and first published by D.M. Library, Calcutta, 1926. See, Munshi Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmed, "Loke-ta Mussulman na Shaitan ?", **Islam Darshan**, 3rd year, 2nd. issue. 1922 (Kartik, 1329 B.S.) Also see, Mustafa Nurul Islam (ed.) **Samakal-e Nazrul** (Contemporary Nazrul), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1983. pp. 17-18.

Government reaction to Nazrul's writings was such that the **Dhumketu** was banned and Nazrul was arrested in November, 1922. He was in prison for about a year at the Alipore Central Jail, Calcutta. Poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) dedicated his verse play "Basanta" (the Spring) to Nazrul praising him of his bold and fiery writing. Tagore believed Nazrul's writings had invigorated the life of the whole nation just as spring does to nature.²⁷ Nazrul was on hunger-strike for over a month at the Hooghly prison in West Bengal, where he protested for not being treated as a state prisoner. This hunger-strike symbolized his open defiance to the authority. Wide-spread commotion over his hunger-strike made him more widely known as a rebel poet. Nazrul was eventually released from prison in December, 1923. Soon after his release, Nazrul married a Hindu lady, Pramila Sen-Gupta. This incident once again brought him to the centre of criticism all over Bengal.²⁸ Except the progressive group of the Bengalees, the orthodox section of both the Hindus and the Muslims severely criticized Nazrul. In the existing communal atmosphere Nazrul's marriage with a

27. Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani**, *op.cit.* p. 290.

28. Pramila Sen-Gupta (1908-1962) came of an ordinary Hindu family from Comilla. Nazrul stayed with the Sen-Gupta family for a few days as a guest and came to know Pramila. The Sen-Gupta family belonged to Brahmo society which believed in social reform in the light of western ideas and culture but Pramila's family did not agree to this marriage. Pramila's mother, Giribala Devi brought her daughter to Calcutta and gave her daughter in marriage to Nazrul against all opposition. See, Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani**, *op. cit.* pp. 148-149, 316-317, 597-598.

Hindu lady appeared to be an event of great significance. His marriage proved to be a very extraordinary and courageous step in an atmosphere of communal hatred and ill-feeling. Although the orthodox section of the Bengalees were shocked, the liberals were happy and Nazrul remained as popular as before. Nazrul's marriage, in fact, represented both the secular and the radical trends present in him and also embodied the religious and cultural synthesis he so earnestly preached in his writings.

For a short while around 1925-1926 Nazrul got actively involved in politics. Nazrul joined the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and worked mainly among the peasants and fishermen. He toured several places like Comilla, Madaripur, Hooghly, Faridpur, Bakura and made political speeches there. Influence of the Russian revolution and of the communist ideology through Muzaffar Ahmad and Nazrul's own liberal and humanistic leanings turned him into a staunch preacher of equality of all classes of people. In his political ideology, Nazrul believed in Democratic Socialism.²⁹ He began to write poems on equality, liberty and socialism. In the **Langal** (the Plough) Nazrul wrote poems and articles which expressed the need for social change.³⁰ His poems, like the "Samyabadi" (Equality),

29. Abdul Qadir, the editor of **Nazrul Rachanabali**, wrote in his note to the second volume that Nazrul's political ideology could be defined as Democratic Socialism. He gave a brief idea on this aspect.

30. The **Langal** (the Plough), a weekly paper first published in December, 1925 from Calcutta. It spoke for the workers, peasants and those who supported **swaraj**. It was the first journal in Bengal to express communist ideology. See, Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani**, *op. cit.* editor's note. Also see, Mustafâ Nurul Islam, **Samayik Patre Jiban O Janamat**, *op. cit.* pp. 443-444.

"Sarbahara" (the Destitute) and most of the poems compiled in his verse-book **Fani-Manasha** like "Sabyasachi" (the Ambidexter), "Sabdhani Ghanta" (the Warning Bell), "The Internationale" reflect his sympathy for the oppressed and the downtrodden and his revolt against the existing order of society.³¹ In "Samyabadi" Nazrul wrote,

"গাহি সাম্যের গান -
যেখানে আসিয়া এক হয়েছে সব বাধা ব্যবধান,
যেখানে মিশেছে হিন্দু-বৌদ্ধ-মুসলিম-ক্রীষ্টান।
গাহি সাম্যের গান !

মিথ্যা ঔনিনি ভাই,
এই হৃদয়ের চেয়ে বড়ো কোন মন্দির কাবা নাই।

পূজিছে গ্রন্থ; গ্রন্থ ভন্ডের দল ! - মূর্খরা সব শোনো,
মানুষ এনেছে গ্রন্থ আনেনি মানুষ কোনো।
আদম দাউদ ইসা মুসা হুরাহিম মোহাম্মদ
কৃষ্ণ বুদ্ধ নানক কবির, - বিশ্বের সম্পদ,
আমাদের ঐরা পিতা - পিতামহ, এই আমাদের মাঝে
তাদের রক্ত কম - বেশী করে প্রতি ধমনীতে বাজে।" 32.

31. **Fani-Manasha**, the snake goddess in Hindu mythology. Compiled in the **Rachanabali**, Vol. 11, op. cit. pp. 53-89. "The Internationale" a song expressing solidarity with the world proletariat, which was translated by Nazrul in Bengal and published in **Ganabani** in 1927. **Nazrul Jibani**, op. cit. pp. 385-386. **Ganabani**, a weekly journal, first published in August, 1926 from Calcutta and was edited by Muzaffar Ahmad. This journal was the mouthpiece for the workers and peasants of Bengal and was closely associated with the **Langal**. Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Samayik Patre Jiban O Janamat**, op. cit. p. 445.

32. See, the **Sanchita**, Bani Sree Library, Calcutta, 13th. ed. 1964. p. 78. Also see, the **Samyabadi** verse book, **Rachanabali**, vol. 11, pp. 5 - 8. **Ka'aba** is the holy place for pilgrimage of the Muslims. It is situated in Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Kabir (1398-1448) and Nanak (1469-1539) were the popular **sufi** saints of the Punjab in the fifteenth and in the sixteenth centuries respectively.

(" I sing of equality -
Where all barriers and differences have come to fusion,
Where the Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians have met.
Of that equality I sing !

I have not heard wrong,
There is no other sacred temple or Ka'aba than this heart.

The hypocrites worship the religious books. Listen you
ignorant ones,
Men have brought these books, not these books any man.
Adam, David, Jesus, Moses, Abraham, Muhammad,
Krishna, Buddha, Nanak, Kabir --- the treasure of the universe,
They are our ancestors, in our midst they reign,
In every vein of ours their blood flows - may be a little
more or little less.")

In the same poem "Samyabadi" (Equality) Nazrul wrote on the equal rights of women in society. He wrote,

" সাম্যের গান গাই -
আমার চক্ষে পুরুষ -রমণী কোনো ভেদাভেদ নাই।
বিশ্বে যা কিছু মহান সৃষ্টি চির কল্যাণকর,
অর্ধেক তার করিয়াছে নারী, অর্ধেক তার নর ।" 33

33. *The Sanchita*, op. cit. p.84. Also see, the **Samyabadi** verse book, included in the **Rachanabali**, Vol. 11, p. 15.

("I sing of equality,
To me there is no difference between man and woman !
Whatever great and benevolent performed in this world,
Half has been achieved by woman, the other half by man.")

Nazrul believed in the emancipation of woman. He criticized the **pardah** (veil) system existing in Bengali Muslim society. Muslim women were not allowed to come out of the houses, let alone receive education or undertake any profession. Hindu women, on the other hand, were not bound by such taboos. They had progressed in the field of education and in learning arts and crafts. Nazrul urged the Muslim women to be courageous and disregard such barriers. Nazrul pointed out with much appreciation that freedom was allowed to women in Turkey, another Muslim country and demanded that in Bengal too, freedom must be allowed to Muslim women. In poems like "Barangana" (the prostitute), "Nari" (Woman), "Mrs. M. Rahman" Nazrul preached emancipation of women.³⁴

34. "Nari" and "Barangana" were compiled in the **Samyabadi**, verse book of Nazrul. See, **Nazrul Rachanabali**, Vol. 11. pp. 15-17 and pp. 12-13 respectively. The poem, "Mrs. M. Rahman" contained praise and admiration of an eminent lady of this name. Mrs. M. Rahman (1885-1926) hailed from Hooghly and was wife of Kazi Mahmudur Rahman of Faridpur. She was an enlightened woman, very rare among Muslims in Bengal during those days. She wrote novels like **Chanachur** and **Ma-O-Meye** and many of her articles were printed in the **Dhumketu**, **Bijli**, **Mohammadi**, **Saogat** and other journals of the time. She loved and treated Nazrul as her son. See, Rafiqul Islam, **Nazrul Jibani**, *op. cit.* pp. 316, 318-319. Also see, **Chritavidhan**, *op. cit.* p. 186.

Nazrul's belief in secularism was strongly and clearly reflected in his poems for instance, the "Samyabadi" in which he expressed that men of all castes and creeds, of all religions and classes were equal. At the same time he criticized the artificial barriers created by religious orthodoxy, social taboos and economic exploitation. The **Langal** expressed clearly leftist views when it made protests against the oppression of the poor and the depressed. The journal also remained completely secular and wrote against the communal riots that engulfed Bengal in the summer of 1926. Nazrul wrote articles like "Mandir O Masjid" (Temple and Mosque) and "Hindu-Mussalman" which were published in the **Ganabani** (Message of the People) in the month of August, 1926 and expressed his discontent about Hindu-Muslim hostility and the negative aspect underlying such conflict. The Bengal Pact of 1923 which had attempted to unite the two communities giving certain concessions to both, had proved a failure by 1926. Nazrul had been hopeful when the pact was made, but as the communal riots started, he realized that unless the Hindus and the Muslims could unite at heart, unless they could love one another disregarding all religious differences, communal harmony was impossible.³⁵ Nazrul got directly involved in politics as he

35. Nazrul Islam wrote a satiric poem, "Pact" criticizing the communalists, both Hindu and Muslim. Nazrul mentioned that it was unrealistic on the part of the political leaders who made the Bengal pact in 1923 to hope for religious tolerance and communal harmony through signing a pact. What was needed, he felt, was a real change in the attitude, respect for all religious customs and values and above all, love for humanity. See, **Nazrul Rachanabali, Vol. 11, op. cit.** pp. 423-424. Also see, Nazrul Islam's articles in the **Rudra-Mangal** (Compilation of Nazrul's articles), **Rachanabali, Vol. 1,** pp. 693-714.

contested elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in November, 1926 from Dhaka Division. He was nominated to contest the elections by the Swaraj Party.³⁶ As expected, Nazrul lost the contest. There ended Nazrul's direct involvement in politics. This brief involvement, however, symbolized Nazrul's strong anti-colonial and anti-imperialist feeling.

Nazrul's idea of nationalism dealt more with the cause of the Bengali nation. Although he believed in Indian nationalism, some of his writings clearly expressed his ideas about the Bengalee people as a separate nation and Bengal to be politically, an independent state. In his poem, "Muktikam" (Desire for Freedom) composed in 1924, Nazrul pleaded the Bengalees to be

36. Muzaffar Ahmad, **Kazi Nazrul Islam Sritikatha** (Memoirs of Kazi Nazrul Islam), Dhaka, (2nd. ed. 1976) pp. 302-303. The Swaraj Party was led by C.R. Das who was able to bring the revolutionaries, mainly of the "Jugantar" and the Muslims under his leadership. The Swarajists contested the elections in order to "wreck the Council from within" as they declared going against the decision of Gandhi not to contest the elections. The Swaraj Party nominated Nazrul only to participate in the election since it had no intention to contest the reserved seats. Two Muslim seats were reserved at the Central Legislative Assembly from Dhaka division which included the then districts of Dhaka, Faridpur, Bakerganj and Mymensingh. Only the Muslims with property qualifications were allowed to vote. The total number of voters was 18,116 and each voter had two votes. See, Leonard A. Gordon, **Bengal : The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940**, New Delhi, 1st. Indian edition, 1974 (rpt. 1979), pp. 190-195. Also see, Muzaffar Ahmad, **Sritikatha**, *op. cit.* pp. 302-303.

courageous enough to demand for a free Bengal. He also pointed out the need for a leader to take the helm.³⁷ In another poem, "Purab Banga" (East Bengal), Nazrul praised the geographical setting and natural beauty of East Bengal and urged the Bengalees to get inspired and take the leadership of the nationalist movement.³⁸ Nazrul pointed out the exploitation of East Bengal by the capitalists from outside Bengal, like the Marwari and the Gujrati industrialists and urged the Bengalees to stand up against them. Later, in the *Navajoog* Nazrul wrote an article which further expressed his belief in Bengali nationalism. He wrote,

"বাঙালী যেদিন ঐক্যবদ্ধ হয়ে বলতে পারবে "বাঙালীর বাংলা"
সেদিন তারা অসাধ্য সাধন করবে । সেদিন একা বাঙালীই
ভারতকে স্বাধীন করতে পারবে----- । " 39

37. "Muktikan" (Desire for freedom) is compiled in the verse-book, *Fani-Manasha* (Snake Goddess) *Rachanabali*, Vol.11, pp.60-61.

38. "Purab Banga" (East Bengal) is compiled in the verse-book, *Shesh Saogat* (Last Gift). See, *Rachanabali*, Vol. IV. p. 276. During the liberation movement of 1971, Nazrul had been held high for this particular poem in which the Bengalees found inspiration and courage to fight for an independent East Bengal.

39. Nazrul's article "Bangalir Bangla" (Bengal of the Bengalees) was published in the *Navajoog* (New Age) in April, 1942, only a few months before he fell ill. The article is compiled in the *Rachanabali*, Vol. IV. pp. 711-712.

(" The day when the Bengalees would unite and say that 'Bengal is for the Bengalees', only on that day would they achieve something unattainable; that would be the day when the Bengalees alone would make India free.")

Nazrul was not clear about his ideas at that time as to whether the Bengalees would fight for an independent Bengal and at the same time fight for an independent India. He was also not clear in his opinion as to what the relation would be between independent Bengal and the independent India. It seemed that his ideas expressed an emotional nationalism rather than a practical political opinion. But, it was clear that Nazrul neither supported the movement for Pakistan nor did he want partition of Bengal. The movement for a separate homeland for the Muslims in India on the basis of religion was, however, already taking shape by the early 1940's but Nazrul, who believed in secularism, hated communalism and the mixing up of religion with politics.

Nazrul's works embody the synthesis of various cultures and religions. No other writer among the Bengali Muslims in the twentieth century represented this syncretist trend as Nazrul did. By his profuse use of Perso-Arabic words and spontaneous blending of Hindu and Islamic religious themes and images, Nazrul set an example as a "cultural mediator" of modern times.

Presence of a syncretic trend was not new in Bengal. With the advent of Islam in India since the eleventh century the spread of the religion in Bengal took place largely through the **sufi** saints. Conversion of low-caste Hindus in an extensive scale resulted in an inter-mixture of social customs

and religious practices. In order to spread Islam in Bengal the **sufi** saints felt the need to assimilate Islam to the already existing local cultural milieu. They contributed much to increase the number of Bengali Muslims by their ability to work out a synthesis between the extraneous Islam and the indigenous Hindu religion. Without any religious prejudice they even represented the Hindu gods and goddesses in "Islamic garb".⁴⁰ While Islam was spreading rapidly, Bengali Hindu society sought to meet the challenge through **vaishnavism**, enunciated by Sri Chaitanya (1486-1534). It was based on the cult of **Bhakti**. This concept was similar to the concept of love and humanism present in **sufi-ism**. Both the **sufi** theosophy and the **Bhakti** movement centred around God, man and love. The anti-caste tendency of **vaishnavism** became popular among the people of rural Bengal which slowed down the spread of Islam to a great extent.⁴¹ The Muslim poets were also influenced by **vaishnavism**. They began to use **vaishnav** symbolism to express their mystical beliefs and rituals. As a result, a synthesis between **sufi** and Hindu **vaishnav** trends took place which directly influenced the lives of the Bengalees. Nazrul Islam inherited this syncretistic tradition. The element of humanism inherent in **sufi-ism** and **vaishnavism** was strongly present in Nazrul's writings. Nazrul can appropriately be called an heir to the "cultural mediators" of the eighteenth century. The "cultural mediators" were those Muslim writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who tried to bridge the gap between the various social strata,

40. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, **Hindu Muslim Relations in Medieval Bengal**, Delhi, 1985. p. 15.

41. Asim Roy, **The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal**, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983. (rpt. Academic Publishers, Dhaka). pp. 190-192.

religious and social, in Bengal.⁴² The existence of **ashraf** and **atrap** stratification in Muslim society created a cultural gap between the two. The **ashrafs** resided mostly in the urban areas, whereas the **atraps** in the rural areas of Bengal. The **ashrafs** spoke Urdu and hated to speak Bengali. They held the **atraps** with contempt because they were converted Muslims and because they spoke Bengali. There emerged a group of critics among the Bengali Muslims who consciously tried to bridge the gap between the **ashrafs** and the **atraps**; between the urban and the rural Muslims. These writers intended to break the exclusivistic attitude of the **ashrafs**.⁴³ These writers, with the indigenous influence present in them, sought to convey to the Bengali Muslims the cultural heritage of Islam, representing through Bengali indigenous idioms, symbols and the historical, legend^r and mythical tales of the Muslim world. These Muslim writers have been given the credit of acting as "Cultural Mediators". What was more significant about Nazrul was the fact that he mediated to unite all the religious, ethnic and cultural groups together. Besides, indigenous influences like the preachings of the **sufi** mystics, the influence of **pirs**, **fakirs** and **bauls** was dominant in rural Bengal. In spite of the attempts of religious reformists to purify Islam of all indigenous influences their preachings far exceeded the influence of the orthodox Muslim preachers in Bengal. As a result of a fusion

42. Asim Roy, **Ibid.** pp. Preface xii, 58-83. The author has made a detailed study on the various patterns of difference between the socio-cultural milieu of the **ashraf** and the **atrap**. The "cultural mediators" attempted to bridge the gap between the "great and the little traditions" that is, between the élite and the folk or indigenous traditions of Islam in Bengal. **Ibid.** p. 71.

43. **Ibid.** p. 70.

of Hindu and Muslim practices, belief in tolerance and non-communalism got preference among the Bengali Muslims.⁴⁴ Nazrul's writings reflected this trend.

