

**COMMUNALISM IN BENGAL, 1945-47 :
THE POLITICAL DIMENSION**

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "COMMUNALISM IN BENGAL , 1945-47 : THE POLITICAL DIMENSION" submitted by Rakesh Batabyal is in partial fulfilment of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY degree of this University. This is an original work and has not been submitted for any other Degree to this or any other University to the best of our knowledge.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. SATISH SABERWAL
(Chairperson)

Prof. BIPAN CHANDRA
(Supervisor)

PREFACE

History repeats itself and so do the historians. I shall be repeating much of what has already been told. A lapse into by gone perceptions, a sense of living the past over with all its vivid minutae and trivial concomitants might involve no repetition of anything that had previously existed or happened. It might be a fresh experience altogether. I enter into the three pre-Independence /partition years of Bengal with expectations if not for anything else, at least for the freshness of experience.

And for this 'freshness of experience', the librarians and the staff of the National Library (Calcutta), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi) and our own J.N.U. Library helped me most. I also received efficient co-operation from the staff of the West Bengal State Archives (writers' Building, Calcutta), P.C. Joshi Archives of Contemporary History (J.N.U., New Delhi) and the National Archives of India (New Delhi) . I am grateful to all of them.

I acknowledge with thanks Leela, Atanu and Lopita Chakraborty and Sangeeta and Anand Topno for making my stay in Calcutta comfortable. Munka, Bubka and Nimmy were always a pleasant company.

I am indebted to Mridula and Aditya Mukherjee for their unqualified support. Indivar Kamtekar and Kunal Chakraborty have always encouraged me while I was writing

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I am grateful to Simon Digby for introducing me to the intricacies of Islamic thought and always reminding me that it was high time I should start writing my dissertation. I also express my gratitude to Maulvi Azizul Hassan for making me literate in Urdu.

Affection of my friends and Usha Chandra was always stimulating. I am thankful to them. I express my thanks to Pushpa Sharma for rescuing me from my computer ignorance.

There are two final debts. I record my gratitude to my supervisor, Bipan Chandra, who not only had all the time in this world to answer my innumerable impatient queries but also helped me realise that there is always a human face behind the cold facts of history. He allowed me the liberty to express myself and from him I learnt that the essence of history is liberty.

I regret that Father Joseph Van Troy who gave me my first lessons in History, passed away while I was writing this dissertation.

This dissertation is in fact a tribute to these two teachers of mine.

Errors ! They are many. They are mine.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The post-partition period has witnessed a spate of writings on communalism and communal riots. The list is overwhelmingly large and one cannot exhaust the writings available. The present dissertation which studies communalism and politics in Bengal during the fateful years of 1945-47, premises itself upon an understanding of communalism. 'The premise' however is not just given, I have tried to arrive at it after a detailed study of communalism as a phenomenon. The present chapter tries to look at different stands that historians and social scientist have taken on 'communalism'. A thematic coherence is attempted by analysing the different stands in these writings.

The selected writings are all from the post partition period which witnessed three major trends¹. The three trends have been characterised on the basis of their understanding and approach to the problem. Though the classification into categories may appear to the arbitrary, one takes the liberty of doing so for the convenience of shaping one's arguments.

The first variant consists of the writings of those historians who deny India an overarching community called 'Nation'. According to them, it is so shapeless and such a jumble of societies, that leave alone the question of two nations, there was no nation at all. In such a conglomeration of societies, politics and life are structured around religion, caste, community or factions. Communalism is seen as a

1. The writings taken for analysis are all published after 1947.

phenomenon which existed since time immemorial because it was the only way through which the pluralities or religious groups could interact as well as counteract. Thus, communalism is not a modern phenomenon.

Indian history provides these historians with a past whose every layer unfolds a new history of 'Communalism'. Anil Seal ¹, Gallagher ², and Bayly ³ are some of the major historians subscribing to this 'perception'.

In a renewed effort at excavation, Bayly has come out with new findings. He suggests that many conflicts in the period 1700-1850 bear close resemblance to the communal riots that took place during the late 19th and 20th centuries ⁴. Taking examples from the land wars and acts of the indigenous states, i.e., the Sikh and Marathas, he attempts at attacking some of the assumptions held by a large number of Indian historians. "If religious revitalisation did not necessarily give rise to religious or communal conflict it is also the case," says Bayly, "that the widespread Hindu Muslim symbiosis of the pre-colonial

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1. Seal, Anil, The emergence of Indian Nationalism: competition and collaboration in the later 19th century, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,
 2. Gallagher, John, Johnson, G., and Seal, Anil, ed., Locality Province and Nation, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972.
 3. Bayly, C.A., The Local Roots of Indian Politics, Allahabad 1880-1920, Oxford University Press, London, 1975.
 4. Bayly, C.A., "The Pre-history of 'Communalism'? Religions conflict of India, 1700-1860' in Modern Asian Studies, 19,2,1985, pp. 177-203.

and early colonial periods did not totally exclude the possibility of riot and disturbance along communal lines."¹

Criticising the assumption that the "communal violence was an export from the towns and that the syncretism of rural religion excluded the possibility of communal violence",² Bayly comes to the conclusion that neither "communal violence was incompatible with eclectic religious practices as the orthodox nationalist view of communalism has so often contended,"³ nor there is "ground to assume that communal violence in the countryside was only an export from the town in the course of late nineteenth or twentieth centuries."⁴ By analysing the context, for he thinks "analysis of consciousness seem to lead nowhere if taken out of context",⁵ he invariably argues that "the 'land wars' of the 18th century which saw the rise of agrarian Hindu and Sikh peasantry against Muslim rural gentry were apparently no more or no less communal than the riots in eastern U.P. in 1920 or in eastern Bengal in the 1930s and 1940s."⁶

Though Bayly says that he postulates "no teleology by which the conflicts of this period broaden out to provide the background for Muslim or Hindu Sikh contentions in the late 19th and 20th centuries",⁷ one can easily see the contradiction where

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1. Ibid., p.180
 2. Ibid. p 193
 3. Ibid., p 193.
 4. Ibid., p 193
 5. Ibid., p 203
 6. Ibid., p.202
 7. Ibid. p.190

he sends 'context' into oblivion and then teleologically digs out the pre-history of communalism. If the attacks of the Hindu peasants on the Muslim rural gentry in 1700 is same as for example the attack on Hindu landlord by Muslim peasants in Noakhali in 1946, then Bayly fails to give 'meaning', which he intended to do, to the events of 18th and 19th centuries. It is difficult for one to equate the breaking of mosques in 1700 by Hindu peasantry with the desecration of temples by Muslim peasantry in 1946 or demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. This is because the 'contexts' are drastically different. Therefore, ignoring the 'culture of politics', as Romila Thapar calls it¹, of the particular age/period, Bayly freezes both 'context' and 'time'.