Nazrul's writings and compositions contain a strong element of syncretism. His poems were full of Hindu words, symbols and images. He created a Bengali Muslim literature from the same source like the **Vedanta**, the **Ramayana**, the **Mahabharata**, the works of Sri Chaitanya and the **Vaishnava** which also led to the creation of Bengali Hindu literature. Nazrul used those religious and mythical sources along with the folk elements in his writings which offended the orthodox Muslims. Nazrul's writings were a deviation from those of the contemporary Bengali Muslims who copied the Bengali Hindu writers in style but carefully avoided any use of Hindu words or images. Of all his writings, the **Sanchita** (compilation of poems) contains a variety of poems which vividly reflect the synthesis of Hinduism and Islam.⁴⁵ The **Vidrohi** (the Rebel), for instance, is full of Hindu images and words.⁴⁶ In this poem, Nazrul used only a few Islamic words, like **Arash** (seat), **Beduin** (nomad), **Chengiz** (the Mongol), **Israfil**

44. A.F.Salahuddin Ahmed. "Banglar Samaj-Chinta : Aitijha O Bibartan" (Social Thought in Bengal : Heritage and Transformation), **Ekusher Probandho, 1986** (Articles on **Ekushey**, printed in memory of the martyrs of the language movement commemorated on the 21st. of February, 1952.), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1986. pp. 14-16.

45. The **Sanchita**. 'Vidrohi', 'Pujarini', 'Samyabadi', 'Sabyasachi', etc.

46. The **Vidrohi** (compiled in the **Sanchita**), See, the **Agni-Vina** verse-book, **Rachanabali, Vol. I.** pp. 7 - 12.

(the angel Raphael), **Habia Dozok** (the Seventh Hell), **Gibrael** (the angel) and **Jahannam** (hell) and about thirty Hindu images and words, like **Bhagaban** (God), **Dhurjati** (Shiva), **Shoshan** (place of cremation of the Hindus), **Durbasa** (a hermit of the **Sakuntala** mythology), **Basuki** (Hindu image of snake), **Jagadiswar** (God), etc. The orthodox Bengali Muslims felt apprehended about his writings which he was using, according to them, to debase Islam. In the poem "Pujarini" (female worshipper), Hindu images are predominant. The title of the poem itself presents a Hindu image. **Japmala** (prayer beads), **pujar thalika** (plate used for offerings to the idols) and similar such Hindu imagery are made and reference is made of the story of Radha and Krishna.⁴⁷ Nazrul saw no religious difference between the images and meanings underlying these words. To Nazrul, these were not mere linguistic terms. He used those to establish his non-communal feeling. Nazrul, in fact, wanted to shock the orthodox Muslims as well as the Hindus because his idea of Islam and Hinduism was contrary to the religious bias of the contemporary Hindu and Muslim communalists. Nazrul did not accept the existing notion about God, temples, mosques, priests and the **mullahs**. Nazrul also used Urdu, Persian and Arabic words in abundance.⁴⁸ He believed in using a language of everyday use, thus making his writings a synthesis of a variety of cultures, languages and religions. This was a new

47. The "Pujarini", **Nazrul Rachanabali**, Vol. I. pp. 136-151.

48. Abdus Sattar, "Nazrul Kabye Arbi-Farsi Shabda" (Arabic and Persian words in Nazrul's poems), **Nazrul Institute Patrika**, Nazrul Institute, Dhaka, 1987. p. 83.

phenomenon introduced in Bengali literature. Just as the "cultural mediators" of the eighteenth century attempted to bring Islam closer to the indigenous people by blending Islamic and Bengali cultures, so did Nazrul attempt to bring the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal closer together through his writings. He was more an "inter-cultural mediator" in this respect trying to establish communal harmony.

In the poem, "Kandari Hushiar" (Helmsman, watch out), Nazrul expressed his concern about the worsening communal relation in Bengal. He wrote,

"----- হিন্দু না ওরা মুসলিম! এই জিজ্ঞাসে কোন্ জন ?
কান্ডারী ! বল ডুবিছে মানুষ, সন্তান মোর মা'র । "49
("-----Are they Hindus or Muslims ? Who asks the question ?
Helmsman Say, people are drowning; people who are
my mother's children !")

In his poem "Samyabadi" (Equality) Nazrul expressed his view that peace and harmony could be achieved without creating religious conflicts. The poem expressed Nazrul's belief in humanism. He wrote, -----

"-----গাহি সাম্যের গান -
যেখানে আসিয়া এ হয়ে গেছে সব বাধা-ব্যবধান,
'যেখানে মিশেছে হিন্দু-বৌদ্ধ-মুসলিম-ক্রীশ্চান
গাহি সাম্যের গান !
কে তুমি- পার্সী? জৈন? ইহুদী? সাঁওতাল, ভীল, গারো ?
কন্ফুসিয়াস? চার্বাক-চেলা? বলে যাও, বল আরো !
বহু, যা খুশী হও
পেটে - পিঠে, কাঁধে-মগজে যা-খুশী পুঁথি ও কেতাব বও,

49. See, *Rachanabali*, Vol. II. pp. 36-37.

কোরাণ-পুৰান-বেদ-বেদান্ত-বাইবেল-ত্ৰিপিটক -
জেন্দাবেস্তা-গ্রন্থসাহেব পড়ে' যাও যত সখ,-
কিন্তু কেন এ পণ্ডশ্রম, মগজে হানিছ শূল ?
দোকানে কেন এ দর-কম্বাকষি ? পথে ফোটে তাজা ফুল !" 50
("I sing of Equality" -
Where all differences have come to a fusion,
Where the Hindus-Buddhists-Muslims-Christians have met.
I sing of equality !
Who are you ? A Parsi ? Jain ? Jew ? Santal , Bhil , Garo ?
Or confucious ? Follower of Charvaka ? Say as many as you can,
Carry in your stomach, back and brain, any scripture you wish
The Quran-Purana-Veda-Vedanta-Bible-Tripitak -
Zend-Avesta, Granth ----- Read as many as you can
But why this futile effort and piercing spears in your brain ?
Why bargain with religion ? Flowers bloom on the roadside !")

50. *Rachanabali*, Vol. II. p. 5. Santal, Bhil and Garo are the aboriginal tribes of greater Bengal and Assam. Charvaka is the Hindu mythical demon referred to for his preaching of heretical doctrines and rejection of God. Also see, Abdul Aziz Al-Aman, *Nazrul Rachana Sambhar* (On Nazrul Works), Calcutta, 1981, p. 121 where the author quotes Nazrul's advice to those present at the Muslim Students' Conference at Faridpur in 1933 to bring the various sects among the Muslims like the Shia, Sunni, Shaikh, Syed, Mughal, Pathan, Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maleki, La-Mazhabi, Wahhabi and others under one banner and remove the barrier existing among them.

Some Bengali Muslim intellectuals of the time suggested to Nazrul that he should preach Islamic ideas. Some progressive-minded Bengali Muslims suggested that since Nazrul was a Muslim, he should concentrate on developing a Bengali Muslim literature rather than wasting his creative powers revolting against the existing social order and trying to improve communal relations. He was advised to take the "line of least resistance".^{51/} They were well-wishers of Nazrul who wanted to save him from criticisms by the orthodox Muslims. Nazrul, however, accepted all criticisms sportively. He wrote in "Amar Kaifiyat" (My Excuses) :

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মৌ লোভী যত মৌলবী আর 'মোলু -লা'রা কন হাত নেড়ে;
'দেব-দেবী নাম মুখে আনে, সবে দাও পাজিটার জা'ত মেরে।
ফতোয়া দিলাম । কাফের কাজী ও,

'আমপারা' পড়া হামবড়া মোরা এখনো বেড়াই ভাত মে'রে
হিন্দুরা ভাবে, পাশী শব্দে কবিতা লেখে, ও পা'তা নেড়ে

আনুকেরা যত ননু ভায়োলেন্ট ননু -কো'র দলও ননু খুশী ।
'ভায়োলেন্সের ভায়োলিন' নাকি আমি বিপ্লবী-মন তুমি ।

51. Principal Ibrahim Khan's letter to Nazrul, written in 1925. The letter was published in the *Naoroze* in 1927. *Naoroze* was a monthly literary journal published from Calcutta. The journal was known for publishing writings of the progressive-minded writers like, Rabindranath Tagore, Humayun Kabir and others. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Samakal-e-Nazrul*, op. cit. pp. 329-334. Also see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Sangbad Patre Jiban O Janamat*, op. cit. p. 447.

'এটা অহিংস' বিপ্লবী ভাবে,
'নয় চরকার গান কেন গাবে ?'
গোড়া রাম ভাবে নাস্তিক আমি,পাতি-রাম ভাবে কন্ফুসি
স্বরাজীরা ভাবে নারাজী, মারাজী ভাবে তাহাদের অমুকুশি! "52

("-----Those honey-suckers all **maulvis** and **mullahs** deny me
and say, "make the rogue an outcast; he utters the names of
gods and goddesses".

Learning just the **Ampara** they have become proud and revengeful,
The Hindus think, "he must be a Muslim because he uses
Persian words in his poems,
The new-comers in the non-violent, non-co-operation are
not happy too,
They think I am the violin of violence and please the
revolutionaries,
"He is the follower of **ahimsa**", the extremists think,
"Otherwise why should he support the **charka** ?"
To the orthodox Hindus I am an atheist, to the progressives
I am a Confucian,
The Swarajists think I am a No-Changer, the No-Changers
think I am their enemy!")

52, "Amar Kaifiyat", **Rachanabali**, Vol. II. p. 42. **Ampara** is a basic book on Arabic alphabets. **Ahimsa** means non-violence. In this respect the poet refers to Gandhi's political strategy of non-violence.

Nazrul analysed and criticized the flaws in the existing social conditions and urged the Bengalees, irrespective of religion and creed, to destroy the evils and create a new society based on freedom and equality. Nazrul got involved in contemporary politics but his main concern was to establish communal harmony and create a society free from oppression and exploitation. He did not accept the idea of a Muslim India and a Hindu India. Neither did he support the idea of dividing Bengal. Although most of the Bengali Muslims were disappointed with Nazrul because of his preoccupation with secular and egalitarian ideas, the progressives, however, praised him for his sincere and genuine feeling for the Bengalees. He wrote for both the communities and kept alive the syncretic trend so strongly present in the Bengali society. The **Saogat** wrote quite appropriately, in 1948,

"Just as Rabindranath is the poet of Bengal, of India and of the world, so is Nazrul the poet of the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians."⁵³.

53. *Most contemporary* Bengali Muslim writers like S. Wajed Ali (1890-1951), Syed Ismail Hossain Shiraji (1880-1931), Mohammad Nasiruddin (1886-1993) and Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894-1970), particularly praised Nazrul. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Shamakal-e-Nazrul**, p. 233. The **Saogat** was then a weekly paper first published from Calcutta in 1918 edited by Mohammad Nasiruddin. The journal played a very progressive role in the contemporary Bengali Muslim society. Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Sangbad Patre Jiban O Janamat**, p. 449.

(Nazrul lost his speech quite suddenly in July, 1942 at the age of 43. He suffered from severe brain damage and although he lived till August, 1976, he remained invalid.)

*[All translations of the extracts from Nazrul's poems and the English titles of the names of the poems are mine. Those are literal translations from original Bengali writings of Nazrul.]

SECTION - II

CHAPTER -4 : ANALYSIS OF NOVELS

MOHAMMAD NAJIBUR RAHMAN, **ANOWARA**

Anowara is a novel published in the year 1914. The novel depicts the various facets existing in the Bengal Muslim society in the early twentieth century which was a transitional phase. Although my study begins from the year 1918, the significance of the novel cannot be overlooked. The novel serves as a kaleidoscope through which one can get a clear picture of the Muslim society in rural Bengal in the early twentieth century.

The novelist, Mohammad Najibur Rahman (1860-1923) hailed from Pabna.¹ He was a teacher by profession and most of his life was spent in the village. He was associated with politics but never seriously involved in any movement. His first book **Bilati Barjan Rahashya** (Mystery Behind the Swadeshi Movement) written in 1905, was based on the **Swadeshi** movement in Bengal.² The book was banned by the British government.³ Najibur Rahman had attended the founding meeting of the Muslim League in Dacca in 1906 but had never participated actively in politics.⁴ He wrote several novels of which **Anowara** (1914) and **Goriber Meye** (1923) are

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1. Anisuzzman, **Muslim - Manas O Bangla Sahitya** (A Critical Analysis of the Muslim Literateurs in Bengali), Dhaka, 1971. 3rd ed. 1983. P. 369.
 2. **Ibid.** P. 369.
 3. **Ibid.** P. 369.
 4. **Ibid.** P. 369.

worth-noting. He was a popular novelist in his times mainly in the rural and semi-urban Bengali Muslim society.⁵ His novels were mostly didactic and were based on rural social life of the Bengali Muslims.

Anowara is mainly a novel based on love and marital relationship between the heroine of the novel named Anowara (String of Stars) and her husband Nurul Islam, an educated jute merchant.⁶ The novel gives an insight into the Muslim society in rural Bengal when various changes and developments had been taking place both at urban and rural levels. There existed in rural Bengal, social stratification, **ashraf - atrap** distinction, the flexibility of such stratification through upward social mobility, the social hierarchy and the cultural distinction between the so-called respectable society, i.e. the **ashrafs** or the richer peasants belonging to the upper strata and the **atraps**, the landless or poorer peasants, upholding the local peasant culture.⁷ The novel also exposes the condition of education and economy,

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5. Firdous Azim and Niaz Zaman (ed.) **Infinite Variety, Women in Society and Literature**, Dhaka, 1994, p. 130.
 6. The meaning of the name Anowara is taken from the paper "The New Woman in literature and the novels of Najibur Rahman and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain" by Sonia Nishat Amin, in **Ibid.** p. 131.
 7. Mohammad Najibur Rahman, **Anowara**, place of publication ? (either Rajshahi or Dacca) 1914. 15th ed. Dacca, 1985. pp. 27, 31. References have been made about these social titles in various places of the novel. Social stratification in rural Bengal was significantly extensive. There were about twelve low - status groups like Sardar, Biswas, Mongol, Joddar, Tarafdar etc. besides the lesser **ashrafs** like the Syeds, Khondkars, etc. See, Rafiuddin Ahmed, **The Bengal Muslims, 1871 - 1906, A Quest for Identity**, Delhi, 1981. 2nd ed. Delhi, 1988, PP. 15-18.

social evils, conservativeness, existing taboos and the syncretic influence in the rural Muslim community.

Pabna, the district where the novelist was born and the background of the novel set, was historically a significant place. It was mainly a Muslim majority district, comprising about 75% of the population there, most of them being peasants.⁸ There was strained relationship between the peasantry and the landlords. There was constant peasant unrest. The Pabna Revolt (1872-73) was an example of serious peasant uprising in the region.⁹ By the late nineteenth century there was widespread jute cultivation in the district.¹⁰ Most of the peasants cultivated jute and jute trading was the main economic activity in the region. Agents from Calcutta, both non-Bengali and European, appointed local traders to collect jute from peasant farms and those were sent to Calcutta. Belgaon, mentioned in the novel was an important port, handling jute exportation and a busy jute trading centre. Nurul Islam, the central character in the novel, was employed as the chief

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8. Sufia Ahmed, **Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884 - 1912**, Dacca, 1974, p. 236. This figure was according to the 1901 Census Report. Muslim population in Northern Bengal was nearly three-fifths. Pabna is in Northern Bengal.
 9. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op.cit.* p. 62. Also see, Rajat Kanta Ray, **Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1857 - 1927**, Delhi, 1984. pp. 62-64, 73. Sirajganj in Pabna district was a volatile place for peasant unrest.
 10. Rajat Kanta Ray, *Ibid.* p. 62. Jute cultivation spread in the district after the Mutiny (1857-58) and the famine of 1865-66.

agent for the Belgaon Jute Company, who bought jute from various peasants in the locality and the outskirts and sent the jute to Calcutta.¹¹ There was, therefore, constant contact with Calcutta, the great metropolis. Jute was brought from Pabna, pressed into bales and sent by rail or steamer from the Belgaon port to Calcutta.¹² Most of the agents employed in the rural markets were literate youths, coming mainly from the smaller gentry.¹³

The novel is set on the background of the First World War (1914-1919). The war had affected the economy and there was a serious slump in the jute market. Jute price reached its lowest level in those years. The rural gentry involved in this trade shifted to other jobs, like teaching and services in government offices. This shift had however started by the beginning of the twentieth century when the educated Muslim youths in the countryside were discontented by the economic situation, the Swadeshi movement and non-co-

11. Najibur Rahman, *Anowara*, p. 23.

12. Sufia Ahmed, *op.cit.* p. 104. The author mentioned the importance of Pabna and Sirajganj as jute trading centres and as distributing centres for imports of other necessary goods for the peasants like, salt, cloth, sugar, etc. Also see, Rajat Kanta Ray, *op. cit.* p. 46.

13. Najibur Rahman, *Anowara*, p. 27. Nurul Islam was educated at Calcutta. See, Rajat Kanta Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 45 - 46. The author mentioned the involvement of literate youths in jute-trading agencies in Bengal.

operation and were drawn to various professions.¹⁴ In the novel, Nurul Islam, after his ordeal in a false theft case and his mental suffering for suspecting his wife of in chastity, takes up the career of independent business at the advice of his wife, with whom he had started a happy marriage life after his discovery that his suspicion was false.¹⁵ Najibur Rahman personally preferred that Muslim youths in Bengal should get more interested in trade and commerce.¹⁶ Besides, getting higher education and going for jobs, they should also get interested in doing business. The emerging English - educated Muslim youths in Bengal in the early twentieth century had to face tough competition for jobs with the Hindu candidates, who in most cases, were comparatively better qualified. The author of the novel encouraged higher education for Muslim youths and also advocated female education. He was a very progressive writer in his times. He had repeatedly expressed the need for English education and female education for the Muslims of Bengal. In **Anowara**, the hero of the novel, Nurul Islam, when proposed by his elders for marriage, preferred to

14. Rajat Kanta Ray, **op.cit.** pp. 66-67, 73. Anti-Swadeshi and anti-Hindu movement was strong in Sirajganj and various places of Pabna. Many poor Muslims left the service of their Hindu employers, lands of the Hindu **Zamindars** lay uncultivated, there was also boycott by Muslim share-croppers. The local **maulvis**, however, had a significant role in instigating and inciting the Muslims in the region.

15. Najibur Rahman, **Anowara**, pp. 212-213.

16. Anisuzzaman, **op. cit.** p. 369.

marry an educated girl.¹⁷ There was tendency, which is still existing in the present society, that a girl of fair complexion and of higher class or **ashraf** family is more preferred for marriage. But, it is significant to note that Nurul Islam was determined to marry an educated girl and refused to marry any girl of higher social status even if she was pretty.¹⁸ Nurul Islam chose to marry Anowara because she had education and made an independent decision disregarding the customary tradition. Nurul Islam was the epitome of the emerging modern Muslim youth.

Anowara, the heroine of the novel, gives the image of the "new woman" emerging in the early decades of the twentieth century in the Bengali Muslim Society.¹⁹ She is portrayed in the novel as a **sharif**

17. **Ibid.** p. 30.

18. **Ibid.** p. 30. Also see, G. Murshid, **Reluctant Debutante : Response of Bengali Women to Modernization 1849-1905**, Rajshahi, 1983. The author mentioned the influence of the Hindu reformists and the progressive "Young Bengal" group for initiating modernization among both men and women in Bengal. Men also inspired modernization among Bengali women and the women responded to such modernization. pp. 28-29. **Anowara** depicted the presence of such a trend among the Bengali Muslim society.

19. Firdous Azim and Niaz Zaman (ed.) **op. cit.** pp. 130-131. The idea of the "New Woman" is dealt with in chapter IX of the book by Sonia Nishat Amin, who pointed out that the influence of the **Brahmo** movement in Bengal had greatly contributed to the emancipation of women, among the Hindus in the early part of the nineteenth century and the idea got disseminated in the Muslim community by the early twentieth century. **Ibid.** pp. 125-129. Also see, G. Murshid, **op. cit.** pp. 58-59.

girl, married at sixteen but had received a fairly good education. Anowara was born in a well-to-do peasant family, married to an educated person, became a model wife and house-keeper and eventually accepted in the rural society as a **sharif** woman. This transitional stage in the Bengali Muslim society in respect to female education and discouraging of the practice of **pardah** or seclusion is pointed out in the novel. The novelist gives an insight into the position of women in rural Bengal. Although they were not strictly secluded, the practice of **pardah** was maintained. **Pardah** was a symbol of belonging to **sharif** family. Social prestige depended on the adoption of **pardah**. The lower - class women worked while the upper - class were restricted to their home.

The novel points out the frequent practice of polygamy in the rural Muslim society. Both Anowara and Nurul Islam had stepmothers. The stepmotherly treatment to the children hindered positive upbringing of the children. In most cases, the spontaneous, natural mental development of the children were hampered. Girls were forced to early marriage and their education discontinued. Najibur Rahman discouraged this system of polygamy which is allowed in Islamic **shariah**. A very progressive and conscious author, he advocated the discarding of evils existing in the society and the conservativeness and religious fear among Muslim of rural Bengal.

Najibur Rahman also depicted the syncretic influences in the rural society. Although the village people were normally religious, constantly influenced by the village **mullahs** and **maulvis**, there also existed in the

society the practice of rural and folk culture, which was a blend of the age - old Hindu rituals and Islamic customs. In the novel the author mentioned the popularity of the **puthis** which narrated mythical and popular religious stories of both Hindu and Muslim sources. Strict following of the religious texts and the teachings of the Islamic **shariah** did not affect the following of folk practices by the rural Muslims. Anowara had read the Quran, the **Meftahul Jinnat**, the **Rahe Nazat**, the **Padma Nama**, **Gulistan** and also the **Charu Pat**, **Sitar Banabash**, the **Meghnad Badh Kabya**, which shows the syncretic influence dominating the rural Muslim society.²⁰ In the novel, Anowara sought the help of a **Vhaishnav** woman who practiced witchcraft and sorcery. Anowara also accepted the idea of treatment of **pirs** and **fakirs** when her husband was seriously ill. Influence of local practices and the deep - rooted belief in **pirs**, **fakirs** and **darvesh** were common in rural society.²¹ It is interesting to note that the influence of the **Tariqah-i-**

20. Najibur Rahman, **Anowara** , pp. 3, 6. Folk practices and popular culture in rural Bengal were a blend of Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs, mysticism and rituals. The two traditions, the "great" and the "little", i.e. the "high culture" which got introduced into the folk or local culture, called the "little" or the "low culture" had long affected each other and this phenomenon was dominant in rural Bengal.

21. See, John Takle, "Islam in Bengal", **The Moslem World**, Vol. IV. London, January 1914, No. 1. Another article by John Takle, "Popular Islam in Bengal and how to Approach it", **The Moslem World**, Vol. IV. London, October 1914, No. 4. **The Moslem World** was published from London since 1911. Later it was published from Hatford, New York. Also see, Robert Redfield, **Peasant Society and Culture**, the University of Chicago Press, 1960. 2nd ed. 1961. pp. 41-42. The phrases "great" and the "little" tradition, "high" and "low" culture have been coined by the author.

Muhammadiyah and the **Wahabi** movement was great in eastern Bengal, particularly Pabna.²² Propaganda against any anti-**Shariah** activity was strong in the district. This aspect is also depicted in the novel. Anowara, from her early life was a deeply religious girl. When her husband fell ill, and doctor's medicine worked slow, she accepted the treatment of **pirs** and **fakirs** and very hesitantly sought the help of the **vaishnav** woman who assured her of curing her husband if she followed her advice. Anowara knew that it was against the Islamic **shariah** to follow the **vaishnav** woman's rituals.²³ It was when she went out at the depth of the fixed night that she was abducted by the licentious Abbas and his associates. Abbas was the son of a wealthy peasant. The author shows in the novel that even though religion dominated the life of rural people, faith in local and mystical rituals was also strong in them. The author also pointed out the evil nature of the so-called, **sharifs** in rural Bengal. Najibur Rahman highlighted the conservativeness and ignorance of the rural people and pointed out that even after receiving education, the rural Muslims had not yet become ready to shake - off the existing taboos and customs . The beginning of the twentieth century was actually a very transitional phase for the rural Muslims, both economically and socially. The novelist does not go into politics but has given a very transparent picture of the religious, social and economic life of the rural Muslims.

22. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.* p. 40.

23. Najibur Rahman, *Anowara*, pp. 127-128.

As a literateur, Najibur Rahman followed the classical prose writing of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Mir Mosharraf Hossain and other contemporary writers.²⁴ Not much credit is given to the linguistic quality of his novel but **Anowara** is considered as a classic novel on the Muslim society in rural Bengal. Although the novelist has portrayed the character of Anowara as a model Muslim girl with basic education on religious and social life, capable of running the household, a faithful and devoted wife, but the idea of the emerging "new woman" is not fully exposed in the novel. The novel was written in 1914 and the aspect of the idea of the "new woman" or the emergence of the **bhadramohila** in the Bengali Muslim society had not yet occurred. The author was more concerned of the domestic life of women in the Muslim society and gave a glimpse through the character of Anowara of how a Bengali Muslim woman should be. Another significant point worth-mentioning about the novel and the novelist is that no where had the author made any reference to communal relationship. Najibur Rahman had also written other novels like **Goriber Meye** (1923), **Meherunnessa** (1923) where he advocated communal harmony in spite of all religious and cultural differences, female education and social upliftment through progressive ideas.²⁵

24. Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Muslim Bangla Sahitya** (Bengali Muslim Literature), Rajshahi, 1968. p. 59.

25. Anisuzzaman, **op. cit.** pp. 370 - 371.

KAZI EMDADUL HUQ, ABDULLAH

Novels, in general, are fictional works but some novels are based on the historical and political background of a particular time. Some are biographical novels and some are autobiographical, which are comparatively more revealing of the time. Attempts have been made by scholars like, Najma Jasmin Chowdhury to study novels in the context of political events in Bengal during the years roughly from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.¹ Anisuzzaman has also analysed the literary works of Muslim authors of Bengal in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to depict the trends of thought of the Muslims in Bengal.² Both Asim Roy³ and Rafiuddin Ahmed⁴ have used literary works like **puthis** and biographies of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries to signify the two contradictory trends of syncretism and Islamization respectively in the Bengal Muslim society. Novels like **Shei Shomoy** (1981 and 1982) by Shunil Gangapadhyay depicts the Hindu society in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵ The novel exposes the conservativeness of the Hindu society in Bengal and at the same time reflects on how the English - educated Hindu youths challenged the established ideas

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1. Najma Jasmin Chowdhury, **Bangla Uppannash O Rajniti** (Bengali Novels and Politics), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1980.
 2. Anisuzzaman, **Muslim-Manas O Bangla Sahitya** (A critical Analysis of the Muslim Literateurs in Bengali), Muktaadhara, Dhaka. 3rd. ed. 1983 (1st. pub. 1964).
 3. Asim Roy, **The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal**, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983.
 4. Rafiuddin Ahmed, **The Bengal Muslim-A Quest for Identity, 1871-1906**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2nd ed. 1988 (1st pub. 1981).
 5. Shunil Gangapadhyay, **Shei Shomoy** (Those days), Vol. 1, Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta : 1981. **Shei Shomoy**, Vol. 2, Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta : 1982.

and beliefs of their society. They shocked the Hindu conservative society by publicly eating beef which is prohibited by their religion. They pressed for the abolition of Sati (wife accompanying her dead husband in the pyre) and campaigned for widow remarriage. Similar reflections on the Bengali Muslim society in the first half of the present century have been made by Abu Jafar Shamsuddin (1911-1988) in his novel **Padma Meghna Jamuna** (published in 1974).⁶ He has depicted the hopes and aspirations, the response of the educated Muslim youths to political trends in the period and the contradictions and frustrations of the rising Muslim middle class in Bengal. Other novels like **Shangshaptak**⁷ by Shahidullah Kaiser and **Prem Nei**⁸ by Gour Kishore Ghose (Published in 1965 and 1981 respectively) are worth mentioning for the study of social and political trends of the Bengali Muslim society in the first half of the present century. **Abdullah** is novel, more realistic, in the sense that it was written by an author who lived in the period he wrote on. The novel was written between 1918 and 1926 which was published in thirty series in the monthly literary journal, **the Moslem Bharat**.⁹ The author could not complete the novel since he died in 1926 but left manuscript for two chapters and sketch for the rest of the novel. Kazi Anwarul Qadir completed the novel which was

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6. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin, **Padma Meghna Jamuna**, Navajiban Prakashani, Dhaka : 1974. The novel was written in the 1960's but published in 1974. **Padma Meghna Jamuna** are the names of three rivers in Bengal.
 7. Shaidullah Kaiser, **Shangshaptak**, Muktaadhara, Dhaka : 3rd. ed. 1975, (1st. ed. 1965).
 8. Gour Kishore Ghose, **Prem Nei**, (Without love) Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta : rpt. (1st. Published in 1981).
 9. **Moslem Bharat**, a monthly literary journal which was published from Calcutta for a year and a half since May, 1920. The journal emphasized on improving the condition of the Muslim community in Bengal and also maintaining a harmonious communal relation in the province. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, **Shamaik Patre Jiban O Janamat, 1901-1930** (Public Opinion as Reflected in the Press, 1901-1930). Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977. P. 438.

published in 1933 from the Musalman Press, Calcutta. ¹⁰

Abdullah has been considered a classic work on the conditions of Bengali Muslims at the turn of the century. **Abdullah** represents the transformations taking place in the Bengali Muslim society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Backwardness in education, economic distress, religious and social orthodoxy had led the Muslims of Bengal to a state of paralysis. Various complexities as a result of these drawbacks contributed to worsening of relation between Hindus and Muslims. The author depicts the existing tensions and complexities within the Muslim community in Bengal and at the same time reflects on a parallel development of communal hatred among the Muslims and Hindus which was to take a serious turn in a few decades.

The central character of the novel was Abdullah, the son of a professional **Pir**. His father's profession was in decline. Abdullah received English education and was about to take his Bachelor's examination when his father died. Abdullah refused to follow his ancestral profession of **pirism** or to be **maulvi** (priest). Abdullah learnt English because his father had realized the practical importance of learning the language and had wanted his son to learn English though not without fear that English education would ruin his Islamic manners. There was a common belief among the older generation of Muslims that the younger generation was losing Islamic values by learning English.¹¹

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10. Abdul Qadir ed. **Kazi Emdadul Huq Rachanabali** (Complete Works of Kazi Emdadul Huq), Vol. 1. Kendrio Bangla Unnayan Board (Central Board for development of Bengali), later named Bangla Academy Dhaka, 1968. P. 656.
 11. Amalendu De, **Islam in Mordern India**, Maya Prakashan, Calcutta, 1982. P. 33. English language was considered **Kufr-e-Kalam** (language of the infidels) and **Elm-e-Bedin** (irreligious teaching) by the orthodox Muslims. See, Mustafa Nurul Islam, op. cit. pp. 5, 8. But, there was a strong opinion among Muslims in Bengal by the early twentieth century in favour of learning English. Ibid. pp.. 4-6. See, **The Pracharak**, 2nd. yr, 9th. issue, 1900; **Nabanur**, 1st. yr. 11th issue, 1903; **The Islam Pracharak**, 6th yr. 8th issue, 1905; **The Islam Pracharak**, 8th. yr. 11th issue, 1907. Ibid. Also see, Amalendu De, **Bangali Buddhijibi O Bichinnatabad** (Bengali Intelligentsia and separatism), Calcutta, 1974. pp. 217-218.

The older generation believed that their sons should keep away from learning English because it was the language of the Christians, that is, the non-Muslims. Learning English meant that those youths came in contact with western ideas of liberalism and rationalism and began to question the orthodox views of their parents. Abdullah wanted to take up teaching as a job and thought of studying Law after saving some money in a few years time. He was married to a family which prided in its social status as **ashraf**. His father-in law, Syed Abdul Quddus symbolized the older generation of Muslims who were puritan and orthodox in their social views. Syed Shaheb,* as he was popularly known, was an **ashraf** with a decaying financial condition but retaining a pride of his earlier social and economic position of superiority.¹² He disliked the idea that his son-in-law, Abdullah would give up the profession of **pirism** and take up a job in the secular field. He had disowned his own son, Abul Kader for taking up job of a sub-registrar. Syed Shaheb did not support that Muslim youth should learn English. He believed that the **Sharifs**, i.e. the **ashrafs** must remain in the path of Islam. To him, learning English and taking up jobs meant losing faith in religion. Abdullah's wife, Saleha commented about her father's disliking,

“যারা শরীফজাদা তাদের উচিত দীন ইসলামের উপর পাকা হয়ে থাকা। ইংরেজী পড়া, কি চাকরি করতে যাওয়া ওসব দুনিয়াদারী কাজে ঈমান দোরস্ত থাকে না বলে তিনি মোটেই পছন্দ করেন না।”¹³

(It is the duty of the **ashrafs** to remain firm on Islam. He does not like such mundane works like learning English and taking up jobs because that make one lose faith on religion).

12. *Shaheb indicates a mark of respect used to refer to a gentleman.

13. Abdul Qadir ed, Kazi Emdadul Huq Rachanabali (Complete Works of Kazi Emdadul Huq), Vol. 1. p. 30.

Later, Syed Shaheb expressed his detestation by saying,

“সাধে কি আমি ইংরেজী পড়তে মানা করি? ইংরেজী পড়লে লোকের আর দীন দারীর দিকে কিছুতেই মন যায় না-কেবল খেয়াল দৌড়ায় দুনিয়াদারীর দিকে-।”¹⁴

(Now see, why I discourage English education. Learning English means completely losing faith on religion and one runs after worldly gain only).

His view was that Abdullah's father had wasted money by giving his son English education. It would have been wiser if Abdullah had continued his father's profession of **pirism** and would have earned enough if he had managed to collect a number of **murids** (disciples).¹⁵ Losing social power and prestige on the one hand and keeping away from English education on the other, the **ashrafs** in rural Bengal in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century remained engrossed in religion. They turned to religion not so much for spritual upliftment but for refuge and comfort in distress.¹⁶ This tendency was marked among the older generation of the Muslims. To them learning English was equal to be **nastik** (an atheist). Abdullah tried to convince his wife and father-in-law that the economic condition of the **ashrafs** was in an extremely bad shape and therefore, learning English had become vital for their survival. They had no other alternative than to learn English and take up jobs. Abdul Kader, son of Syed Shaheb in the novel, went to see

14. *Ibid*, p. 57.

15. *Ibid*, p. 58.

16. A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835*, Rddhi, Calcutta, 2nd. ed. 1976. (1st pub. E. J. Brill, 1965).

magistrate Mr. Corbett for a job of sub-registrar. Mr. Corbett asked Abdul Kader in a faunting manner. ___

“তা আপনাদের মত বড় ঘরের ছেলের চাকুরীর দরকার কি?”¹⁷

(Why do sons of noble families like you need to go for jobs?)

Abdul Kader replied that their economic condition had so deteriorated that they must now take up jobs. He said,

“আমাদের ঘরের অবস্থা আর আজ-কাল তেমন ভাল নেই, স্যার। এখন অন্য উপায়ে উপার্যন না কত্তে পাল্লে সংসারই চালান কঠিন হ’য়ে পড়বে। আপনি একটু দয়া ক’ল্লে, স্যার, আমার কষ্ট দূর হ’তে পারে।”¹⁸

(We are no longer well off economically, Sir. It would be difficult for us to maintain family unless we earn by different means. If you are kind Sir, my problem can be solved.)

Mr. Corbett said surprisingly,

“মুসলমান জমিদার ঘরের ছেলে হ’য়ে আপনি এমন কথা ব’লছেন। আমি দেখেছি, আপনাদের শ্রেণীর মধ্যে এমন লোকও আছে যে, ক্রমে দুরবস্থায় পড়েও গুমোর ছাড়ে না। লেখাপড়া শেখা, কি কোন ব্যবসায় করা, ছোট লোকের কাজ ব’লে মনে করে - শেষটা তাদের বংশবলীর ভাগ্যে হয় ভিক্ষা, না হয় জাল-জুয়াচুরি ছাড়া আর কিছুই থাকে না।”¹⁹

17. Abdul Qadir ed. Kazi Emdadul Huq Rachanabali, Vol. 1. p. 82.

18. Ibid, p. 82.

19. Ibid, p. 82.

(Being a decendent of a Muslim zamidar family you surprise me by saying so. I have seen there are many among you who do not give up their vanity even in distress. They think it humiliating to get educated or to set up a trade. As a result, their ultimate fate is nothing but either to beg or get involved in frauds.)