Thus 'communalism' is not at all a new phenomenon for these historians, whereas for the second variant of historians it is purely a modern phenomenon. "Communalism' emerged as a consequence of the emergence of modern politics which marked a sharp break with the politics of medieval or ancient or pre-1857 period,"² says Bipan Chandra, who is one of the chief representative of this variant. Situating communalism within the

1. Thapar, Romila, 'Communalism and Historical Legacy: some Facets' in Social Scientist, 205-6, vol. 18, June-July, 1990. p.12.
2. Chandra, Bipan, Communalism in Modern India, vikas Publishing, New Delhi, 1989 (1984). p.8.

overrching colonial context, they refute the fact that it was an item present in India for centuries - since the hoary past. Instead, it emerged as a result of British colonial impact and the response of different Indian social classes, strata and groups.

One of the first major post partition work on the topic is that of A.R.Desai.¹ Working under orthodox Marxist moorings, Desai defined communalism as "only the disguised expression of the struggle between the vested interests belonging to different faith who gave communal form to that struggle....It was also the form within which the struggle of the professional classes of different communities over posts and seats were carried on."² Therefore, in the final analysis, a middle class inspired distorted class struggle.

A similar view has been expressed by Ashgar Ali Engineer and Moin Shakir.³ They see communalism as a product of the weaknesses of economic imbalance created by the capitalist system. The unequal economic forces led Muslim middle classes

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1. Desai, A.R., Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular prakashan, Bombay, 1948.
 2. Ibid, (1959) p. 382.
 3. Of Engineer's numerous writings I have taken his Communalism and Communal Violence in India, Allied Publishers, Delhi, 1989, as his representatives work.

See Also Shakir, Moin, Khilafat to Partition: A survey of Major Political Trends among Indian Muslims during 1919-1947, Kalamkar Prakshan, Delhi, 1970.

to lag behind their Hindu counterpart. They began to feel uncomfortable in the entire capitalist scene and hence gradually shifted towards the parties demanding a separate homeland for the Muslims.

The fact is that it was not merely economic backwardness but lag in the socio-cultural reforms which made Muslim masses as well as the middle classes to feel uncomfortable. After all the advanced Muslim capitalists, who could be as comfortable with the system as any Hindu or Parsi capitalist could be, were the main sponsors of the Pakistan movement. Thus, the argument is too simplistic to embrace a number of other factors.

Engineer and Shakir both have extensively studied the post-partition communal situation/conflicts. Engineer reaches the conclusion that, "Communalism like ethnicity has existed since time immemorial in the form of prejudices and it is very much in keeping with the human nature. However, we should not confuse these ethnic and communal prejudices with present day communal conflicts."¹ Engineer and a host of others who study the riot accounts suffer from the typical empiricist dilemma. This is due to the fact that they derive their definition from their field work which leaves an over whelming impression on their views and understanding regarding communalism.

A second group of historians who believe that

1. Engineer, A.A., op.cit. p.5

communalism is a modern phenomenon, analyse it from the point of view 'elite' - 'power' relationship.¹ Combining both, Prabha Dixit finds that communalism is a political doctrine that makes use of religio-cultural differences and awareness and turns them into communalism in the form of a political doctrine.² This deliberate choice however, she argues, is not made by the community but by the elite of the community. Thus, 'communalism is consciously conceived political doctrine of one section of traditional elite.'³ According to her Communalism first originated among the Muslim elite and hence Muslim elite is the original sinner. Then how did Hindu communalism emerge? Dixit's explanation is that it originated as a reaction to Muslim Communalism.⁴

Positing herself within the 'Tradition-Modernity' model (She opines that the Muslim elite was getting backward), Dixit finds herself within the Whig historiographical ambit when she shows that the Muslim elite did not modernise themselves or even when some modernisation occurred, i.e., in the form of Syed

1. Dixit, Prabha, Communalism - A struggle for Power, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1974.
2. Ibid., p. 1
3. Ibid., p.3
4. 'Muslim communalism did not arise as a reaction to Hindu Communalism.' 'Hindu communalism on the other hand grew as a reaction to Muslim communalism'. Dixit, Prabha, op.cit, pp.vii,9. However, Bipan Chandra criticises this argument because for him " assigning the blame or the original sin to the opposite communalism, a sort of back-door justification was provided for one's own communalism or the communalism one is studying or supporting. Chandra, Bipan, op. cit., p. 205.

Ahmed's efforts, these were superficial efforts at modernisation. This lack of modernisation on the part of the Muslim elite made them, in the long run, ill disposed to adopt democratic principles and democratic set up. Since nationalism in India symbolised democratic institutions and equilateral principles, the backward/lagged behind elite did not want to accept them.

The 'backwardness of elite' theory homogenises both the elites and their reaction. Similarly Dixit's formulation of a homogenised vernacular culture where Hindu folk and Muslim folk culture did not have insularity, (nor it had those fears/apprehensions of loss of power which propelled elites to communalise itself) glosses over a lot of typicalities of that cultural context of the growth of communalism and its fruition. Finally, it prevents us from studying communalism in its extreme phase when Hindu and Muslim masses developed their psychological insularity.

If for Dixit communalism is an anti democratic and anti-modern phenomenon, for Bipan Chandra it is the *reaction par excellence*.¹ For him it was a middle class, petty bourgeois phenomenon, product of typical socio-economic and political

1. He says, "In the wider historical perspective, communalism was an extreme form of reaction, as is also brought out by the role of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha in politics. Communalism was a major weapon of political, social and economic reaction in the modern period that has to be 'fought on all fronts and given no quarter'." Chandra, Bipan, op.cit., p. 78.

situation of colonial India. He views communalism as a "belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result common social, political and economic interests. It is the belief that in India, Hindus Muslims, Christians and Sikhs form different and distinct communities which are independently and separately structured or consolidated... that, in fact, each religious 'community' constitutes a homogenous entity and even a distinct society in itself." ¹

For Bipan Chandra, ideology and consciousness which help people to take subjective cognition of objective realities, are crucial for understanding communalism. Communalism is a false consciousness as it presents reality in a distorted form. This false consciousness fills in gaps created by inadequate development of true consciousness. This inadequacy is explained by the failure to develop national consciousness, linguistic-cultural identities and class identities.²

His concept of false consciousness, as his analysis of communalism itself, proceeds along with their counterparts, i.e., true consciousness and nationalism. If communalism was a false consciousness, nationalism was the true consciousness. "It was historically valid at the moment as it provided a real solution to a real problem - national liberation against colonial domination."³

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1. Chandra, Bipan, op.cit. , p 1-2.
 2. Ibid., pp 18-28.
 3. Ibid., pp 23-24.