The novel exposes a significant phenomenon existing in the Muslim society in Bengal and that was **pirism**. Abdullah's mother also persuaded her son to continue his father's profession of **pirism**. But Abdullah pointed out that **pirism** was prohibited in Islam. Islam prohibits worship of saints, dead or alive. **Pir** is a mystic, a spiritual guide, worshipped by both the masses and the élites in Bengal. In fact, **pirs** played a dominant role in rural Bengal. But, with the Islamic revivalist movements in the mid-nineteenth century onwards this trend was strongly challenged. The wave of Islamic revivalist spirit had curbed **pirism** to some extent but in rural Bengal even in the early twentieth century **pirs** retained their earlier popularity although many took to **pirism** without religious training or spiritual dedication. During the first decades of the present century a new generation of educated youths had emerged who began to oppose the **pir-murid** practice. Abdullah represented this younger generation of educated youths.

The other significant feature of the Bengali Muslim society depicted in the novel was the **ashraf** and **atrap** classification which worked deep into the fabrics of the society. This phenomenon was prominent in rural Bengal compared to the urban areas where the percentage of Muslims residing was comparatively much smaller. In Calcutta, for instance, out of a total population of 900,000 there was approximately 205,000 Muslims, that is, 22.7% in 1921. In 1931 the percentage was 26.²⁰ A vast majority of the

20. K. McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm, Calcutta 1918 to 1935*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1974, p. 9. Also see, Bazlur Rahman Khan, *Politics in Bengal, 1927-1936*. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987, p. 8.

urban Muslims were mostly migrants and upper-class having connections with the Muslims in Northern India or with the dominant mercantile group in Bengal.²¹ They spoke Urdu and it became a trend among Bengali Muslims to speak Urdu to signify a mark of nobility and to prove that they were of foreign stock.²² The **ashrafs** in the city took to western education and had entered profession and government services by the 1920's.²³ The **ashrafs** considered themselves well-born and hated to mix with the **atraps**. It was almost an accepted fact in rural Bengal that education was only for the upper-class Muslims.²⁴ The respectable Muslim families of Bengal were unwilling to send their children to schools in order to prevent association with children of lower social status. Nawab Abdul Latif (1826-1893) recommended that admission into the **madrassah** should not include children from lower class.²⁵ The **ashrafs** objected to the education of lower-class Muslims. This aspect is depicted explicitly in **Abdullah**. When Abdullah visited the **maktab** (private school usually run by the **ashrafs** in village to teach Arabic at the primary level) at his father-in-law's house he noticed that the **maulvi** (priest) was giving attention only to one group of students sitting at the front and not to those sitting at the rear. He also noticed that the two groups were

21. McPherson, *op. cit.* p. 9. Bazlur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.* p. 8

22. McPherson, *op. cit.* pp. 9, 15.

23. McPherson, *op. cit.* p. 15.

24. Report of the Indian Education Commission, 1882, Calcutta, 1883, Chapter IX, p.483 mentioned that one of the causes of the backwardness of the Muslims in education in Bengal was the "unwillingness felt by the better born to associate with those lower in the social scale".

25. Rafiuddin Ahmed *op. cit.* p. 23. The Madrassah Committee appointed by the Government in 1869 included Nawab Abdul Latif (1826-1893) who favoured to maintain a **status-quo** in respect of social relationship between the **ashrafs** and the **atraps**. The committee made its report in 1871.

learning different lessons. When Abdullah enquired about the reason the **maulvi** replied prudently,

“খতাবা খি, বোজলেননি, দুলহা মিঞা? অরা অইলো গিয়া আতরাফগোর ফোলাফান, অরা এইসব মিয়াগোরের হমান হমান চলতাম্ ফারে? অর্গো জিয়াদা সবক দেওয়া মানা আছে, -----”²⁶

(The fact is, my dear brother-in-law, these are sons of the **atraps**. Can they be equal to the **miahs (ashrafs)**? I am not allowed to teach them more than this, -----.)

The **ashrafs** never wanted the **atraps** to receive proper and higher education. Social discrimination by the **ashrafs** contributed to the backwardness of education in rural Bengal. The **ashrafs** intentionally kept the **atraps** backward in education in order to maintain their social leadership.

By the early decades of the twentieth century Muslim youths in Bengal had started receiving English education and taking up jobs. As a result a new phenomenon emerged in Bengali society which was the worsening of relation between the Muslims and the Hindus. The Hindus, far advanced in education, were in a privileged position in respect of jobs. In 1903, for instance, the **Nabanur**²⁷ mentioned that out of 3 High Court Judges only one was a Muslim, out of 10 District and Session Judges, two were Muslims, out^{of}/62 Sub-Judges, one was a Muslim, out of 340 Munsiffs, 18 were Muslims, out of

26. Kazi Emdadul Huq *Rachanabali*, op. cit. p. 55.

27. The **Nabanur** was a monthly literary journal published from Calcutta from May 1903 onwards for four years. The object of the journal was to maintain a harmonious relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim communities in Bengal. Mustafa Nurul Islam, op. cit. p. 433.

529 Deputy Magistrate and Collectors only 76 were Muslims and out of 215 Lawyers of High Court only 11 were Muslims.²⁸

Mr. Corbett, a magistrate in the novel, pointed out to Abdul Kader that the Hindus were ahead in all spheres of jobs and trades. He said,

“দেখো, হিন্দুরা লেখাপড়া শিখে কেমন উন্নতি ক’রে ফেলেছে - অপিসে আদালতে কি ব্যবসায় - বানিজ্যে, যেখানে সেখানে দেশীয় লোক দেখতে পাই, কেবলই হিন্দু - কুচিং কালে -ভদ্রে একজন মুসলমান নজরে পড়ে। ক্রমে ওরাই দেশের সর্বেসর্বা হ’য়ে উঠবে, দেখতে পাবেন, আপনারা কেবল কাঠ কাটবার জন্য প’ড়ে থাকবেন।”²⁹

(See, how the Hindus have developed through education. In offices and courts, in trade and in commerce wherever we see natives, most of them are Hindus. Seldom we find a Muslim. They will gradually control over every aspect of the nation. You, the Muslims will be there only to hew wood.)

Since the Muslims had started learning English and were willing to take up jobs but lagged behind, they now sought cooperation and favour from the British government. Munshi Shahed who was with Abdul Kader, in the novel, pleaded,

“প্রথম প্রথম তো আমরা হিন্দুদের সংগে সমান সমান হ’য়ে প্রতিযোগিতা ক’তে পারব না, কাজেই গভর্নমেন্টের একটু বিশেষ নজর এ গরীবদের উপর থাকবে ব’লে ভরসা করি।”³⁰

28. Amalendu De, *op. cit.* p. 31. Also see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, *op. cit.* p. 276.

29. Kazi Emdadul Huq Rachanabali, *op. cit.* p. 83.

30. *Ibid.* p. 83.

(We will not be able to compete with the Hindus on equal terms at the beginning. We hope the government will keep a sympathetic eye to our needs.)

With the partition of Bengal in 1905, a Muslim majority province was created which included Muslims of Bengali-speaking area of Eastern Bengal and Assam comprising 59% of the total population of Bengal.³¹ The administration of the new province held out prospect for jobs and also grants and aid for Muslim education. Between 1906 and 1911, with the increased grants-in-aid, the number of Muslims in high school in the new province rose from 8,869 to 20,729 and in the middle English school from 14,100 to 38,702.³² Sir Bampfylde Fuller (1854-1935), first lieutenant Governor of east Bengal and Assam, openly expressed favour towards Muslim.³³ The Hindus, quite naturally, criticized almost jealously, the British for granting favours to the Muslims by giving them jobs which would otherwise have gone to the more eligible and more experienced Hindus. Communal ill-feeling began to develop as a result. In the novel, *Sashi Babu*, a Hindu, refused to let his house to Abdul Kader. This was an open manifestation of communal hatred. Muslims were not considered gentlemen and were not considered Bengalis by the Hindus. However, the fact that the Muslims were not considered Bengalis was the creation of the Muslims themselves. The upper-class Muslims loved to harp on the idea that they were of foreign origin and hated to speak Bengali. They felt detested to be called a Bengali. In the novel, *Sashi Babu* told Abdul Kader,

“বঙ্গালী ব’লে আপনারা বঙ্গালী হিন্দুকেই বোঝেন ----”³⁴

31. P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge, 1972. p. 149.

32. *Ibid*, p. 151.

33. *Ibid*, p. 151.

34. Kazi Emdadul Huq *Rachanabali*, op. cit. p. 109.

(----- To you Muslims, Bengalis mean Bengali Hindus ----).
Abdul Kader denied that was so. He did not agree and replied,

“কই, তা তো বুঝিনে-- আমরাও তো বাঙালী---”³⁵

(No, we never think so - we are Bengalis as well ----). Sashi babu expressed the reason of his opinion.

“আমি অনেক মুসলমানকে বলতে শুনেছি, - “মুসলমানেরা আজকাল ধুতি প’রে বাঙালী সাজে।” এর মানে কি?”³⁶

(I have heard many Muslims to say, ----- "Muslims are trying to be Bengalis by wearing **dhoti**." What does that mean ?)

The upper class Muslims in Bengal preferred to follow the culture of the Muslims of northern India which was based on the Mughal heritage. Their usual dress was **Kurta** and **Pajama** and their language was Urdu.³⁷ The affectation of the Muslims in Bengal in dress and language was an indication of their desire to prove their foreign origin. As a result they had to face an alienation socially. The younger generation of newly educated Muslims in Bengal realized that affectation in language and dress had contributed nothing but social and economic backwardness. They had come in contact

35. **Ibid**, p. 109.

36. **Ibid**. p. 109.

37. Rafiuddin Ahmed, **op. cit.** p. X. (preface to first edition).

with Hindus who dominated the society. They began to imitate the Hindus in dress wearing **dhoti** and **panjabi** to overcome that alienation. This was true to a certain section of Muslim youths in Bengal who came in touch with the Hindus in the field of education and jobs.

The novel also exposed the extravagance of the Muslims, both **ashrafs** and **atraps**. Social functions and ceremonies were arranged in grandeur. Huge sum of money was spent and in case of shortage of money, pieces of landed property were sold during events like circumcision or wedding. In the novel, Abdul Quddus, Abdullah's father-in-law, who tried to maintain his social status even by selling land, spent huge sum of money for celebrating the opening ceremony of his newly-built mosque. Illiteracy, ignorance about health and sanitation were other shortcomings of the Bengali Muslims which have been depicted in the novel.

[All translations from original Bengali are mine.]

(This is a revised version of the paper read by me at the seminar arranged by the Bangladesh History Association at Dhaka in 1989.)

Shaheedullah Kaiser. **Sangsaptak**

Sangsaptak exposes elaborately the social, political and economic condition of the two decades before partition of 1947 and the dislocation of the post-partition days. The novel deals specifically with the events of the years between 1938 and 1951.¹

Born in 1927, the novelist Shaheedullah Kaiser, experienced the whole gamut of the political and social atmosphere during the 1940's, the war and the famine, communal riot and partition. Himself an educated youth and conscious of the existing flaws in the Bengali Muslim society, the author depicted the futility of the war and the communal riots and closely observed the disenchantment at the creation of a separate state based on religion. **Sangsaptak** reveals the author's opinion and ideological beliefs through the political conversation and polemic debates between two major characters in the novel, Sikander and Zahed. Sikander was an educated and politically conscious teacher of a school at Taltali. Zahed, also an educated youth came from a rich landholder family and was totally committed to politics. The two talked of **Swaraj** and socialism, communal relation and partition of India.

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1. Najma Jasmin Choudhury, **Bangla Upannash O Rajniti**, (Bengali Novels and Politics), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1980. Also see, Jatin Sarkar, "Jugantarar Ghurnipak O Bangladeshher Upannash" (The Stormy decades and novels of Bangladesh), **Uttaradhikar**, Bangla Academy Journal, Bangla Academy, Dacca, January-March, 1974, p.34.

Sikandar believed in the welfare of people irrespective of religion or culture and did not support division of India on any ground. Zahed, on the other hand, was educated at Aligarh, and indoctrinated by the Muslim League politics, argued in favour of partition. Zahed pointed out the communal tension and expressed his fear that Muslims in India as a minority community would be in a very unsafe position if the British left without partitioning India.²

The author reveals the socio-economic and communal relation of the two adjacent villages Bakulia and Taltali, the first, a Muslim majority area situated at the south and the second, a Hindu majority one, at the north. Bakulia was impoverished with most of its residents being peasants. Only two **ashraf** families, the Syeds and the Miahs resided there. The Syeds had left Calcutta for good. They had lost most of their landed property and sought for better life by receiving education and taking up jobs in urban centres. Felu Miah, descendant of a **zaminder**, stayed at Bakulia trying to regain his past glory and prestige. Felu Miah was a **talukder** (a petty landholder) whose predecessors had lost most of their landed property which

2. Shaheedullah Kaiser, **Sangsaptak**, Dhaka. 1st published in 1965, 3rd ed. 1975. p.115. **Sangsaptak** as mentioned in Hindu mythological epic, the **Mahabharata** means a soldier who fights bravely till death.

was taken over by the Hindu **mahajans** after the permanent Settlement, 1793.³ Felu Mia cursed Cornwallis and hated the Hindus, particularly the **banias** and **mahajans** because his wealth had shifted to their hands.⁴ His lean and bare-boned horse symbolised the economic impoverishment of the **ashrafs**, who once possessed the wealth to keep horses and elephants.⁵ But, Felu Mia retained his **ashraf** status and pride. He refused to take up jobs or do independent trade or business.⁶ That was against the so-called **ashraf** prestige. Felu Mia was rather willing to buy his lost **taluks** from Ram Dayal, the Hindu **mahajan** at Taltali.⁷ Price of rice and jute was high in the pre-war years, in 1938-1939 and Felu Mia was able to make some money.⁸ He symbolised the conflict existing among the **ashrafs** in Bengal trying to regain lost wealth and prestige but being unable to do so, nourished hatred and vengeance.

The novel starts with the village **panchayat** headed by Felu Mia, punishing a Muslim girl, Hurmati, for carrying a child before marriage. Felu Mia, because of his **ashraf** status acted as the head of the **Pachayat**. But, the way Hurmati was punished with a red-hot coin pressed on her forehead exposed

3. Shaheedullah Kaiser, **Sangsaptak**, p.57.

4. **Ibid**, p.66.

5. **Ibid**. p.69.

6. **Ibid**. pp.60-61.

7. **Ibid**. pp.63.

8. **Ibid**. p.63.

the cruelty and barbaric attitude to women.⁹ The author exposed the extent of conservativeness and feudal attitude existing in the Bengali Muslim society still in the late 1930's. **Panchayat - Jamat** were a common practice in Muslim society headed by the village headman, in most cases, an **ashraf**.¹⁰ **Bahas** (religious debates) were also common in the villages.¹¹ **Ashraf** and **atrap** distinction in rural Bengal is highlighted in the novel. At the **maktab**, the **atrap** children had to sit at the back while the children from **ashraf** families used to sit in the front and the teacher used to give them more attention while teaching.¹² Polygamy was practiced and Muslim men used to marry more than once disregarding the wishes of the first wife. Women were not allowed to receive education and had to follow strict **purdah** even in the late 1930's.¹²

The novel also exposes the syncretic influence among the **ashrafs** in the Muslim society. Veneration of **pirs**, visits to **mazars** and graves of relatives were common.¹³ The **ashrafs** usually patronized the **pirs** even though in most cases fake and degenerated.¹⁴ Rabu's father was a **darvish** belonging to the Syed family of Bakulia, who had left home but occasionally came to the village with his **murids** (disciples). He mistreated his wife all through

9. **Ibid.** pp.4-9.

10. **Ibid.** p.14.

11. **Ibid.** p.39.

11. **Ibid.** pp,45-46.

12. **Ibid.** p.112.

13. **Ibid.** pp.126,163.

14. **Ibid.** pp. 126,186-195.

and his battered wife died after giving birth to a dead child. The author points out in the novel that **darvishes** and **pirs** were not always moral or spiritual. The presence of **sufi darvishes** at the house of the Syeds depicts the extent of influence of syncretism among the **ashrafs**. The **darvishes** created a mystical atmosphere while performing **dhikr** accompanied by loud music.¹⁵ **Darvishes** of the **Naqshbandi** order, usually practised **dhikr** which means remembering God by repeating His name to the extent of ecstasy and trance.¹⁶ They were non-communal, but often the **ashrafs** accepted only the mystical part of it. The **ashrafs**, in most cases, were not tolerant to other religions. They represented both orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the Muslim society. The **pirs**, **faqirs** and **darvishes** usually followed a corrupt form of **sufism**.¹⁷ The ignorant and illiterate masses in Bengal and the women - folk, totally restricted to home, were also ignorant.

15. *Ibid.* pp. 186-187.

16. There were two kinds of **dhikr**—**dhikr i jali** which meant reciting aloud and **dhikr i khafi**, reciting mentally. In the **Naqshbandi** order, the **murid** (disciple) closes his eyes, repeats the name of Allah in a special way, holding his breath, bringing about trance by song and dance. See, Tara Chand, **Influence of Islam on Indian Culture**, Allahabad, 1976. p.65. Also see, Gail Minault Graham, "Akbar and Aurangzeb—Syncretism and Separatism in Mughal India. A Re-Examination", **The Muslim World**, Vol. LIX. April 1969, No.2. pp.119-120.