Randhir Singh, the Marxist political theorist, criticises this point of view because of its failure in 'theorising communalism' and for 'legitimising the state'.¹ He criticises Bipan Chandra for providing an alibi to the ruling class for its failures. "Nationalism", says Randhir Singh, "serves to cover up or provide alibis for the historic default or the failure of the post colonial ruling class in India and increasingly turns into a legitimising ideology for the new social order or power that be."² He sees two basic flaws, i.e., ideological and methodological, in the writings of the contemporary historians and theorists of communalism. Ideologically, they are flawed because they understood communalism from the stand point of nationalism and methodologically, studying contemporary communalism in an essentially empiricist and often in an ahistorical manner.³

His critique is primarily based on his need for, as he says, a theory and practice that will help articulate struggles against communalism with the class struggle. Similarly "a critique of religion and of the inter-related phenomenon of revivalism, fundamentalism and communalism, especially as it is an escape into or aggressive assertion of an identity based on religion, must become the critique of the society that makes the religion."⁴ For all this, Randhir Singh waits for a socialist

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1. Singh, Randhir, 'Theorising communalism: A Fragment - any note in the Marxist Mode', in Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), 23 July, 1988, pp. 1542-1548.
 2. Ibid., p. 1543.
 3. Ibid., p. 1542.
 4. Ibid., p. 1543

transformation¹, to wage a war against communalism.

Achin Vanaik, on the other hand, studies the limits of false consciousness as proposed by Bipan Chandra.² According to Vanaik the concept has some merit in that it tells us that 'certain barriers exist in the true subjective perception of the structural character of capitalist relations,'³ or that there is some true objective reality exist. However, as he says, "the concept cannot explain why these barriers exist and why they remain so powerful which is surely a theoretical prerequisite for removing them in practice."⁴

1. He says: "The struggle against communalism and for secularism in India today has to be understood and waged as a part of the over all revolutionary struggle for socialism in India'. Ibid., p. 1548
2. Vanaik, Achin, The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India, Verso, London and New York, 1990. His criticism of Bipan Chandra is that though the latter "asserts that communalism is the politics of religious identity, but the question of importance of religious identity, its formation and meaning is never incorporated in any sustained way into his analysis." See Ibid., p. 154.

If one incorporates all these, as Vanaik suggests, one may have an explanation on the following lines: "to sum up, I am suggesting that the rise of communalism should perhaps be seen in relation to the long standing separateness of the religious networks, the acute social distance expressing a high level of social antagonism between Muslims and Hindus the lapse of the formerly functioning integrative political and administrative ties, and the growth of communally homogenous neighbourhood in the Metropolitan Centres", Saberwal, Satish, 'Elements of communalism' in EPW, 21-28 March, 1981. This in a way becomes a kind of sociological explanation rather than rigorous examination, acceptance rather than an attempt to break out of the phenomenon.

3. Vanaik, Achin, op.cit., p. 153.
4. Ibid, p. 153.

Tracing the growth of communalism in India, Vanaik sees Indian Renaissance as the chief culprit as it was embedded with strong Hindu symbols. He calls Indian nationalism Hindu Nationalism. Counterpoising this Hindu Nationalism and post independence India state to the European nation states, Vanaik draws the conclusion that while European nation states, prior to their emergence, went through a process of secularisation, Indian state, which came into being with the culmination of the national movement, inherited the predominance of religion which had marked the national movement. Indian civil society also never went through the process of secularisation. In this context he defines communalism as "a process involving competitive desecularisation in a religiously plural society - that in a competitive striving to extend the reach of religion through ideology and control institutions - which along with non-religious factors helps to harden division between different religious communities and increase tension between them."¹

The theoretical merit of this definition is that unlike other Marxist writings it does not sidetrack or dilute the importance of religion in shaping communalism. But the study as well as the steps which helped Vanaik to reach such a definition is informed by a lack of sensitivity to the strong secular current of the national movement. This traps Vanaik to overlap/confuse Hindu Revivalism, Hindu fundamentalism and Hindu communalism with contours of Indian Nationalism.²

1. Ibid, p. 154.

2. Ibid., pp. 140-154

The major arena of debate among the authors of this variant now focuses on the question of a way out of this problem - if one thinks it a problem at all. Engineer is convinced of the incorrigible nature of communal conflicts and he feels a bit resigned.¹ He sees capitalist development with its imbalanced growth as the major cause of communal problems. The macro-level cause of communal problem in economic arena is that "Muslims are left out in process of economic development and the Hindus mainly benefitted from it."² This again brings out Engineer's empiricist dilemma. Similarly in his micro level analysis, unbalanced economic growth of one community creates situation inducing violence by the other, be it in Meerut, Bhiwandi or Ahmedabad. This follows from Engineer's view that violence is an "integral part of the development. In capitalist system it takes place in ethnic and community lines while in socialist system in class terms." "Development in South Asia has been," according to Engineer, "taking place in capitalist form, hence communal violence."³

1. His logic is that the "final solution is too complex to easily yield to any solution. The dynamics of capitalist development are such that communal violence cannot be contained in our society. We will have to live both with communalism and communal violence for quite sometime to come. We can however certainly try to reduce it." Engineer, Ashgar Ali, *op.cit.*, p. 59. Here what I see is the empiricist ever. For him 'communalism' becomes a given social fact and one has just to explain it rather than try to transcend beyond the fact by applying rigorous analysis. He also fails to separate communalism and communal conflicts as he uses them quite interchangeably.

2. Ibid., p. 41

3. Ibid.

Is class struggle a part of socialist system of development? Whereas in its ideal-typical form, socialist system of development presupposes the solution of class struggle by creating a class less society. Similarly, it is primarily in the capitalist system in which classes emerge and class struggle takes place to solve the dialectics of exploitation. Engineer is not able to analyse the root of economic imbalance which for him is the sole/basic cause of communal violence. He uses capitalist system, capitalist model of growth, etc., quite interchangeably while on the other hand communalism and communal violence become synonymous. This prevents him from getting out of the empiricist dilemma which we have talked about.

Desai offers the way out. For him the origin of the problem lay in the capitalist epoch."In countries where due to historical reasons, a centralised state came into existence before the whole mass of people whom it governed was transmuted into a well knit nation living a common economic life.... as a result of the capitalist economic development, the problem did arise in the course of historical development."¹ But it seems to be an evaluation rather than an explanation because it does not explain as to why the problem arose only in the form of communalism and that too only by using religion.

Desai's solution, as he prescribes, is to "unite the lower strata of different communities for securing their economic and other interest." Thus if communalism is distorted version of

1. Desai, A.R. , op.cit, p. 402

class division, " to combat it effectively"¹ one has to bring in a "class consciousness" among the lower classes.

This theme is further taken up by Bipan Chandra for whom " to combat communalism is to creat and propagate the counter ideology."² This has to go together with efforts at improving the real condition of the people. However communal consciousness has to be fought on the level of ideology. Since objective conditions feed the false consciousness of communalism, to successfully oppose communalism it is necessary to eliminate the social conditions favouring its growth, that is, to liquidate its social roots by bringing about fundamental changes in the social system. Since capitalism can no longer bring about conditions favourable for national unity, this unity can only be maintained and strengthened by fighting for a socialist transformation of society. Here he provides what Randhir Singh has been asking for - a critiue of the social system. However unlike Randhir Singh who is looking for an ideology to fight communalism with, Bipan Chandra provides one. The counter ideology "is to be a continuing phenomenon alongwith the fight for the transformation of the society. The war should be waged on synchronous time framework and at different levels.

1. Ibid

2. Chandra, Bipan, op.cit pp. 310-335. Unlike Engineer, Bipan Chandra does not want to give way to the feeling of helplessness and opposing it says that "in facing the communal challenge, the starting point has to be the realisation that the way out is going to be a long haul."

Vanaik, setting out to critique Bipan Chandra's alternative, comes to the same conclusion though through different phraseology. Setting an agenda for the Marxist socialists, he argues that "it should be wrong to imagine that collective religious identities might be easily replaced by other identities (i.e. class) without some construction of an alternative working class and socialist culture rooted in the everyday existence of the oppressed."¹

This is hsi what Vanaik thinks his Marxist remedy as against "the bourgeois liberal mode' of Bipan Chandra's"². He advocates fight for the secularisation of Indian state and development of alternative sources of defence and principled militant violence against communal violence."³

Despite his repeated emphasis on socialist culture, socialist activity and socialist ways, Vanaik never develops a critique of the capitalist system which in any final analysis helps and sustains communalism within its ambit.

The third variant of writings on communalism is premised on the idea that 'communalism is a conception of bourgeois - liberal ideology,'³ and that in the pre-independent

1. Vanaik, Achin, op.lit., p. 156-162.

2. Ibid.,

3. Ibid., p. 161

4. Chatterjee, Partha, Bengal 1920-1947 Volume one the Land Question, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta, 1984 (hereafter B), p. Iii.

stage it was invariably tied with 'nationalism' and in post colonial society it is a notion which derives from the self definition of Indian State and is inseparably tied with its counterpart, viz., 'secularism'.¹

Now the problem which informs the works of these writers is the term communalism itself which for them is a category imposed by the colonial knowledge, a construction and hence, an obstacle in understanding the socio-cultural realities. It obfuscates specifics.

Accepting Edward Said's evocation², Partha Chatterjee seeks to locate the contradiction within the nationalist thought which he thinks "in agreeing to become modern accepts the claim of universality of this (bourgeois - rationalist conception of knowledge established in the post enlightenment period of European intellectual history) framework of knowledge."³ In order to find out the locale of the subject and object in the nationalist thought, Chatterjee attempts an examination of the structure of the epistemic foundation of the nationalist thought. Soon he

1. Ibid.

2. "Perhaps the most important task of all would be undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and non-manipulative perspective. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power." Said, Edward. @., Orientalism, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. p. 24.

3. Chatterjee, Partha, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World : a Derivative Discourse, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986 (hereafter Chatterjee C), p. 11.

finds out that its contradictions are based on its very epistemic foundation in the 'modern' knowledge¹. Here Abdel-Malek provides Partha Chatterjee with the characteristic of the dominant framework of orientalist knowledge, i.e., Orientalist knowledge which imposes rationalist post-enlightenment knowledge of the West on the Orient and stamping it with 'otherness'.²

"The problematic in orientalism is one in which the Orient and orientals were 'an *object*' of study, stamped with an otherness.... This object of study will be, as is customary, passive non-participating endowed with a historical subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regards to itself."³

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1. Dissecting the structure of knowledge into problematic and thematic, Chatterjee elaborates: "We wish to separate the claims of an ideology, i.e., its identification of historical possibilities and the practical or programmatic forms of its realisation, from its justificatory structures, i.e., the nature of the evidence it presents in support of those claims, the rules of inference it relies on to logically relate a statement of the evidence to a structure of arguments, the set of epistemological principles it uses to demonstrate the existence of its claims as historical possibilities, and finally, the set of ethical principles it appeals to in order to assert that those claims are morally justified. The former part of a social ideology we will call its problematic and the latter part its thematic. The thematic in other words, refers to an epistemological as well as ethical system which provides a framework of elements and rules for establishing relations between elements; the problematic, on the other hand, consists of concrete statements about possibilities justified by reference to the thematic." Chatterjee, Partha, (C) op.cit., p. 38.
 2. Abdel Malek, Anouar, 'Orientalism in Crisis', Diogenes, 44 (winter, 1963) pp. 102.40 as quoted in Chatterjee, Partha, (C). op.cit., p.36
 3. Abdel-Malik, Anuar, ibid., as quoted in Chatterjee, Partha, (C), ibid., p. 37.

Similarly, at the level of thematic, "there was an essentialist concept of the countries, nations and people of the Orient under study, a conception which expresses itself through a characterised ethnist typology....."¹

Now applying these, characteristics to his framework, Partha Chatterjee finds that the 'problametic' in nationalsit thought is exactly reverse of that of Orientalism, "that is to say object of nationliast thought is still Oriental, which retains the essentialist character depicted in orientalist discourse. Only he is not passive non-participating".² At the thematic level, on the other hand, "Nationalsit thought accepts and adopts the same essentialist conception based on the distinction between 'the east' and 'the west', the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject, and hence the same objectifying procedures of knowledge constructed in the past-enlightenment age of western sciences."³

This contradiction between thematic and problematic which informs nationalist thought "signifies the theoretical insolubility of the national question in a colonial country, or for that matter, of the extended problem of social transormation in a post colonial country within a strictly nationalist

1. Ibid.

2. Chatterjee, Partha, (C) op.cit, p. 38

3. Ibid.

framework."¹ Partha Chatterjee therefore in order to tackle this and other problems in nationalist thought, 'breaks its presumed unity.'² So that the mode of discourse could be altered and that the 'thematique' would match the 'problematique': In this way an onslaught can be directed towards the categories imposed by the orientalist discourse.

On similar lines, Partha Chatterjee breaks an obvious event of communalism into several constituent events and locates each of them on a different analytical plane',³ because the task is to break up and supersede all liberal problematic of communalism/ secularism.'⁴ Since communalism is the 'self definition of the Indian state' and hence he will not "regard it as a problem and secularism its answer',⁵ He locates communalism in the structure of power relations where, for instance in Bengal, communalism becomes a synonym for actions of the peasant, community.