17. See, John Takle, "Islam in Bengal", **The Moslem World**, Vol. IV, January 1914. No.1. pp.16-17.

They obeyed the **pirs** and **faqirs** blindly. In the novel, Rabu only fourteen years old, was forcefully married to the aged **pir**, chosen by her **darvish** father.¹⁸ Zahed, the epitome of the younger generation of educated Muslims, revolted to such excesses of conservativeness and orthodoxy and at the same time, to the practice of distorted and corrupt form of **sufism**. The English educated Muslim youths in Bengal were largely progressive who rejected the absurdity of such conservativeness like polygamy, child marriage and **pardah** but in most cases lacked courage to protest against such social evils. Zahed, educated at Aligarh and rationalistic in his views, demonstrated his protest by driving out the **pir** and his disciples out of the village.¹⁹

The novel also highlighted the controversy between the Deoband and the Aligarh school of thought in respect to politics in India. The Deobandis had supported the Indian National Congress since the early 1920's. They were religiously fundamentalists but tolerant to the non-Muslims. They wanted India as an "indivisible whole" and reacted sharply to the Lahore Resolution adopted by the Muslim League in March, 1940.²⁰ The Indian **ulama** who believed in upholding the Muslim legal tradition and the purified principles of Islam, were considered as orthodox. But, in political sense they were secular. They opposed the "two-nation" theory arguing that partition of the

18. **Sangsaptak**, pp.193-194.

19. **Sangsaptak**, pp.204-205.

20. M.S. Agwani, **Islamic Fundamentalism in India**, Chandigarh, 1986. pp.18,24-25.

country would split the Muslim community into a smaller and less effective minority.²¹ Husain Ahmad Madani (1879- 1957), the chief spokesman of the **Jamiat -ul-ulama-I-Hind** believed in the theory of "Composite nationalism" (**muttawahidah qawmiyat**), by which he meant that Indians had one thing in common and that was their Indianness, disregarding their religious and cultural differences.²² He blamed the British for economic and political backwardness of the Indian Muslims. He believed that the British colonial rule had systematically destroyed the educational and legal institutions of the Muslims in India.²³ The **ulama** of the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-I-Hind** and of the Deoband considered the Pakistan movement a "death-knell" for the Muslim of the regions where they were a minority community.²⁴ They came in direct conflict with the Aligarh-based Muslim thought and the Muslim League for propagating the doctrine of Islamic nationalism and "two-nation" theory. The Aligarh Muslim University became the emotional centre of Pakistan demand. This institution was not originally anti-Hindu or anti-Congress. It had propagated rationalistic ideals during the Khilafat and non - co-operation movement in the 1920's. Because Aligarh was an

21. **Ibid.** p.25.

22. **Ibid.** p.25.

23. **Ibid.** p.25.

24. **Ibid.** pp.25-26.

educational centre, it created a large section of educated youths who later provided intellectual and political leadership for the Muslims in India.²⁵ The Aligarh-influenced nationalist Muslims were in many ways progressive in modern thought but gradually becoming less secular. They were modern in religious sense that they interpreted Islam in a more rationalistic manner but formulation of "two-nation" theory and demand for partition of India on religious ground put them in a way to a category of "pseudo or quasi-modernists".²⁶ The non-Deobandi **ulama** formed the **Jamiat-ul-ulama -i-Islam** and supported the "two-nation" theory and the demand for separate homeland.²⁷ There was conflict between the **Jamait-ul-ulama-i-Hind** and the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i- Islam** on the question of partition. The **ulamas** were divided among themselves. There were conferences in Bengal where **ulamas** of the **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i- Hind** expressed their support for Muslim League. In November 1938 a Muslim Conference was held at Sylhet where

25. **Ibid.** pp.23-24. Also see, Mushirul Hasan, "Nationalist and Separatist trends in Aligarh, 1915-47", **The Indian Economic and Social History Review**, Vol. XXII, No. I. Delhi, January-March, 1985. P.3.
26. Dietmar Rothermund (ed.) **Islam in Southern Aisa. A Survey of Current Research.** Wiesbaden, 1975. p.50.
27. The **ulama** of Bengal formed the **Nikhil Bharat Jamiat-ul- ulama-i-Islam** in October 1945. See, Amalendu De, **Islam in Modern India**, Calcutta, 1982. p.220.

Nawab Habibullah and Maulana Azad Sobhani urged the Muslims to join the Muslim League.²⁸ The **Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Bangala** had been formed in 1921 which preached the need for spread of education, social reform and unity among Muslims in Bengal.²⁹ The **ulamas** of this organization also pointed out in the 1930's that the majority of the Muslims in Bengal were losing confidence on the nationalist Muslims and on the **ulamas** who had supported the Congress.³⁰ They also began to support the demand for partition.

In the novel, the author has highlighted this aspect of conflict between the Deobandi and the nationalist **ulama** versus the supporters of the Muslim League, indoctrinated mostly by the Aligarh movement which upheld the right of the Muslims in India as a separate nation, ^{having} distinct culture, religion and language. Sikandar, represented in the novel as an idealist and a socialist, pointed out that partition of the country would not bring any good to the Muslim community. Majority of the Muslims, being peasants and in depressed economic condition, needed good harvest, better price for their crops, education for their children and a **bania** and **mahajan-** free society.³¹

28. Muhammad Abdullah, **Rajneetite Bongyo Ulamar Bhumika** (Role of the **Ulama** of Bengal in Politics), Dhaka, 1995. p.106.

29. **Ibid.** p.96.

30. **Ibid.** p.107.

31. **Sangsaptak**, pp.196-197, 227-229.

He contradicted with Zahed, supporter of the Muslim League demand for a separate nation who argued that after partition those things could be achieved easily.³² What was needed, Zahed argued, was the realization by the Muslim masses that the British and the Hindu **mahajan** were their real enemies and that they had to build up a movement in favour of partition.³³ Zahed criticized the Deobandi **ulama** and the nationalist Muslims who had opposed the idea of partitioning India.³⁴ The novel exposes the attitude of the educated Muslim youth in the early 1940's when socialist ideas had infiltrated into their minds making them secular in their political outlook and at the same time made them aware of the negative attitude of the politicians of both the Congress and the Muslim League about any compromise on keeping India united. Their half-hearted efforts for improving the condition of the general masses had, in fact, confused them. They were sceptical about the need for partition, whether at all partition would solve the genuine problems of the Bengali Muslims.³⁵ The author also exposes in the novel the horrifying effect of the famine in Bengal in 1943 when about

32. **Ibid.** pp.196-197.

33. **Ibid.** p. 197.

34. **Ibid.** pp.196,227.

35. **Ibid.** pp. 358-359.

thirty-five lakh people died and nearly thirty thousand women took to prostitution for want of food.³⁶ Calcutta city was swarmed by famine-stricken people. Gruel kitchens were opened, Bengal medical relief committees and food committees were formed. The novel points out the malpractices carried out by the hoarders, smugglers and blackmarketeers who made money out of the misery of millions of unfed people.³⁷

About a hundred pages or so of the novel deals with the complication of the urban life during the war, famine and the communal riot. During famine refugees fluxed to Calcutta; lands were left uncultivated due to war, smuggling of food and essential things went on rampant, peasant girls were taken forcefully to entertain the soldiers.³⁸ In the midst of famine and war-time dislocation communalism reached to the highest peak. As the war ended in 1945, Hindu hatred of the Muslims increased.³⁹

36. **Ibid.** pp. 342-343. These figures are given in Gautam Chatterjee (ed.) **Itihas Anushandhan** (Historical Research), Vol. III, Calcutta, 1988. p.469. This book contains papers read at the Fourth Annual Conference of the West Bengal Itihas Sangsad.

37. **Sangsaptak**, pp.255-256.

38. **Ibid.** pp.259-269.

39. **Ibid.** pp.292-295.

When the Second World War started in 1939, Congress government in the provinces resigned but the Muslim League ministry continued to govern in Bengal. The British government was unhappy with the Congress leaders because they had declined to support the British war effort. Many Congress leaders and activists were in prison during the "Quit India" movement in 1942.⁴⁰ The Hindus remained in a low profile and according to the author apparently non-communal during the war but as the war ended they began to express their hatred of the Muslims.⁴¹ They blamed the Muslims for increase of communalism in the province and for the communal riot in 1946. The author believes that the Hindus were also to be blamed equally for the riot and the Great Calcutta killing in August, 1946.⁴² The novel depicts the orgy of killing, looting and burning that went on in Calcutta city on 16 and 17 August 1946.⁴³ The Hindus raised "**Bande Mataram**" slogan and

40. Leonard A. Gordon, **Bengal : The Nationalist Movement 1876-1940**. New Delhi, 1st. ed. 1974. rpt. 1979. p.289.

41 **Sangsaptak**, pp.295-298.

42. **Ibid.** pp. 308-309, Also, see Leonard A. Gordon, **op. cit.** pp.291,369 n.116.

43. **Sangsaptak**, pp.308-309, 310-311.

killed the Muslims, burnt and ramshacked houses.⁴⁴ There were however, many Hindus who gave shelter to Muslims during the riot and vice versa. The author raises one crucial question as to the legitimacy of creating a separate nation or partition of India on the basis of religion. The author's secular attitude to politics and tolerance to other religions is revealed in the novel. The characters portrayed in the novel depict the communal atmosphere prevailing in the pre-partition days. There were many among both the communities who were not communal and who felt such bloodshed and massacre were unnecessary.⁴⁵

In the last over hundred and fifty pages of the novel the author gives a glimpse of the Muslim society in the post-partition days. Most significant aspect depicted in the novel is the freedom of women who had begun to take part in music and drama and in social services. They had broken the traditional norm of staying home and had started to go to theatres, clubs and restaurants and mixing freely with men. The author pointed out the negative side of it through the sequence of the story that sudden freedom normally brings disasters and disintegration in society. Freedom attained after tribulation and suffering is more fruitfully used. The complications of the urban life, particularly human relationship which lacked simplicity, honesty, sincerity, love and affection is revealed through the incidents revolving around Malu's life in Dacca. Life in the then East-Pakistan, hopes and aspirations of the Muslim in their newly independent land is depicted here.

44. **Ibid.** p.311.

45. **Ibid.** pp.320-335.

Bengali Muslim youths were getting involved in business and trade and hoping to make wealth by whatever means.⁴⁶ Women were liberated but in spite of educating themselves or taking up professions in most cases they were more interested in enjoying life.⁴⁷ The author wants to make a point that in spite of building the newly independent nation, people were more concerned with getting rich quickly and their attitude getting more self-centered. The author makes this observation through Mr. Rakib's comments in the novel.⁴⁸ Two female characters in the novel are symbolic of two different attitudes to life. Rabu had attained freedom after strict social bindings and much tribulations, while Rehana attained freedom due to relaxed social conditions after the partition. Rabu took up education and gave service to the society by working in volunteer camps during famine and riot while Rehana craved for material things, foreign goods, like cosmetics made in Europe, and enjoying life freely. Attitude of women had changed greatly just as attitude to women had changed within a gap of only two decades. The author believed that independence had brought only superficial changes in the society. Poverty, illiteracy and ignorance remained as before. Life of the common man had not changed. Only middle class benefitted from it. At the end of the novel, Zahed, who once argued in favour of partition was disenchanted and got involved in Communist movement for which he got arrested. Communist party was banned in the new country then.

46. *Ibid.* pp. 362.

47. *Ibid.* pp.359-360.

48. *Ibid.* p.358.

The novel remains as a classic work on the period under **Krishak-Proja** Party and Muslim-League coalition ministry, the passing of the Tenancy Acts, the war years, famine, riot, partition and the post-partition days leading to the year 1951. The next year, 1952 ushered in a new era through the language movement for the Bengalees which led them to realize the mistake of dividing India on religious ground. Linguistic identity then became the basis of their movement for liberation from Pakistan. The author Shaheedullah Kaiser was himself killed by the agents of the Pakistan army when they were defeated in the war of liberation in December, 1971.⁴⁹

49. Shaheedullah Kaiser was taken by the **razakars** who were collaborators of the Pakistan army on the night of December 14, 1971 and killed. See, foreword of the novel, p.2. Also see, **Charitavidhan** (Dictionary of Biography), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1985. pp.245-246 for information on his life.

ABU JAFAR SHAMSUDDIN, PADMA MEGHNA JAMUNA.

Abu Jafar Shamsuddin's autobiographical novel **Padma Meghna Jamuna**, was his **magnum opus**, written in the 1960's and published in 1974. **Padma Meghna Jamuna** spreads over a wide canvass and depicts the hopes and aspirations, the frustrations and contradictions of the rising Muslim middle class in Bengal. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin, at once a realist and a romantic, with the experience of his own life, has highlighted the transformations and developments taking place in the social and political spheres of the Muslim society in Bengal particularly in the 1930's and in the 1940's.¹

Abu Jafar Shamsuddin came in contact with modern liberal and humanist thought through the poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam and his

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1. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin was born in 1911 in a lower middle class Muslim family in the village of Dakhinbagh under Kaliganj upazilla in the district of Gazipur near Dhaka. His father was a **maulvi** and an heir to a decaying semi-feudalistic social and economic condition. **Wahabi** influence fell on his family which led them to give up religious prejudices like arranging feasts at **mazars** and going to **pirs** in order to absolve themselves of sin, to cure diseases or to pray for good harvest. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin learnt Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali at childhood from his father. He passed his **Madrassa** examination in 1925 from his village school and got admitted to class VII at the Dhaka **Madrassa** (the new scheme **Madrassa**, founded in 1874) from where he passed Matriculation in 1928. He studied at Dhaka Intermediate College for about a year and gave up formal education. He fled to Calcutta around 1929, as he admitted later, with the romantic idea of doing something for his motherland by contributing to the nationalist movement. This he said at an interview with the Bangladesh Television, Dhaka taken in 1986 and recast on 27.8.1988.

acquaintances with poet Benazir Ahmed (1903-1983), poet Abdul Qadir (1906-1984), Ashraf Ali Khan (1901-1939) and his contemporary journalists like Abul Kalam Shamsuddin (1897-1978) and Abul Mansur Ahmad (1897-1979). They inspired him to read Darwin, Freud, Ibsen, Bernard Shaw and also Communist literature including works of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Plekhanov, Bukharin and others. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin came of a rural, conservative, lower-middle class Bengali Muslim family and of a semi-feudal background but his intellectual pursuits gradually transformed him into an emancipated and progressive-minded writer. He became inclined to left-wing politics around the late 1930's and it was during this time that he came close to political ideas of the revolutionary leader M. N. Roy. But a contradiction between his willingness to serve the cause of Islam and the Muslim community on the one hand, and the whole of India on the other, existed in him.²

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2. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin admitted this in an interview in September 1985 taken for the Oral History Project, Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He had a revolutionary spirit in him and was inspired in this respect by poet Benazir Ahmed (1903-1983). Benazir Ahmed was involved in extremist movement in the 1920's and in the 1930's. See, Abu Jafar Shamsuddin, **Muslim Shamajer Jharo Pakhl Kabi Benazir Ahmed**, Muktahdara, Dhaka 1988. He was also inspired by Kazi Nazrul Islam's poems particularly, "Kamal Pasha" and "Bidrohi" written around 1920-1921. He worked as a journalist, correspondent, editor and columnist at various times in papers like the **Daily Soltan**, daily **Vanguard**, the weekly **Independent India**, the **Daily Azad**, the **Pakistan Observer**, the weekly **Ittefaq**, the **Eastern Herald**, the **Daily Purbadesh** and the **Daily Sangbad**. Though a journalist he wrote quite a number of novels and also wrote essays on history, politics and society and also did some translation works.

The story of **Padma Meghna Jamuna** starts in the year 1911 (1316 B. S.) and ends with the partition in 1947. The novel covers the whole span of years under my study and is written by an author who lived the period and shared the spirit of the age. Analysis of **Padma Meghna Jamuna** would bring out the dominant political and social ideas, the conflicts and tensions in the Bengali Muslim society, particularly of the newly educated youth, the contradictions existing in them and the transformations taking place in the socio-economic and political spheres. The novel is of 1155 pages and consists of five parts. The first part, **Unmesh** or 'exposition' unfolds the conservativeness of the Muslims in rural Bengal, their economic hardship, lack of education, their extravagance, idleness, lack of foresight, the practice of polygamy and ignorance about hygiene.

In this autobiographical novel, the central character is Mamun, who symbolises the author himself. Mamun observes the negative forces existing in the rural Muslims since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The novel starts with Idris Mia, a **maulvi** who in his fifties was thinking of getting married once again since his first wife failed to bear children. Feudalistic sentiment drove him to remarry in order to have a male heir. Although he belonged to a lower-middle class family he was now able to marry a widow of a comparatively upper class Choudhury family which once prided of its aristocracy. The author depicts the economic distress of the **ashrafs** or the upper class Muslims in Bengal. He writes.

“চৌধুরীর চৌধুরিত্ব আজ আর নেই। জমিদারি বহু আগেই কিছু সদর খাজানার দায়ে কিছু বিক্রিতে হাতছাড়া হয়েছে। আমীর বলতে যা বুঝায় তেমন আমীর ছিলেন তারা। এই আমীরিতেই চৌধুরীরা মজলো। এখন সে শান-শওকতের নাম নিশানাও নেই— যৎসামান্য খাস খামার ভূমি মাত্র সম্বল। অতি কষ্টে সংসার চলে— পেট চলে তো আক্ৰ বাঁচে না, আক্ৰ বাঁচাতে গেলে পেট থাকে খালি।.....”³

3. **Padma Meghna Jamuna**, pp. 14-15.

(There is no prestige of the Chowdhuries any longer. They have already lost their **zamindaris** due to rent defaults. They had been real aristocrats then They lost their wealth due to extravagance. They have now lost all power and prestige. They have little land now and lead a miserable life due to financial hardship.)

Though possessing very little land, Idris Mia decides to sell some of it and gets married for the second time with the only intention of having an heir. Mamun was the eldest son of his second marriage. He is the central character of the novel. The author narrates and analyses events through the observations of Mamun.

Padma Meghna Jamuna is also a historical novel. History serves the perspective of the novel. Khilafat movement, extremist nationalist politics, rise of the Muslim League, the factions in the political parties, the popularity of Marxism among the extremists, the conservative reaction to left-wing politics, famine, communal riots, the conditions in Bengal during the Second World War, and the partition of India and of Bengal in 1947— all these constitute the source materials of the novel. The characters in the novel are symbolic ones of real life individuals. The story of the novel proceeds with reflections of Mamun on events he sees and gets involved in. The novel does not have a tight-knit or a consistent plot or story. It is more a record of events, of feelings, of reactions and analysis of a Bengali Muslim youth on the contemporary events and some political and intellectual personalities. Mamun grows up to manhood amidst social tensions and political turmoils in Bengal in the three decades before the partition in 1947.