Let us examine Partha Chatterjee's position vis-a-vis communalism. His attempts to alter the structure of discourse in nationalist thought on the basis of an attack on the liberal rationalist thought of the modern West meant to resurrect the

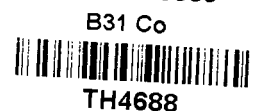
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1. Ibid, p.39
 2. Ibid., p. 50
 3. Chatterjee, Partha, (B) op.cit, p. Iiii.
 4. Ibid., Iii.
 5. Chatterjee, Partha, Agrarian Relations and communalism in Bengal, 1926-1935 (hereafter Chatterjee A) in Ranjit Guha, ed., Subaltern Studies, Writings on South Asian History and Society vol. I, OUP, Delhi, 1984, pp 9-38.

meaning and of the action of the 'subject'. This he waited to dispel the imposed 'essences' of the orientalist discourse. That is why national movement must be breached into two domains of politics¹ where the 'second domain' lost its voice to the rationality of the first domain. In similar vein, the first domain or the elite domain, in order to 'self-define' itself created communalism as 'the other' and on the lines of oriental discourse, imposed its own definition of communalism on the subject of the second domain.

Chatterjee's attempt to answer questions when he comes to the level of actual events proves too facile and in fact, his statement begs the question when he says that "the crucial element which deflected the peasant agitation into anti-Hindu movement was not that the zamindars were Hindus and peasants were Muslims but the fact that the muslim rent receivers were considered part of the peasant communities whereas the Hindu zaminders were not."² Now, why were the Hindu Jotdars not thought of as members of the peasant community? Moreover during the later phase of the communal attacks even Hindu peasant was treated as a Hindu and not as a peasant. Answer is not available to Partha Chatterjee because going by his own logic, Muslim

1. "In the case of the so called mobilisation of the peasant masses into 'communist' politics, we will show that in the second domain of politics (italics mine) peasants' actions were neither communal nor social....for those categories were irrelevant to the world of second domain." Chatterjee, Partha, (B), p. Iiii.

2. Chatterjee, Partha, (A) op.cit., p.11



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peasants could, by 1947, realise the possibilities inherent in the nationalist discourse of the insolubility of important issues, and therefore, taking advantage of it carved out an independent nation of Pakistan. Since, for Chatterje, communalism is a product of bourgeois-liberal ideology (also nationalism as well as Secularism), any breach of that imposed ideology is welcome. Therefore an event of 'communalism' has to be studied not in relation to its counterpart of secularism but in its own right, because it helps one to understand how the 'object' of the 'oriental discourse' tries to assert its own autonomy and sovereignty.

The further work to resurrect the agency, and to give the oriental 'object' his history which had been taken out of his society and politics by the forces of 'colonial construction' has been taken up by Gyanendra Pandey.¹ To do this, Pandey takes upon himself to challenge the "givenness of categories of 'communalism',² 'nationalism' and, for that matter, 'secularism'. He questions the finality and fixity of these categories and the 'analytic apparatus of the dyads of *communalism/nationalism* and *communalism/secularism*'.³

1. Pandey, Gyanendra, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial India, OUP, Delhi 1990.

2. Ibid., p. 64

3. Ibid., p.

Communalism, in his colonial constructions analysis¹ becomes an epistemic construction the ingredients of which have been supplied by the 'bourgeois-colonialist knowledge' (one may say liberal colonialist). These ingredients have been internalized by the Indian elite or superordinate classes,² who represented nationalism and needed a self definition which they gained by creating 'the other',³ in communalism, i.e., thus Nationalism was what communalism was not. This construction has been done by creating a colonial sociology which imposed 'essences' to the Indian population. "If bourgeois ideology continuously transforms the products of history into essential types, bourgeois colonialism seems to perform this task of transformation with a vengeance, and essential types, i.e., bigoted Julaha, fierce Pathan, intriguing Brahman, the turbulent Ahir and criminal pasi are created", and as Pandey argues, "takes history out of reality".⁴

1. This is a recent trend in Indian historiography and the major works in this field are Dirks, Nicholas, B., The Hollow Crown; Ethnohistory of a South Indian Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 1967; Inden, Ronald, Imagining India. Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1990. Their historical analytic tools are based on Edward Said's 'Orientalism' and the discourse on power and knowledge initiated in the post-modernist thought by Foucault and Derrida's attempt to breach totality by decentering the subject. An appraisal of Foucault's assault on totality has been done by Grumley John E., History and Totality, RKP. London and New York 1989. I have greatly benefitted from the stimulating discussion with Amitabh Tripathy while trying to understand the complexities of this debate.
2. Pandey, Gyanendra, op.cit. pp. 156-157.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., pp 107-108

If colonialism imposed essentialist typology, it also denied history to the people-'the oriental objects.' The thinking of the Indian elite was in line with that of the colonial rulers in this respect. " Just as the colonial regime would, if it could, appropriate to itself the entire political life of the subject people, so the local elite would, if it had its way, appropriate the whole history of the local community," ¹ says Pandey. Thus the local community is deprived of its 'autonomy,' 'history,' and 'politics.' He simply becomes the irrational, the communal other of the 'National'.

Pandey attempts to restore this denied autonomy, history and politics, to the much maligned 'oriental object.' This he does by deconstructing 'meta texts' which he finds in the 'Riot narratives' and in the community history texts. While communal riot narrative is a history of the State and imposed quite forcefully the essentialist types,² Pandey, by positing the community history texts vis a vis these riot narratives shows how history can be contended and how the community history is the real history which challenges the colonial history and asserts the autonomy of the oriental 'objects', his history and life vis a

1. Ibid., p. 150

2. He writes. "The point that needs to be emphasised in this connection is not simply that the myth or essential types distorts reality but that it does so in a particular way - by taking history out of itthis is surely the end result of the mythicisation of the bigoted Julaha, the fierce Pathan, the intriguing Brahman, the turbulent Ahir and the criminal Pasi." Ibid, pp 107-8.

vis the colonial construction to its contrary¹.

Thus, while Partha Chatterjee wants to understand communalism by breaking its monolithic construction into different analytic planes, Gyan Pandey does it by giving meaning to community text and demonstrating colonial construction of communalism.

In this attempt at representation, Pandey raises important questions without answering them. Without any attempt at class-analysis he brackets the Indian elite with colonial power and knowledge indirectly by saying that Indian elite's thinking was in the same line with the colonial masters. Thus Pandey transforms economic collaborationist role of the Indian elite (bourgeoisie) as advanced by, the Marxist historians, in to the role of intellectual collaborators.²

Secondly, on the plane of contending histories, the real contenders for him are the colonial history with its avowed aim to silence the orient and the community history with its struggle to come out of this imposed silence. Nationalist

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1. "It is my submission that the real alternative to colonial historiography in the Nineteenth Century is to be found in the historical memory and accounts of the 'litte community', an example of which is the text we examine here - Sheik Muhammad Ali Hasan's Waqeat-O-Hadesat: Qasba Mubarakpur-". Ibid., p.115.
 2. Just as the colonial regime would, if it could, appropriate to itself the entire political life of the subject people, so the local elite would, if it had its way appropriate the whole life and history of the local community." Ibid., p. 156.

historiography, which he somehow associates with the national movement, and national movement itself just evaporates as it subscribes to the same bourgeois colonialist knowledge which is the basis of the colonial historiography. In this vein, the real phenomenon of national movement is also denied its own meaning and rationale in an effort to give meaning to something which opposed it—quite a straight way to delegitimise the hegemony of nationalism by bringing in the construction analysis. In fact, it will not be out of place here to apply Bayley's term (used for another construction analyst, Ronald Inden), for Pandey that 'his approach remains that of the intellectual historian of texts.'¹

Since communalism for Partha Chatterjee and Gyan Pandey is a problem at the level of epistemic construction, they do not give any solution as such for the actual communal riots or communalism which stalks the land. Their solution is to break the totality of the term Communalism in order to restore meaning and rationale of the participants in an event of supposedly communal rioting. This will then deny the imposed rationality of the post-enlightenment discourse of reason which colonialism imposed on the communities. Nationalism is also enmeshed with this modern rationality, hence, it, too, has to be breached at the level of analysis or bypassed for the purpose of this restoration.

The moorings of this construction analysis is in

1. Bayly, C.A., 'Elusive Essences' in Times Literary Supplement December 7-13, 1990, p. 1314

Edward Said 's counterposition to the Orientalist discourse, where Said premising himself on Foucaultian discourse tries to restore the Orient's and especially Arabs' past from the textual imposition of the Orientalist construction of that past. An appraisal of Said's position goes beyond the scope of this study but it becomes important because Said's methodological tools have been used in the Indian context which creates a some problems here. Said's treatment and use of Foucault's discourse on power and knowledge invariably calls for attention. Whereas Foucault specifies the spatial limits (of this discourse) as the western episteme, and temporal limit to the period historically ranging from roughly Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, Said travels across time and takes recourse to the Foucaultian discourse to show the Oriental construction since the days of the ancient Greeks. To Aijaz Ahmad, " the idea that there could be a discourse, that is to say, an epistemic construction spanning both the pre-capitalist and capitalist periods is not only uncapitalist but also unFoucaultian.¹"

Thus, applying the same critique of reason and liberal humanist knowledge on a different spatial location, construction analysis, though breaks new grounds, at times seems incongruous even it comes to its application to analyse/understand actual phenomena of communalism and communal riots. What is more important is the question whether application of the same

1. Ahmed, Aijaz, 'Between Orientalism and Historicism: Anthropology Knowledge of India' in Studies in History, Sage pub., 7,1,1991.

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discourse which Foucault applies to critique modern reason with his antitotality and anti-humanist stand, to the nationalist thought and especially the nationalist construction of the communal 'other' gives us a clue as to how a mobilization on communal grounds not at the level of episteme but real political plank takes place. Moreover, why does it have to be antagonistic in actual practice and why religious and community symbols are attacked ?

In fact I am conscious that to analyse the entire historiographical range mapped here requires a detailed study of communalism spanning over a long period which would show its relation with epistemic context as well as how the actual politics of communalism is related to that context.

The scope of the present work, however, does not allow me to enter into that problem which I would like to address. However, the very fact that I have entered into the problem of communalism also calls for an empirical investigation. I will test some of the theoretical proposition raised in this historiographical introduction by going into the actual excavation site, i.e., communalism and politics of communalism in Bengal during 1945-47.

II

Writings on 'Communalism in Bengal' are very few though there have been a large number of works on 'Muslim Separateness' or Muslim Separatism. A strong influence of the partition informs the studies of the communal problem and in fact the studies which can be grouped under the writings on communalism¹ are primarily works on the long history of the latent separation which in due course and owing to the presence of a colonial power and its divide and rule policy came out openly and ultimately resulted in the partitioning of the province. The teleology, in shape of partition informs such studies.

Three important works have come out in recent years which have broken new grounds in order to study the phenomenon of communalism and various questions attached to it in the context of Bengal.² Partha Chatterjee, Sugata Bose and Suranjan Das have attempted to apply different tools of analysis to study the phenomenon. Partha Chatterjee attempts to study the history of Bengal by breaking up the linearity or continuity of history and

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1. De, Amalendu, Bangali Buddhijibi O Bicchinatabad (Bengali Intelligenisia and Separatism), West Bengal State Book Board, 1980; Pakistan Prostab O Fazlul Hug (Pakistan Resolution and Fazlul Haq), West Bengal State Book Board, 1989; Ahmed, Sufia, Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884-1912 Dacca, 1974. Lahiri, Pradip Kumar, Bengali Muslim Thought, 1818-1947, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta, 1991.
 2. Chatterjee, Partha, Bengal 1920-1947, volume One, Land Question, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta, 1984; Bose, Sugata, Agrarian Bengal, Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, in association with Orient Longman, Bombay, 1986; Das, Suranjan, Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1991.

attacking the totality. He does not accept the phenomenon of communalism as a problem as it is basically the self-definition of the Indian State. Here he tries to examine the peasant actions in their own domain of politics and recognising that the consciousness which informs the actions of the subordinate classes cannot be understood or described in terms of elements which may be said to constitute elite consciousness. The agrarian scene gives him area to examine his theoretical propositions.

More important from our point of view is the study of Sugata Bose, who has separated Bengal into distinct areas according to the typology of their agrarian social structure, and then studied the politics of those areas. He has come out with the findings that enmeshing of agrarian Bengal with the world market became the unmaking of the societal harmony as in the period of crisis it sapped the symbiosis of the agrarian social structure. He locates the origin of Kishorganj and Noakhali - Trippera riots in this rupture. He intervenes in the debate over pre-existing peasant communal consciousness. With his empirical evidence he shows how this theme of peasant consciousness has been overplayed and says that, "the basic right to land in Bengal and, for that matter, in most part of India was essentially an individual right. The perception of individual interests as collective interests was not easy to achieve."¹

1. Bose, Sugata, op.cit, p. 280

Thus the consciousness of collective interests which if one agrees with Partha Chatterjee, moved the peasants to attack Hindu Zamindars was not a pre-given consciousness as it appeared from a reading of Partha Chatterjee. Here other factors, i.e. politics of the political parties, etc., came in to add to the peasants' actions.

Suranjan Das has attempted to look at the communal politics from the prism of communal riots. Communal riots, says Das, 'shape community's perception of boundaries given to it by symbols.' Similarly he tries to show how riots promoted communal consciousness. In order to go beyond the traditional empirical studies which see communalism as simply 'Muslim Separateness', Das examines the contours of communal riotings in Bengal over a period of 41 years, i.e. 1906-47. Das attempts to define communalism but he starts with community riots as the defining feature of a community's changing perception.

Though Das uses the bi-polarity of the elite - popular to define the two types of communal riots, he never defines the elite communalism or popular communalism except for the fact that the former is characterised by its association with organised communal politics, while the latter by its unorganised communal politics in which violence predominates.

A linear development informs this treatment of communal riots, i.e., gradual convergence of elite and popular communal riots; increasing political overtones of the communal riots,

which finally results in separation/partition of the province.