Padma Meghna Jamuna exposes the differences of opinion among the political leaders of the Congress, the left-wing Congress, the Muslim League, its right-wing, the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha, the extremist nationalists and the **Krishak Proja Party**, the Communists and the Radical Democrats. Parallel to the political differences existed a social tension between the western-educated Muslim youths and the conservative bastion of the Muslim society in Bengal. One point which is highlighted in the novel is that a sense of futility and frustration among a section of the Muslim youth in Bengal existed because of the lack of any positive or practical programme for social and economic change. As a result, these youths, disillusioned and disenchanted with either the communists or the **Proja** movement, joined the movement for Pakistan, even though at heart they could not accept partition of India or of Bengal. A didactic writer as he himself admitted, Abu Jafar Shamsuddin pointed out the negative aspects of the differences and conflicts, the confusion and self-contradictions existing in the political leaders and intellectuals of the time, which acted as hindrances to any constructive outcome.⁴

In the novel, Mamun got involved with the extremists when he was a teenaged boy and a student of class VIII. Ali Ahmed inspired him to join such a movement. Ali Ahmed in the novel was poet Benazir Ahmed in real life who was involved in extremist nationalist movement in the 1920's and the 1930's and formed his own party. After the successful Bolshevik revolution in 1917 in Russia, the extremists in Bengal got inclined towards Marxism and some began to discuss about the strategy of their movement. Romesh, Ali Ahmed, Abinash talk political polemics.⁵ Their debates expose the differences of opinion prevalent in contemporary left-wing politics. One group believed that both socialist revolution and nationalist movement should run parallel in India. Another group, who can be labelled as the so-called "evolutionist," e.g.

4. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin's interview with Bangladesh Television, recast on 27.8.1988.

5. **Padma Meghna Jamuna**, pp. 207-212.

Abinash in the novel, believed that transformation in a society would take place in its natural course. He said that a few hundred years were nothing when thought of the evolutionary process, and so, the future generations would take the responsibility of a socialist revolution. While Ali Ahmed, representing the third opinion, believed that in India what was practical was achieving independence first and then to fight for establishing socialism. Otherwise the situation would be like "placing the cart in front of the horse".⁶ Abinash tried to establish that their programme was to seize political power, not to bring revolutionary changes in the society. On the other hand, Romesh and Samar supported that both socialist and nationalist movements should run parallel. Ali Ahmed opposed such idea by saying that situations in India were not ripe yet so that two movements could go on simultaneously. Communal conflict, caste differences among Hindus, the varied interests of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the workers and the peasants and such conflicting interests created obstacles to a dual movement. Besides, a self-contradictory and self-conflicting state was also present in the Bengali mind which Romesh pointed out,

"আশ্চর্য এই যে চিন্তায় আমরা গান্ধীবাদী, কর্মে বিপ্লবী।" ⁷

(What is strange is that we are Gandhites in thought but revolutionary in action.)

However, dogmatic Marxists in Bengal believed that one had to believe the historical process Marx had predicted which meant that socialist revolution would come out of a proletarian movement when capitalism reached its highest point in any particular society. Class consciousness would

6. **Ibid.** p. 208.

7. **Ibid.** p. 208.

lead to class conflict in such societies and a proletariat, i. e. the workers in strict Marxian term, would rise up against the capitalists in a highly industrialized society. Such a stage was still a distant phenomenon in India, Ali Ahmed observed.

Mamun, a schoolboy, listened to the above discussions and felt a secret and romantic urge to serve his motherland. He got involved for a brief period in terrorist movement. Although the terrorist movement failed to attract Muslims because of the Hindu religious trappings associated with it, like the song "Bande Mataram" (Anandamath, 1882) and taking vows touching the Gita in front of the goddess Kali, some Muslim youths joined the movement. These Muslim youths formed terrorist parties of their own as Ali Ahmed did in the novel. They worked in liaison with the Hindu terrorist parties but having their own parties meant that they did not have to follow those Hindu rituals while joining the party. With the failure of Surya Sen's Chittagong armoury raid in 1930, the terrorists had a setback and with the resulting repression of the British with the onset of the war, the terrorist movement came to a halt. Most of the extremists both inside and outside prison, got inclined to Communism in the late 1930's though the party was banned in India. They began to get indoctrinated from writings of Marx, Kautsky, Proudhon, Bukharin, Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and M.N.Roy and they began to search the right way for a socialist revolution in India.

In the late 1920's and the early 1930's some intellectual youths and workers of the labour front of the Peasants' Workers' Party began to organize dockworkers, sailors, jute-mill labours, sweepers and cleaners to follow Lenin's strategy to bypass the capitalist phase in India. They began to organize strikes by the dock labourers in the ports of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. But opposition came to this from one group of the left-wing elements who disagreed on the point of strikes and lockouts. They believed in collective bargaining by the workers. By the mid-1930's the Comintern had advised the Indian Communists to act within the Congress to extend communist influence among the working class and at the same time to play a

vanguard role within the national movement. The novel exposes the disagreements and conflicts in the left-wing leadership in Bengal on the question as to whether to work within the Congress or not. The Communists viewed the particular socio-economic and political problems in Bengal in the light of theories and interpretations of western Marxist theoreticians. The result, as Abu Jafar Shamsuddin commented in his novel that the Communist Party of India was "a bundle of contradiction."⁸

In the 1940's M.N.Roy supported the demand for Pakistan on the ground of self-determination of any ethnic or religious community. This surprised the communists in India and although Roy was criticised of his decision to support the creation of Pakistan, both the Hindu and Muslim communists supported the movement around 1941-1942 in accordance to Roy's views on self-determination which incidentally was also the view of Lenin. (Lenin's theses written between January and February 1916 "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination".) Roy's support for the British war effort on the ground that Britain was fighting against fascism further surprised those who believed that pressure should be put on the British government while it was engaged in war and make its position difficult in India. The Indian National Congress refused to co-operate with the British Government in its war effort unless it agreed to grant independence first. Roy opposed Gandhi's "Quit India" movement, 1942-

৪. "বান্ডল অব কন্ট্রাডিকশন ভারতের তথাকথিত কম্যুনিষ্ট পার্টি।"

(The so-called Indian Communist Party is a bundle of contradictions.)

Ibid. p. 801.

1943. The differences between Gandhi and Roy triggered much theoretical discussions among the left-wing in Bengal. The Royists criticised the Congress of its strategies of passive resistance and non-co-operation and believed that Congress under Gandhi could never become revolutionary.

Besides, the peasants, workers and trade unions were still mostly under Congress leadership and were not yet conscious of class conflict. But by going against the mainstream of the nationalist movement Roy was alienated. The Communist Party of India had also supported the British in their war effort after Soviet Union got involved in the war. Congress followers criticised the Communists severely.⁹

Rising communalism in the 1930's and the 1940's is also depicted in the novel. Frequent riots in Dhaka and Calcutta disenchanted many of the hope for communal harmony. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League came to believe that though Indians were alike in colour and lived in the same geographical territory they were different in culture, customs, religion and language and therefore, they could never make one nation. Even though the educated youths both Muslims and Hindus were acquainted with modern western liberal ideas, most of them were not free from medieval religious prejudices and superstitions. Both the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League openly preached communal hatred and it was the purpose of the right-wing campaign to,

"হিন্দুকে অধিকতর হিন্দু করা এবং মুসলমানকে অধিকতর মুসলমান করার পথ নির্ধারণ।"¹⁰

(To determine that the Hindus became more Hindu and the Muslims more Muslim.)

9. **Ibid.** pp. 800-801.

10. **Ibid.** p. 424.

Patriotism and nationalism in India were greatly influenced by religious sentiment of the people. In the years before partition communalism took a fierce shape. The novel ends with the depiction of the horror, deaths, sufferings and dislocations due to communal riots and partition.¹¹

A significant trend of thought among Bengali Muslims was the idea of Islamic Socialism enunciated in the early 1940's by Abul Hashim (1905-1974), leader of one faction of the Muslim League. Abul Hashim believed that India was never one country and he demanded self-determination of Bengal from imperial India. He was non-communal and believed in joint electorate. Most of his followers were influenced by socialism. With his centre of activity in Calcutta he was able to make an impact although for a brief period, on a small section of Muslim youths with his idea of Islamic Socialism or "**Rabbaniyat**" as he termed it.

".....রব্বানিয়াত হচ্ছে আপনারা যাকে সোসিয়েলিজম বলেন তাই— দুনিয়াকে আল্লাহর রাজ্যে পরিণত করা।"¹²

(".....**Rabbaniyat** means socialism — to make the world a kingdom of God.")

They spent much time on metaphysical discussion rather than on organizational work. There was much opposition to this idea of Islamic Socialism from the right-wing Muslim League led by Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan (1868-1968). Maulana Akram Khan was a conservative Muslim and disliked any talk of communism. He supported the demand for Pakistan and guarded against any attempt of infusing the idea of communism into the

11. **Ibid.** pp. 1076-1110.

12. **Ibid.** pp. 951-959.

minds of the Muslim youth. Maulana Akbar Khan in the novel is the leader of the right-wing reactionary group. He is the epitome of the conservative section of the Muslim community in Bengal. His character in the novel is portrayed on the real-life character of Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan, a Congressman in his early life, who later joined the Muslim League in the 1930's. He edited and published the weekly **Ahle-Sunnat** as mentioned in the novel. In real life he wrote in the monthly **Al-Eslam** and in the weekly **Ah̄le-Hadith** which acted as mouthpiece for the orthodox sect of **Ah̄le-Hadith**. Maulana Akram Khan also brought out the **Mohammadi** which served to uphold the opinions and ideas of the conservative Muslims in Bengal. He also opposed the movement led by Fazlul Huq's **Krishak Proja Party** and the demands made by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (1880-1976) for the abolition of the **zamindari** in Bengal. Without analysis how far or to what extent the **krishak Proja Party** programme or Maulana Bhashani's campaign were to introduce socialism, Maulana Akbar Khan in the novel accuses Fazlul Huq and Bhashani that,

"দেশটাকে কমিউনিষ্ট না করে ছাড়বেন না ওরা।"¹³

(Their attempt is to make the country a Communist one.)

He used his paper, the **Mohammadi** for counter propaganda against them. In 1936, Maulana Akram Khan brought out another paper, the **Daily Azad** for the purpose of campaigning for the Muslim League on the eve of the election next year.

Padma Meghna Jamuna also exposes the political moves taken by Fazlul Huq (1873-1962). The peasants of Bengal had high hopes on him when he introduced the tenancy reform acts during his ministry in the years

13. **Ibid.** p. 528.

between 1937 and 1941 but the left-wing political leaders criticized him as a 'betrayed' when he joined the Muslim League in 1937. In page 1038 of the novel it is commented that,

" যুগসঙ্কীর্ণে তিনি জাতির সর্বনাশ করছেন।....."

(He is ruining the country at this critical stage.....)

The left-wing of the **Krishak Proja Party** who even went as far as to demand for "land to the tillers of the soil" were most critical of Fazlul Huq.

H.S. Suhrawardy (1892-1963) was also not spared of criticisms. His political role in the 1930's was mostly misinterpreted. He worked among the trade unions, dockers and mill workers in Calcutta. The left-wing at the beginning thought that Suhrawardy was working for them and viewed his attempts half-hearted but Suhrawardy was never inclined to left-wing politics. He attempted to build Muslim League support among the workers. The Congress accused him of introducing communalism among the workers. In the 1940's the political scene in Bengal was as factional as ever. The Muslim League was divided into three groups. Maulana Akram Khan and Sir Nazimuddin (1894-1964) formed the right-wing of the party and acted as the Muslim counterpart to the Hindu Mahasabha. Suhrawardy worked for Muslim League but his base was among the trade unions and the third group was led by Abul Hashim who talked of Islamic socialism but both he and Suhrawardy demanded an independent United Bengal. The Indian National Congress attempted to keep the workers and trade unions free from communist influence. The Royists had joined the movement for Pakistan. The right-wing of the Muslim League feared that a powerful communist enclave would be a threat to their existence in the newly created Pakistan, and therefore, they made strong anti-communist propaganda. The younger generation of the Muslims were puzzled at these conflicts between leaders

who, in fact, lacked any definite programme. They had joined the Pakistan movement because that was the only goal they had in front of them. The rising Muslim middle class, dissatisfied with their own inferiority compared to the Hindu community on the one hand, and the rising Hindu communalism on the other, supported the Pakistan movement. Pakistan was for them a means to an end. But they did not know what to do when Pakistan would come into being. They did not have any definite economic or social programme. Mamun, who represents Abu Jafar Shamsuddin in the novel, was not happy about partition because of the negative aspect of it and that there was no constructive programme for Pakistan.

Padma Meghna Jamuna also depicts the progressive movement that took place in the Bengali Muslim society in the 1920's and the 1930's. A group of educated Muslim youths like Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894-1970), Abul Husain (1897-1938), Abdul Qadir (1906-1984) and others led the movement for the "emancipation of the intellect" in Dhaka in the 1920's which stood against all sorts of religious orthodoxy, social conservativeness and communalism. They also supported female education and social equality. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin made reflections in his novel on how the conservative section of the Bengali Muslim community reacted to this. He is critical of their aggressive attitude and of the physical assaults made on them and on the other Muslim youths who carried on this progressive trend.¹⁴

14. **Ibid.** pp. 424-494.

In the third part "Mohanogor" (The City) Mamun comes to Calcutta where the newly educated youths, most of them coming from lower middle class families from the villages, form their own political and social views. Ali Ahmed, Abdul Rahman, Abdul Gafur, Mamun, Mansur are some of these youths whose ideas represent the confusion and contradictions of the time. They had read Akbar, Ram Mohan Roy, M.N. Roy, Gandhi, Darwin, Freud, D.H.Lawrence, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Rousseau, Voltaire, Thomas More, Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw and Sartre besides others. They regarded Thomas More's idea of Utopia as useless and interpreted male and female relationship on the idea expressed in Shaw's **Man and Superman** that women are 'boa constrictors'. In the novel we come across two Muslim girls, Mariam and Mumtaz who move freely in the society. They act as symbols of the liberated Muslim women in the late 1930's and in the 1940's. These youths in the novel went on discussing endlessly on Darwins' theory of evolution, the social evolutionary theory, Freud's psychoanalysis. They were determined to reject the moral values and life style of their parents. They were determined to shock the conservative section of the community. They disregarded current beliefs in religion or morality. They felt that their society needed changes, but they did not know how to bring those changes. They were not actually groping in the dark ; they were not sure of the right means to bring changes in their society. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin highlighted this point in the novel.

These educated Muslim youths in the novel, coming of a rural background, faced tough competition with the already established Hindu youths who were comparatively highly educated and more advantageously placed in society. After the depression in the 1930's, high price rise and acute unemployment further worsened communal relation. These youths were disillusioned and frustrated. The contradictions present in the politicians of the time in Bengal and the religious resurgence of the 1930's and the 1940's left little scope for them to come out of their confusions and frustrations. By the 1940's most of them got involved in communal politics, some turned to business during the war and even some dedicated communists, like Ali

Ahmed in the novel, got involved in illegal trade during this time. Most Muslim youths joined the Muslim League with the hope that a separate homeland for the Muslims would ensure their interests. Hindu-Muslim conflict took most aggressive shape and it seemed as though the dominant trend of the time was communalism. To Abu Jafar Shamsuddin communalism was a negative force, an outcome of the inconsistency and indecisiveness of the political leaders of the time in Bengal.

(All translations have been done by me from original Bengali.)

GOUR KISHORE GHOSE. PREM NEI.

Prem Nei is a novel based on the rural life of the Muslims in Bengal in the mid-1930's. Gour Kishore Ghose has depicted the rural Muslim society in Bengal with an exceptional insight even though he does not belong to the Muslim community and this makes the novel more significant. He has portrayed the developments and transformations taking place in Muslim society in rural Bengal in the years between 1935 and 1937.¹

The dominant phenomenon in Bengal in the years from mid-1930's onwards till the partition in 1947 was the emergence of bitter communal relation between the Muslims and the Hindus. The novel portrays the years when political changes and social developments were taking such shapes as to lead to an imminent clash between the two communities. The author does not make mere reflections and comments on the Muslim society as an observer from outside. Rather it seems as though he went deep into the fabrics of the Muslim community in rural Bengal and portrayed the tensions and transformations in the community as it was from within. He had made an intensive study of the social taboos, religious conservativeness, communal relation and the existing economic, political and religious tensions as reflected in journals and newspapers of the time, particularly, the **Mohammadi** and also made use of personal contacts and observations. **Prem Nei** depicts the existing tension between religious and social conservativeness and progressive ideas, love and hate between individuals, their sufferings and conflicts, their religious beliefs and political affinity. The story of the novel is based on the lower middle-class life in rural East Bengal.

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1. A novel of 342 pages, **Prem Nei** was written around 1977–1978 and was first published in 1981 by Ananda Publishers, Calcutta. **Prem Nei** is the second part of the epic trilogy **Desh-Mati-Manush** by Gour Kishore Ghose.

The author has chosen a period of only three years, 1935 to 1937 as the setting for his novel because these can be considered the years of watershed in the history of the Muslim community in Bengal. The most significant political event during this time was the Government of India Act of 1935 which was to come into force in 1937. The Act had replaced dyarchy by provincial autonomy and had increased the electorate from 6¹/₂ million to about 30 million. In Bengal, the extension of the franchise allowed a breakthrough for the Muslim League. Bengal, particularly, East Bengal, being a Muslim majority region, the extension of franchise and the provisions of weightage and reservation of seats for the Muslims heightened communal tension. As a majority community in Eastern Bengal, the Muslims began to consider these electoral concessions as their right.² Whereas, the Hindu community, comparatively far advanced in education and advantageously placed in jobs and professions felt that it was their right to dominate the socio-economic and political life in Bengal. In the rural areas of the province, relation between landlord and peasant worsened because Muslims in this region being mostly peasants and the Hindus being landlords.