What is left however is the communal politics and the ideology. Hence study of politics even at the level of political parties will help us to initiate a discussion of that ideology.

III

I am aware that by using the term 'communalism' I am still, a prisoner of "the imperialism of categories". The term might make me gloss over specificities of Bengali Society, i.e., its typicalities, fissures, etc., yet I am applying it because I find it still the most valid category to understand and analyse an actual social process. Hence I am not breaking the totality of this category and am rather using it both as an 'ideology' as well as a category to analyse the happenings at the societal plane which emanate from that ideology.

For me communalism is an ideology. It is an ideology because apart from helping people to take subjective cognition of the objective realities, it also provides a world view.

Communal riots are not the main form or content of this ideology. I agree with Suranjan Das that communal riots shape and reshape boundaries of community. The fact, however, remains that the creation and awareness of its identity vis-a-vis some other identity is created prior to the communal riots. Politics of people is based on their cognition of objective realities in a given spatial and temporal context. Political organisations

reflect such cognition and consciousness which is based on those objective realities. They mobilise people on that basis through symbols and idioms.

The present study attempts to study the interaction between these three aspects of social phenomenon, i.e., ideology, violence and political parties. The thematic context of communalism in this study has been seen within the geographical limits of Bengal and the time scale of three years, i.e., 1945-47.

The period is one of those crisis periods in Indian history which can be termed as turning point. Even for Bengal the period demonstrates signs of this crisis. Bengal had just come out of the great Famine, which had left millions dead, and the society was still grappling with the after effects of war. To this Bengal, came the politics of communalism and the shifts and fissures associated with it.

IV

Chapter I discusses the politics of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and its relationship with the process of communalisation of society. Most of the themes which have been analysed in this chapter constitute the background to understand the politics of the other political parties studied in this work, i.e., Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha and Bengal Provincial Congress.

Chapter II sees Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha in action and its efforts at stealing space for itself in the Provincial politics.

Chapter III analyses Congress's role in communalism and the forms of communalisation of society. Special emphasis is given to its role in the communal riots so that its own understanding of communalism can be explained and an evaluation of its role can be properly made.

Chapter IV brings Gandhi and his understanding of Communalism. His role in the communal situation is sought to be studied so as to see whether Gandhi's understanding of communalism was different from the political parties discussed so far. His relationship with H.S. Suhrawardy is brought to light to emphasise Suhrawardy's own role in Bengal politics during the final hours of the pre independent Bengal province.

A study of communalism in Bengal will remain incomplete without a discussion of the role of the Communist Party. It had played a most dynamic role during the communal riots of Calcutta, Dacca and other places. But I was not able to incorporate the Communists in my present study due to the fact that the sources which I had collected from the files of the West Bengal State Archives at Calcutta have not reached me by the time I am writing these lines. They were sent to the Home Department of the West Bengal Government for scrutiny and it has been six month since I have been waiting for those 'materials' to be sent back to me. Communist government, it is quite ironical, guards the colonial secrets carefully and diligently.

Something must be said about the sources used in this study as they will be important in validating my argument.

Since the time limit within which this dissertation had to be submitted did not allow me to spend more than four weeks in Bengal, my research became dependent on Delhi based sources, which is in any case what is laid down as the rule by the Centre for Historical Studies, J.N.U. This at times made me quite uncomfortable with my findings and conclusion. Among the chapters discussed here, I feel that the chapter on Hindu Mahasabha suffers from this lack of local level research. I found that the Mahasabha was not at all a very strong organization till 1947, as it is believed. However, my inability to gather much local level sources makes me quite uneasy about the findings but then possibilities for the contrary is less because a corroboration of the facts available was done in order to authenticate my conclusions. Yet further research is required to go into the problem.

I have not used too many official records supposed to be the most 'impartial reports', to understand the workings of the political parties discussed here. I have instead used the media coverage, party papers/reports, and the eye witness or riot victims accounts so that mediation through the files 'maintained for law and order concerns' can be minimised. I have most of the time let my subjects speak at length so that I can save myself

from the blame of suppressing the voice of my subjects. How far I have been successful in answering the questions raised in my study is for the reader to judge. I am at fault at many places with many arguments which I tried to build up. But then I always think that it is better to fail than not to try at all.

CHAPTER - I

COMMUNALISM REPRESENTED - I

THE MUSLIM LEAGUE

CHAPTER-I

COMMUNALISM REPRESENTED-I : MUSLIM LEAGUE

The Politics of Bengal Provincial Muslim League becomes the entry point to the study of communalism and communal Politics. This is because of the fact that the Muslim League was one of the most important political parties in Bengal around which a lot of provincial politics revolved.¹ Though it took sustenance from the All Indian Muslim League, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League always had leaders whose politics was rooted in Bengal. This sometimes created hiatus between the party's central leadership and provincial leadership which in turn created situations with important consequences.² One aspect of this chapter is to study this hiatus on Bengal's politics especially on the position of communalism.

Secondly, except Fazlul Huq-Shyama Prasad Mukherjee coalition Ministry, almost all the ministries which came into existence after 1937 had Muslim League either as the Prime or secondary partner. Even when the League was not in power, it

1. Major work on Muslim League's politics has been Sen, Shila, Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-47, Impex, Delhi, 1976. A large number of autobiographical works provide much help to the contemporary historian. These works include Ahmed, Abdul Mansur, Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachor, Dhaka, 1968; Hashim, Abul, Amar Jibon O Bivag Purbo Banqla Desher Rajniti, Chirayat, Calcutta, 1987.
2. The best example of this was Fazul Huq-Jinnah tussels and later on even Suhrawardy had also to face this problem, as this study will show.

created problems for the non-muslim league ministries through its workers and a sympathetic administration.

Third and the most important from the point of view of our present study is the fact that the league was the important medium through which the ideology of communalism penetrated down within the Bengali Society. League was not only the medium but also the chief accused in the communal riots of Calcutta and Noakhali-Teppera. It was also the chief actor in the entire episode/debate over independent, sovereign/greater Bengal. All these factors make analysis of the Muslim League politics an appropriate entry point.

The study of Muslim League during 1945-47 has to be understood in the context of and in relation to the strands and shifts in the All India politics. In this chapter, however, I have tried to isolate Bengal Provincial Muslim League's politics to an extent in order to understand the internal dynamic which propelled the party to act in the given context.