The political activities of the Muslim League and the **Krishak Proja Party** during these years dominated the rural life in Bengal. The **Krishak Proja Party**, formed in 1936 became popular in the villages with its slogan "land to the tillers". The demand for abolition of the **zamindari** introduced clashes between the peasants and the landlords. With the formation of the **Krishak Proja Party** Fazlul Huq emerged as the most popular leader of the

2. Muslim population in Bengal in the 1930's was 33 million. According to the Census Report of 1931 Muslim population in Bengal was about 28 million See, **Census of India, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part 1**. Calcutta, 1933. p. 388. Also see, Kamruddin Ahmad, **A Socio-political History of Bengal**, Dhaka, 4th. ed. 1975. p.55.

Muslim masses. The Muslim League had not been popular to the masses as yet. The party itself had no stronghold in Bengal. Jinnah came to Calcutta by the end of 1936 and also visited Dhaka in 1937. The Provincial elections were to be held in February 1937. Muslim League leaders in Bengal, like H. S. Suhrawardy, Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan and others were engaged in campaigning all over Bengal. The story of the novel is set on this political background.

The novel starts with a bathing scene on the river bank. Two teen-aged girls, Togor and Bilkis, a Hindu and a Muslim respectively, chat on how to please their husbands.³ Bilkis, as a Muslim, has learnt from her grandmother and from **maulvi** Khaleq, that if she displeased her husband in any way she was sure to be burnt in hell-fire. Muslim women were taught to bear ungrudgingly their husband's torture on them. Muslim men are allowed by religion to keep four wives and their wives were taught to bear with their husband's whims patiently. Women in the Muslim society had no education at all, except that they were taught to learn Arabic alphabets and the **Quran** by heart without learning its meaning. They were in strict **purdah** and were never allowed to come out of the four walls of their houses. As a result, they were ignorant and helpless. By the 1930's, however, this situation was beginning to change. The newly educated Muslim youths who had been to towns for the purpose of study or employment encouraged their wives and sisters to learn Bengali and English. Those were the first generation of Muslim youths in Bengal who had received English education and had started taking up jobs in government offices and also careers as teachers and lawyers. They were enlightened through urban culture and through liberal ideas from

3. **Prem Nei**, P.1. In rural Bengal communal relation was harmonious even in the 1930's. **The Census of India, 1931. Vol. 1, Ibid.** p. 382 reports how both the communities kept a kind of peaceful co-existence.

European education. They began to give up the prejudices of their parents regarding religion and female education. Shafiqul, alias Fatik in the novel is the epitome of such a youth. He was married to Bilkis, alias Chobi, the daughter of a **nikiri** or a fish-seller, Ghulam Abbas, who later performed **hajj** or pilgrimage to Mecca and climbed the social ladder. Ghulam Abbas **hajji**, as he came to be called, after he had performed **hajj**, aimed at giving his daughter, Bilkis in marriage to Shafiqul, a bright youth and the son of an agriculturist, in order to raise his social status further. In the countryside the distinction between the **ashrafs** and the **atraps** was very rigid. The **ashrafs** were the Muslims of upper class who considered themselves as direct heir to their Arabian, Turkish or Iranian ancestors and the **atraps** were considered as lower class Muslims because they were originally converted to Islam from Hinduism and Buddhism. There was also stratification among the **ashrafs** and the **atraps**. The so-called **ashrafs** kept themselves aloof from the local converts, i.e. the **atraps** and looked down upon them as natives. Mobility from **atrap** to **ashraf** was rare but by the early twentieth century certain amount of mobility could be noticed within the lower strata of the society. Among the **atraps**, the agriculturists were considered respectable and they treated the **nikiris** with much contempt.⁴ In the novel the reflection of such social mobility among the lower groups of **atraps** can be noticed in the marriage of Bilkis and Shafiqul.

Shafiqul was the son of an impoverished peasant, Sajjad. Having no hope to earn his living from land, Shafiqul was determined to take up a professional career. He started as a school teacher and later studied Law in Calcutta. English education no longer remained a taboo to the Bengali Muslim youths. From 1920's onwards they had begun to shake-off the prejudice of their older generation regarding English education and accepting

4. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*, Delhi, Oxford, New York, 2nd. ed. 1988, pp.7, 18.

jobs in government offices or choosing various professions in the urban centres. The conservatives in the Bengali Muslim community were greatly alarmed at this. The author shows how an educated middle class was emerging in the Muslim community in Bengal and how those educated youths were experiencing a tortuous pull between their future urban-based life and their past ties with land. They felt the pangs of tearing off their roots from land for ever. Fatik i.e. Shafiqul who had recently completed his Bachelor of Law and would soon practice as a lawyer, noticed his ailing father sleeping on a torn mat and his frail mother husking paddy and became conscious of how his relation with his parents and with the rural life was getting severed.

“ফটিক বুঝতে পারল তার সঙ্গে তার পরিবারের নাড়ির বাঁধনটা ছিঁড়ে গিয়েছে। কিন্তু এই আবিষ্কারে সে অস্বস্তিবোধ করতে লাগল। সে কেমন বিপন্ন হয়ে পড়ল। তার বাপ তার মা তার আত্মীয় কুটুম, তার সমাজ থেকে কোন্ একটা অদৃশ্য শক্তি যেন তাকে টেনে নিয়ে চলেছে। সে যেন ছইল-ছিপে গলা-আটকে-যাওয়া একটা মাছ, সুতোর টানে ধীরে ধীরে সে সরে যাচ্ছে তাদের কাছ থেকে, যাদের সঙ্গে তার রক্তের সম্পর্ক।
কোথায় তবে যাচ্ছে সে? ফটিক চোখ বুঁজে দেখতে চেষ্টা করল। কিন্তু সে তটভূমির কোনো ছবিই তার চোখে ভাসল না।”⁵

(Fatik discovered that the roots with his family had broken off. But, he began to feel uncomfortable at this realization. He felt disillusioned as well. He had been pulled out of the relationship with his close associates, his mother, his relatives and in-laws by an invisible pull. He felt his throat hooked to a fish-angle, *being slowly pulled by the thread from those he knew so close and with whom he had blood connection.

But, what could he do ? Fatik began to wonder. He could find no way out.)

5. Prem Nei, p. 65. (* Fish-angling is a very common imagery of rural Bengal. Translation here is done literally from the original Bengali.)

These newly educated Muslim youths in Bengal felt the pangs of separation for another reason besides mere sentiment and that was the uncertainty about their own future. In Fatik's case, he realised how tough it would be for him as a Muslim and also as a newcomer in legal profession, to make a place among the firmly established Hindu lawyers in the courts of Calcutta.

The economic condition of the peasants in the 1930's was deplorable. The effect of the world depression of 1930-31 fell on the economy of Bengal too, particularly in the field of agricultural products. The price of raw materials, especially food grains fell in the world market. The peasants in Bengal suffered the most. The peasants in north and east Bengal grew jute. Trade in jute was directed exclusively for export market and therefore, controlled by the British-owned manufacturing houses in Calcutta. The price of raw jute depended upon the demand in world market. After the slump in the price of jute in the early 1930's, the peasants got such small amount for their jute that they stopped selling it with the hope that they would be able to sell in future with higher returns. They even stopped cultivating jute. The price of paddy was also too low. Sajjad, father of Shafiqul says with bitter anger and frustration,

“তিন বছর ধরে ধান হচ্ছে না, কিন্তু আমরা চাষারা যার যেটুকু হয়েছে সেটুকু হাতে নিয়ে গিয়ে শুনি ধানের মন বার আনা চোদ্দ আনা, দিবা তো দ্যাও নাহলি পথ দ্যাখ। ব্যাপারীগের কথাবাত্তার এই হ'ল ধরন।”⁶

(There has been no cultivation of rice for three years, but the peasants take to the market whatever they produce. There the middlemen offer such little price like twelve **annas** or fourteen **annas** a maund. That is a very low price but the middlemen would not even increase the price a little. Either you have to sell the **crops** to them or come back without selling.)

6. Prem Nei, p. 75.

In the same page and on the same context, Sajjad says,

“কুষ্ঠা ! দ্যাখ গত বছরের কুষ্ঠা এখনও গলায় বোলছে । কুষ্ঠার কথা আর কোয়ে না । গেল বছর চামের খরচই পড়িছিল দু'টাকা । সেখিনে মোকামের দর ছিল পাঁচ সিকে দেড় টাকা মন । সব কুষ্ঠা বাড়ি আনে ছাওয়ালের ঘরে ভ'রে রাখিছি । ইবার হয় ঐ কুষ্ঠা খাতি হবে আর না হয় পাকায় গলায় দিয়ে ঘরের আড়ায় বুলি পড়তি হবে ।”⁷

(Jute! look last years jute is still stacked unsold. Don't talk of jute. Last year it cost two takas per maund for cultivation. But the market price was one taka five anna or one and half taka per maund. So I have stacked all jute in my son's room. Either we have to eat this jute or make those into rope and strangle ourselves.)

The urban traders and money lenders also stopped financing the cultivators of jute after the depression of 1930-32. The jute manufacturers also reduced the number of intermediaries engaged in the supply of raw jute after the slump as finished goods remained unsold because of less imports from outside.⁸

The other phenomenon clearly exposed in the novel is the exploitation of the poor peasants by the non-Bengali, i.e. the Marwari moneylenders. They were the external exploiting forces who lend money to the peasants at high interest and also bought crops and jute at the lowest price possible. Tension between the peasants and the Marwaris was increasing in rural Bengal. The peasants used abusive term like **Mero** as a vent to their anger against the Marwaris.⁹

7. **Ibid.** p. 75.

8. Partha Chatterjee, **Bengal 1920-1947, Vol. 1. The Land Question**, Calcutta, 1984. p. 250.

9. **Prem Nei**, p. 137. Also see, Partha Chatterjee, **Ibid.** pp. 129, 154..

Not only the Marwaris, the Bengali Hindu moneylenders, e.g. the Sahas took high interest from the poor peasants who borrowed money from them. The condition of the peasants was precarious. Besides lack of irrigation, low productivity of land, high interest rates for loans, the peasants had their ignorance and extravagance to add to their miseries. They often spent their borrowed money for marriage and religious ceremonies. They would not think of doing trade even on a small scale. They were poor, helpless and dependent. Whereas the Hindu community in the rural areas were comparatively in a better economic position. They opened stationary and retail shops and traded in iron, tin, kerosene and clothes and similar such commodities which they would bring from towns and sell those to the villagers.¹⁰ From the 1920's onwards average 300 pieces of property of the Muslims got sold everyday in auction. No Muslim was able to buy those. Their lands were sold in auction because of their increasing debts to the moneylenders. For over a century the Muslim peasants in Bengal lost more than 10 thousand small and large **zamindaris**, 50 thousand **taluks**, 3 lakh 15 thousand **jotes**, 53 thousand **lakheraj** and **jaigir** properties besides a cash of over 6,000 million taka to the Hindu and Marwari merchants and moneylenders.¹¹ Unless this situation could be checked the whole Muslim peasant community in Bengal would turn to porters, clerks, servants and labours because they would neither have means to live on land nor have the required education to do better jobs than those. This was how the peasants were being made conscious by the **Krishak Proja Samities** that they were being exploited and that they must work hard, remove their ignorance and at the same time stand up against exploitation by landlords, **jotdars** and moneylenders. In the novel, Mualvi Abu Taleb preaches to the peasants on behalf of the **Krishak Proja Party** that the peasants and debtors of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities should

10. Pages 166-182 of the novel give an estimate of the loss of property of the Muslims.

11. **Prem Nei**, p. 182.

stand up unitedly against the oppression and exploitation of the landlords and **mahajans**. The **Proja Samities** had made an impact on the peasants of Bengal from the late 1920's (formed in 1929) and the **Proja** movement became predominantly an East Bengal movement because the region consisted of an overwhelmingly large Muslim peasantry. The Muslim population of some of the districts of East Bengal can be found from the Census of India, 1931 that Dacca had 66.81%, Mymenshingh had 76.53%, Faridpur 63.76%, Pabna 76.89%, Bogra 83.33%, Jessore 61.88%, Khulna 49.45% of the total population of the districts respectively.¹² Although the **Proja Samities** and later the **Krishak Proja Party** (as the **Proja Samities** came to be called from 1936) attempted to form an united movement against the **zamindars** their movement became popular only among the Muslim peasants in East Bengal. The Hindu leaders, most of whom were themselves **zamindars** and wealthy landholders (**jotdars**) were reluctant to do anything for the tenants and peasants. The 1928 Amendment of the Tenancy Act had legalised for the first time sale and transfer of **rayoti** occupancy holdings but with a stipulation of a 20% landlord's fee (i.e. 20% of the sale price to be given to the landlord) and the landlord's right to pre-emption. This had widespread effect of putting a temporary halt to the sales because the landlord's fee had reduced the value of a holding and a **raiyat** had to sell a larger portion of his land in order to obtain a certain sum of money. But, this phenomenon could be noticed only in the northern and eastern districts of Bengal where a second crop, i.e. jute was available to meet the peasant's need for cash¹³. However, sale or transfer of **rayati** occupancy did not actually

12. See, **The Census of India, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part-1**, Calcutta. 1933. pp. 388-389. Also see, Partha Chatterjee, **Op. Cit.** p. 127. It needs to be mentioned here that the figures in the **Census Report, 1931** and those in the book are different. It seems that the author has presumably counted proportion of the rate of growth of population for the next few years.

13. Partha Chatterjee. **Ibid.** p. 154.

stop because the distressed peasants needed cash and, therefore, they mortgaged their land in order to evade the 20% landlord's fee. According to a study in 1935 there were 1,60,341 sales and 3,57,297 mortgages; in 1936 there were 1,72,956 sales and 3,52,469 mortgages; and in 1937 there were 1,64,819 sales and 3,02,529 mortgages of occupancy holdings in Bengal.¹⁴ During the Muslim League and **Proja** Coalition ministry with Fazlul Huq the Prime Minister, the amendment of the Tenancy Act was passed in 1938 which removed all restrictions, i.e. transfer fee and the right of pre-emption on the transfer of occupancy holdings. Other pro-peasant bills were passed like the Bengal Agricultural Tenants Act, Bengal Agricultural Debtors Act, the Money Lenders Act, etc.

The **Proja** movement in rural Bengal became dominated practically by the Muslims but actually it was not meant to be a communal movement. Abu Taleb, who campaigned for the **Proja** movement stressed in his speeches that the party was against the interests of the **zamindars** and exploiters, not against Christians or Hindus. But, the fact, was, the **Proja** movement ultimately turned to a Muslim movement. The Hindu **zamindars** and **jotdars** alienated the Hindu peasants from the **Proja** movement by injecting into their minds the fear of being forced to get converted.

“চাচা তুমাদের কামকাজের মধ্য মুসলমান মুসলমান ভাবটা বড় বেশী আসে পড়তিছে। এতে অন্য যারা আছে, আর তুমাদের মতই মহাজন জমিদারের অত্যাচার খতম কত্তি চায়, তাগের কিন্তু দূরি সরিয়ে দিবা। কথাডা হচ্ছে প্রজা

14. **Ibid.** p. 143. Also see, Binay Bhusan Chaudhuri's figures given in his article, "The process of Depeasantization in Bengal and Bihar, 1885-1947" published in the **Indian Historical Review** 2,1. (July, 1975).

আন্দোলন। আমাদের এরই উপর জোর দিয়া ভালো। হতি পারে প্রজাগের মধ্য,
চাষীগের মধ্য, খাতকগের মধ্য মুসলমানের সংখ্যা বেশী। তাহলিউ ইডা প্রজা
আন্দোলন।¹⁵

(Uncle, it seems there is too much Islamic sentiment in your **proja** movement. There are others as well in the movement, who too want relief from the oppressions of the **mahajans** and **zamindars** but you will lose their support by your excessive Islamic feeling. This is a **proja** movement. We have to give importance to this fact. Might be that Muslims are a majority among the **projas**, **peasants** and the debtors but we have to remember that it is essentially a **proja** movement).

In page 218 Sajjad observed, that the Islamic modes of greetings and the use of religious symbols at such gatherings led the Hindu leaders to misguide the ignorant Hindu peasants which made a united **Proja** movement impossible. The author goes deep into the analysis of why the **Krishak-Proja** movement, impregnated with a great possibility of a socio-economic change in Bengal ended in failure. One of the reasons of its failure, Gour Kishore Ghose mentions through the conversation that had taken place between Bashir, Abu Taleb, Goya and Sajjad in page 218 of the novel, is that the enormous number of estate managers, rent collectors and clerks engaged in the **zamindari** estates were Hindus and they united against the **Proja** movement. Abu Taleb also pointed out the disinterestedness of the Hindu nationalist leaders regarding the problems of the peasants. The author has

15. **Prem Nei**, pp. 217-218. This is a literal translation from the original Bengali.

pointed out the limitations of the Hindu nationalist leaders both extremists and the moderates and also the Congress nationalists. None of them came forward to protect the interests of the peasants.¹⁶

The other political movement that made the life of the urban Muslim youths in Bengal turbulent in the years around 1936-37 was the rise of the Muslim League. Jinnah had visited Calcutta and Dhaka in 1936 and in 1937 and had infused new life into the Muslim League Party by giving speeches of inspiration to youths and the non-Bengali business community in Bengal. The Government of India Act of 1935 which had extended the franchise and provided safeguards and weightage in electoral seats for the Muslims, acted as a breakthrough for the Muslim League. After the 1937 election results and the formation of the League-**Proja** coalition, mass mobilization for the separatist movement started in Bengal. Tough competition with the Hindus for jobs in government offices and in other careers led the rising Muslim middle class to join the separatist movement. But, not all Muslim youths were swayed away in this trend as yet. In the conversation between Yakub, the cousin of Bilkis and Shafiqul, husband of Bilkis brings out the difference of opinion among Muslim youths regarding the emerging separatist movement led by the Muslim League from the late 1930's. Yakub, educated in Dhaka in Eastern Bengal, felt enthusiastic about the new wave of Muslim nationalism. He was aware that the Muslims were a majority in Dhaka and, therefore, he felt it was their democratic right to get more privileges. He stressed that the University of Dhaka should be a monopoly for the Muslim students in Bengal just as the Calcutta University was for the Hindu students. To Yakub, Calcutta and Dhaka seemed poles apart; Calcutta being a Hindu-majority and Dhaka being a Muslim-majority region. Yakub praised Kemal Ataturk for his reforms in Turkey and regarded him a source of inspiration for the Muslim

16. Prem Nei, p.218.

youths in Bengal. Kazi Nazrul Islam's (1899-1976) poems like "Kemal Pasha", "Anwar", "Shatt-il-Arab", "Qurbani" (all composed around 1920-21) inspired the Bengali Muslim youths by evoking in them the lost glory of the Muslims. Shafiqul, however, does not support the idea of Muslim separatist movement. He felt that such a movement had a negative aspect contributing to communal tension. Yakub, enthusiastic about the idea of Muslim nationalism tells Shafiqul,

“ঢাকায় গেলি বোঝতেন, বাংলার মুসলমান কত দ্রুত জাগছে। ঢাকা তাই আমার খুব ভালো লাগে।” 17

(If you were in Dacca, you would have known how fast the Muslims are progressing. That's why I like Dacca.)

A few lines above on the same page, Yakub had said,

“ঢাকা আমাদের চোখ খুলে দেছে। ঢাকা ইউনিভারসিটির হিন্দুরা মক্কা ইউনিভারসিটিই কন আর ফক্কা ইউনিভারসিটিই কন এই ঢাকাই বাংলার মুসলমানের চোখ ফুটোবে, ফুটোচ্ছে, তারে জাগাবে, জাগাচ্ছেও।.....”18

(Dacca has made us conscious about our community. Although the Hindus call it a Mecca University or a fake University this Dacca University will make the Muslim community conscious of their demands.)

Yakub called this the "spirit of Dhaka" and he was determined that

17. Prem Nei, pp. 205-206.

18. Ibid. pp. 205-206.

“মুসলিম মেজরিটি বাংলা থেকে হিন্দু আধিপত্য হটাতেই হবে। বাই হুক্ অর বাই ক্রুক।”¹⁹

(By whatever means Hindu domination must be removed from the Muslim majority Bengal.)

Shafiqul could not agree with Yakub on this matter. In the novel Shafiqul represents the trend of Bengali Muslim nationalism as opposed to Yakub's Muslim separatism. Shafiqul said that Calcutta was his "Alma Mater".²⁰ He was brought up in a village where peasants of both the communities lived side by side in harmony. To him communalism was a new wave which he sensed harmful. He felt surprised that Yakub, even though educated, could not come out of religious prejudices. The Bengali youths who believed in Muslim nationalism abused Nazrul Islam of his secular writings. To them secularism was a synonym for love of Hinduism. Their attitude, at times, was almost chauvinistic. Their Hindu counterpart, the Hindu Mahasabha had the same attitude towards the Muslims. In this respect Gour Kishore Ghose depicted what the progressive and secular intellectuals of the time thought about communal relation in Bengal. Motahar Hossain Chowdhury (1903-1956), one of the contemporary Muslim writers, in a speech to the students of Carmichael College in Calcutta said in the early 1930's that in Bengal the Muslims were heirs to ancient Hindu culture since most Muslims were originally converted from Hinduism. The Hindus did not inherit Muslim culture. So, he said, it was natural to expect that the Muslims should take the initiative to intermingle the two cultures. Muslims should not expect the Hindus to come forward to make harmony with the Muslims. Rather, the

19. **Ibid.** p. 205.

20. **Ibid.** p. 205.

Muslims, as inheritors of their culture, should make the first move to establish harmonious relation between the two communities.²¹ To Fatik, i.e. Shafiqul, this was a very wise approach to communal relation but, in fact, by the late 1930's even the educated Muslims began to support communalism. Fatik's reflections expose that education could not make those youths secular. On the contrary, as the numbers of English educated youths increased among Muslims in Bengal, communal jealousy intensified because of lack of jobs and clash of interests. Besides, the superiority complex in the middle-class Hindus and their attempt to dominate the society contributed to communal tension.²²

The novel also depicts the attitude of the conservative section of the Muslim community towards the younger generation of Muslim youths who had accepted English education and were taking up jobs in the urban centres. The role of the **mullahs** and **maulvis** in the rural areas of Bengal was quite influential. The illiterate and ignorant masses were easily swayed by their religious preachings. But, those **mullahs** were mostly half-educated or completely illiterate. They spoke Urdu and Arabic and credited the use of those languages as aristocratic. This pretension had originally come from the **ashrafs**. In the novel, Maulvi Din Mohammad Daulatpuri represents the orthodox section of the Muslim community in Bengal. The orthodox Muslims considered English education harmful to Islam. He complains that the Muslim youths no longer wanted to get educated at **madrassas**^h or **maktabs** where Arabic alphabets and the Quran were taught. He says,

21. **Ibid.** p. 230.

22. **Ibid.** p. 229.

“মুসলমানের ছাওয়াল আর মজুব মাদ্রাসায় পড়তি চায় না। তারা ইশকুল কলেজে ঢুকে এলমে বেদীন শিখতিছে। তাগের ঈমান নষ্ট হতিছে। ঈমান নষ্ট হলি মুসলমানের কি আর মুসলমানত্ব থাকে? সে তো কাফের হয়ে যায়। তাই সব অ্যাখন হতি যাচ্ছে। ভাই মুসলমান, সামনে অন্ধকার। হুঁশিয়ার হও।”²³

(Muslim youths no longer want to study at **maktabs** and **madrasahs**. They are learning un-Islamic subjects at schools and colleges. They are losing faith in religion. Once they lose faith do they remain Muslim any longer? They become **Kafirs**. There is grave danger ahead. Be careful.)

The educated Muslim youths in Bengal were beginning to realize how the ignorant and half-educated **mullahs** and **maulvis** were resisting the spread of education and enlightenment in rural Bengal. The progressive-minded youths preached anti-**mullah** opinion through newspapers and journals, e.g. the **Sikha** published from Dhaka in the years between 1927 and 1932. The Muslim Literary Society, founded in Dhaka in 1926 by the educated and progressive group of Muslim youths contributed to the rational analysis of religion. They believed that,

“সমাজ বর্তমান মৌলবী, মোল্লা ও পীর সাহেবগণের হস্ত হইতে মুক্তিলাভ করিতে পারিলে, প্রকৃত প্রস্তাবে অনেকাংশে উন্নতির ক্ষেত্রে অগ্রসর হইতে সমর্থ হইত; তাহাতে বিন্দুমাত্র সন্দেহ নাই। মৌলবী মোল্লাগণ সমাজের উন্নতিকে অনুন আরও কয়েক শতাব্দী পশ্চাতে হটাইয়া দিয়াছেন।”²⁴

(Our society will progress only if it is made free from the influence of the **maulvis**, **mullahs** and **pirs**. They have prevented the development of the Muslim community and had, in fact, taken the society a hundred years backward.)

23. **Ibid.** p. 94.

24. **Ibid.** p. 94.

These **mullahs** and **maulvis** were given moral support by the Muslim aristocrats in Bengal who were mostly conservative. They were alarmed at such remarks against them and felt apprehended that the English-educated Bengali Muslim youths were getting irreligious. They hated the rational interpretation of the **Quran** and the **Hadith**. They feared that the spread of English education would lead the younger generation of Muslims against the principles of Islam. They also disliked learning Bengali and the use of the language. Maulvi Din Mohammad expresses his fear and anger against this progressive trend. He remarked,

“এখন আবার ফ্যাশন হয়েছে, আরবী ফারসীর বদলে বাংলা চালু কর। মজুব মাদ্রাসা থেকে আরবী ফারসীকে নির্বাসন দাও। তা হলেই ষোলকলা পূর্ণ হয়। ইসলামের সর্বনাশ পুরা হয়।.....”²⁵

(It has now become a fashion of the Muslim youths to learn Bengali. They demand abolition of Arabic and Persian from the **maktabs** and the **madrassahs**. It means that the destruction of Islam will be complete then.)

What was most shocking and alarming to them was that these were being initiated not by the Hindus or the Christians but by the Muslims themselves. The Bengali Muslim clergy and the aristocrats spoke Urdu. Most of the Bengali Muslims who had been educated for two generations and were professionally well-established also spoke Urdu. Urdu and Persian were considered prestigious languages until the late-nineteenth century. The Muslims in Bengal spoke these languages to prove that their ancestors had come from Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran. The **ashrafs** continued

25. **Ibid.** p. 95.

to speak Urdu for the same reason and felt a kind of superiority over those Muslims who spoke Bengali. They considered Bengali the language of the **atraps**. The upper-class Muslims in Bengal felt a kind of satisfaction in identifying themselves with the Muslims of the Arab world. An identity crisis was still present among the Muslims in Bengal even in the 1930's. Shafiqul was in a puzzle as to where his roots lay. He asks himself,

“আমার শিকড় কোথায়? কেন, আমার গ্রামে। জন্মজি যেখানে? কিন্তু আমি তো এখন উকিল। তবে এখন আমি কি? তুর্কী না তুরানী, আরবী না ইরানী? সৈয়দ না শেখ, মোঘল না পাঠান? না বাঙালী?”²⁶

(Where does my roots lay? Why in the village of course. I was born there. But I am a lawyer now. So, then should I be a Turkish, or Iraqi, Arabian or an Iranian now? Shaikh, Syed, Mughal or Pathan? Or am I a Bengali?.....)

This was not the case only with Shafiqul. Most educated Muslim youths were puzzled about their identity. The attitude of the older generation of the Muslims made the newly educated middle class Muslim youths deluded about their identity.

In the rural areas of Bengal, the **mullahs** and **maulvis** preached orthodox practices among the ignorant peasants. They spoke Urdu, a language unknown to the villagers who spoke Bengali. The distance between the Urdu - speaking rural Bengalis and the rural masses, therefore, was far wider than the Bengali speaking Muslims and their Hindu neighbours. **Prem Nei** depicts this **ashraf-atrap** dichotomy among Muslims in rural Bengal very clearly. The **maulvis** spoke in Urdu at religious gatherings and as one peasant said to the other,

26. **Ibid.** p. 225.

“আরে উডা হ'ল মৌলবী সাহেবগের জবান। ও বুঝা কি আমাগের কম্মো।”
আর বাকী সবাই বললো, “তা যা বলিছ, মৌলুদ মিলাদে উনারা কন আর আমরা
মারহাবা মারহাবা কই। ব্যস্!”²⁷

(Don't you know that this is the language of the **maulvis**? Can we ever understand what they say? Others in the gathering agreed and said, "you are right. The **maulvis** preach at the **milads** and we just praise them. That is all!)

Prem Nei depicts the reaction of the middle class among the Muslims in Bengal to the established religious practices and social taboos, their open defiance of the **maulvis** and **mullahs** and a feeling of uncertainty in them growing out of their own inferiority complex. **Prem Nei** exposes how the authority of the **mullahs** was crumbling as increasing numbers of Muslim youths were taking English education and were beginning to think in a more rational and progressive manner. These youths were particularly against religious orthodoxy and, therefore, anti-**mullah**. This phenomenon was prominent in rural Bengal, particularly, eastern Bengal where most of the population were Muslim peasants and they were illiterate over whom the **mullahs** had easily acquired an overpowering influence. The novel shows that by the mid-1930's the peasants in the villages had begun to doubt the spiritual greatness of the **maulvis** and the **mullahs**. A comic scene takes place in the novel in pages 227-228 when Maulvi Din Mohammad Daulatpuri dropped his turban carelessly in the mud on the river bank. In spite of requests to the passengers on the bus none came to pick the turban up for him. The passengers on the bus were Muslim villagers. At last a drunken Hindu of the

27. **Ibid.** p. 226.

lowest caste, who the maulvi despised, brought that turban to him for a reward of an **anna** ($1/16$ th. of a rupee) with which he would buy hashish, while the Muslims present there kept watching unconcernedly.²⁸

The above incident is highly symbolic of the socio-religious change taking place in the Muslim society in Bengal. The conservative Muslims and religious priests apprehended that Islam was losing its influence on both the educated youths and the ordinary illiterate Muslim masses. Shafiqul's revolt against religious orthodoxy is represented in his disrespectful behaviour to Maulvi Din Mohammad. A period of change is always characterized with crisis which is present throughout the novel. Shafiqul, the central character in the novel embodies the tensions of the period. On the one hand, he rebels against the existing social and religious orthodoxy of his community, on the other hand, as a lawyer, he struggles as a Muslim to establish himself in the professional domain already captured firmly by the Hindus. These youths had to face a two-pronged struggle, one against the orthodox section of their own community and the other against the already established middle-class Hindus. The younger generation of the Muslims faced tough competition for jobs. Those in professions also struggled hard to establish themselves in their respective fields. Although educated, these Muslim youths coming to towns from their rural background could not become fully urban yet in their expression, dress and habits. They had still in them a pull between the urban and the rural modes of life. This brought an inferiority complex in them. Besides, the exclusive attitude of the Hindu **babus** and their superiority further created a feeling of inferiority among the Muslims. It is a common psychological phenomenon that a kind of alienation grows out of inferiority complex. And this happened to the Muslims which led to the birth of a

28. **Ibid.** pp. 227-228.

* (All translations from original Bengali have been done by me.)

separatist tendency among them. Though not democratic in content, the movement for Pakistan was popular. It aroused popular aspiration and hopes for the emerging Muslim middle class who wanted safeguards for their interests and, therefore, they joined the movement "en masse". The author implied in his novel that a sincere effort from the really secular minded Hindus and Muslims would have prevented communalism and might have also prevented partition.²⁹

Gour Kishore Ghose has made keen observations about the significant changes taking place in the Muslim community in rural Bengal. He has reached so close to Muslim life and has depicted the transformations in their society so realistically that it makes one difficult to believe that the author does not belong to the same community. Being a Hindu he highlighted the problems of the Muslims in Bengal and the novel clearly reflects his secular and humanistic approach to those problems. In this respect the novel can be considered an outstanding work on the Muslim community in Bengal.

29. **Ibid.** pp. 224-225.

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to analyse and highlight the various aspects of political and social thought of the Bengali Muslims during the first half of the twentieth century with special reference to the period 1918 to 1947. It sought to examine the life and work of some prominent Muslim leaders who have made significant contribution to political and social development of the Bengali Muslim community. These leaders represented certain distinct trends of thought which have been broadly categorized as (a) orthodox-conservative; (b) moderate-liberal; and (c) radical-humanist.

Those who belonged to the orthodox-conservative trend stood for strictly following the Islamic **sharia**. The religious reformist movements in the earlier century had greatly moulded their thinking. They were, therefore, strongly anti-syncretic. Anti-Hindu and anti-British attitude had led them to support the Pan-Islamist movement. They upheld the past glory of Islam and believed in maintaining Islamic heritage and culture. They advocated the use of Urdu, Arabic and Persian languages and felt proud in doing so. The legacy of the nineteenth century Muslim thought was carried through them into the next century. But, ideas are not static and attitude of individuals change. Some of the conservative thinkers, in their later life, accepted the idea of Bengali to be the mother tongue of the Muslims of Bengal while retaining its distinct Islamic character by admixture of Arabic, Persian and Urdu words. This fomented religious exclusiveness of the Bengali Muslims.

With the emergence of a new western-educated Bengali Muslim middle class a new trend of social thought emerged. Those who represented this new trend may be termed as moderate-liberal. They were linguistically and culturally conscious of their Bengali identity. They had participated in the provincial and national politics projecting their distinct identity. This generation of youths influenced by western liberal and democratic thought, began to assert that patriotism and national identity could not be mixed up with religion. Faith in alien language and culture was also discarded by them. The new trend set by them dealt with the particular socio-economic, political and religious aspects in Bengal. Their attitude was non-communal. They initiated the formation of the **krishak proja** Party to counter the Muslim League leadership, represented mainly by the Urdu-speaking, upper-class Muslim élite. Throughout the 1930's these moderate-liberals were actively interested in solving the problems of the Bengal peasantry. In politics their attitude was to counter the non-Bengali leadership and in most cases, they succeeded. But the ideas of these leaders were not quite similar. Although they upheld moderate-liberal ideas there was considerable variety and diversity in them. Their ideas greatly influenced Bengali Muslim thought, the legacy of which was carried into the later decades of the twentieth century. They still dominate present-day Bengali Muslim society. The leading political figures of the time, like A.K. Fazlul Huq, Khwaja Nazimuddin and H.S. Suhrawardy have not been dealt with separately because much study has been made on them, but there has been frequent references to their ideas in the present study.

The most significant feature of Bengali Muslim thought particularly during the two-decades before partition was separatism. Social, cultural and religious exclusiveness of the Hindu community had promoted similar attitude among the Muslim community. Muslim League politics, attitude of the Indian National Congress, growth of communalism and the role of the ruling authority had cumulative effect which led to the break-up of India. However, there was a small group of politicians from both the communities, who took up a non-communal stance and wanted to keep Bengal united but their attempts failed in spite of all efforts. The so-called "nationalist Muslims" in Bengal politics unfortunately failed to make any significant impact and at the end felt disenchanting and frustrated.

The other trend which has been categorized as radical-humanist was represented during the period by the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam who had infused in the minds of the Bengali Muslim youth the courage and inspiration to fight against imperialism, colonial exploitation and any oppression against humanity. His writings were very syncretic and he has been projected in the study as a "cultural mediator" of modern times. Muzaffar Ahmad, who has been included in this category, upheld the ideology of Communism, which was very radical in his times. He had attempted to permeate the ideas of socialism and communism among the middle-class youths in Bengal. They were secular in their attitude and preached the need for tolerance to all religions. Attempt has been made in

the present study to point out clearly and strongly that parallel to the dominant stream of politics of separatism and communalism there also existed in Bengal another significant trend of secularism, nationalism and syncretism.

This study also includes an analysis of a few works of Bengali literature, particularly novels. These are based on the historical, political and social background of the time, which reveal the social, political, religious and economic condition of Muslims of both rural and urban Bengal. The effect of political developments in urban Bengal had greatly influenced the rural society. The impact of the two World Wars, slump in the price of cash crops, its effect on the Bengal peasantry and its impoverishment and also agrarian disturbances have been discussed. Communal relationship in rural Bengal was generally harmonious. Syncretic influences of indigenous culture was dominant in rural society. A significant aspect that has been discerned in the study is that most liberal and rational political and social thinkers of the time failed to disseminate their ideas among the rural Muslims. Local **mullahs** and **maulvis** however, played a significant role in shaping the mind of the rural masses.

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- B. Newspapers and Periodicals.
- C. Interviews.

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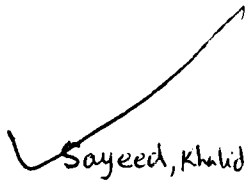
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