I

Abul Hashim, one of the leading personalities and a chief organiser of the Muslim League, could later boast that by 1944 the League's membership had reached over five lacs.¹ Though there is no way one can ascertain the truth of this claim

1. Hashim, Abul, Amar Jibon O Bivag Purba Bangaldesher Rajniti, tr. by Shahabuddin Muhammad Ali, Chirayat Prakashan, Calcutta, 1988, p.74. He said: "By 1944 our membership stood at more than five lacs."

or compare it with data available from an earlier period, it is quite certain that the Muslim League had by 1945 become a strong, organised mass based party. The credit for this successful recognition of the party usually goes to Abdul Hashim who opened up new branches of Muslim League under the over all supervision of Bengal Provincial muslim League. This Organisational work however, created a cheavage between the powers entrenched and the powers emerging. Till then the Nawab family of Dacca with the active help of Calcutta's non-Bengali Muslim capitalists and businessmen was controlling the party organisationally as well as its Parliamentary Board.¹

What Abul Hashim did was to follow up what Suhrawardy began in 1941, i.e., to open up the Party's fold to common Muslims.² Hashim did so zealously and in the process attempted to make the Party stronger than the Parliamentary Board. This he tried to do by opening new branches and wresting control of the existing Muslim League branches and the Provincial organisation. Thus, popularization and reorganisation went together.

Simultaneously with reorganisation, Hashim tried to reorient the party politically. His speech after his election to the post of

1. For a detailed discussion see Sen, Shila, op.cit., Hashim, Abul, op.cit. and Ahmed, Abul Mansur, op.cit. H.S. Suhrawardy's biographer M.H.R Talukdar has also touched upon the internal fissures within the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. See Talukdar, M.H.R., Memoires of H.S. Suhrawardy, University Press, Dhaka, 1986.

2. The efforts at organising the Party were going on for almost two years. Earlier Suhrawardy was the main mover. What Hashim really did was to restructure the Party in such a way as to make democratic functioning of the Party possible.

the General Secretary of the Party on 7 November 1943 assumes significance in this context. He announced that he would organise the Muslim League as a Mass based democratic, progressive political organisation.¹ His subsequent speeches were most often couched in Islamic idealism and references to Socialism and communism, though quite frequent, were not something inherent in Abul Hashim's political philosophy.

What I think made Hashim to take recourse to communistic utterances was the expediency of getting the students of the period involved in the Muslim League Politics and secondly, to bring Muslim League rhetoric in tune with the demands of the time, i.e., With the effect of the war and famine which had affected Bengali society to a great extent.² This was again the time when the Muslim League had to countenance the communist party organisers especially in the rural and labour Bengal where coincidentally most of the Muslim Bengal was existing. Muslim League's organising efforts bore fruits as the party began penetrating among the masses during 1941-43 and under Hashim's energetic leadership penetrated and expanded deeper. Thus, discounting minimum exaggeration, Hashim's claim of having five lacs members even if not literally true may be true figuratively.

1. Hashim, Abul, op.cit, p.44.

2. For the effects of Famine of 1943 on Bengal, see Sen A.K., Famine Mortality : A study of Bengal famine of 1943' in Peasants in History in Hobsbswm et.al. ed. ; Greeneough, P.R. Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal; Mohalonobis et.al. 'A Sample Survey of After effects of the Bengal Famine of 1943' in Sankhya, 7, 1946, pp 337-400.

What this successful organisation meant for the politics of communalism in the province? First, this penetration by emphasising on organisation and its quite successful implementation resulted in two interrelated processes, viz., intensification of the internal dissention in the party itself and increased communal overtones in the rhetoric and politics of the party. In fact, I think that this intensification of the fissures in the party quite often resulted in the intensification of communal overtones by the party.

Though communal overtones were inherent in the exclusivist policy of the Muslim League despite its best effort to include the scheduled caste Hindus in its fold. What however made these overtones increasingly aggressive was the attempt by the party to become the 'sole spokesman' of the Muslims. This required the League to delegitimise all other parties or groups from their positions among the Muslims and to establish itself as the single legitimate expression of the Muslim community.

II

Abul Hashim, through his extensive tours and methodical style, enlarged and created a restructured Muslim League. The new organisation which came up was treated by Hashim as well as his opponents in the party as an organisation opposed to the old leadership which had entrenched themselves in the Muslim League Parliamentary Board. The leaders of the parliamentary party were always suspicious of Hashim's intentions. They were also quite conscious of the fact that the reorganisation and restructuring

of the Party would ultimately hit their own interests. Thus the dissention began and persisted throughout the pre-partition years.

One glaring fact that comes out of the study of the period is that, notwithstanding what Hashim did for the party, in the final analysis he seemed to be ineffective and indecisive in moments of crisis. Thus, though Hashim often used to fall back upon the organisation he created, he was never a real threat to the leaders like, Khwaja Nazimuddin or M.A.H. Ispahani who had hitherto controlled the Bengal Provincial Muslim League through their control over the Muslim League Parliamentary Party. They never had a mass base in Bengal and their politics was based ~~on~~ on their status and link with the All Indian Muslim League which made them follow Jinnah's course rather than charting their own way in provincial politics. What Hashim's efforts really did was to open up vistas for politicians who could muster a large popular support through the party (and not through Parliamentary Party). Hence the real benefit accrued to Suhrawardy who during 1941-43 had already begun organisation tours and with his already large following among the labour, emerged as the real threat to the parliamentary politicians. Hashim's efforts loosened the grip of the Nawab Family and the Calcutta businessmen over the party. Hence Suhrawardy was in a position to capture the leadership. However, his problems lay in his having not a very good rapport with the All Indian Leadership. This again heightened the dissentions within the party. His efforts to

chart an independent course was fought by the other group with full faith in the policies of All Indian Muslim League. This in turn at times forced Suhrawardy to make extra efforts to befriend the All Indian Muslim League leadership and he did so quite zealously which in the final analysis resulted in radicalisation of the communal overtones of the party and was reflected in the aggressive and violent communal riots. The tragedy of communal politics was that even this internal power struggle had to be fought at the cost of the 'other community.'

III

The Governor invited Khwaja Nazimuddin as the leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party to form a cabinet on 13 April 1943. This Ministry could hardly muster a majority and in reality, was a creation of the Governor who had forced A.K. Fazlul Huq to resign ostensibly to facilitate the formation of an all party cabinet.

Nazimuddin's formation of the cabinet coincided with Abul Hashim's tours and the famine. They affected each other. Famine had a debilitating effect on the teeming millions who flooded the big cities and quite a lot of them died of hunger. It also sharpened the class contradiction in the rural Bengal and especially in the Eastern part, where the distinction of classes coincided with differences of religion. *The contours of psychic reaction could easily be dictated in religious terms if any party wanted to do so.* Penetration of communal antipathy and the

communalism of the Muslim League used this period to penetrate the Bengali Society.

In March 1945 the Nazimuddin cabinet had to relinquish its power when it failed to secure legislative ratification for its agriculture Budget.

Technically the main 'culprits' were the 12 Muslim League legislatures who voted with the opposition.¹ However, the Muslim league leadership accused the Marwaris or the Hindu Baniyas for this act against the Muslim League Government. Thus a construction of a 'vicious other' was consciously attempted. The language also became quite 'threatening' suggestive of the aggressive overtones and hardening of the public stance by the league. This became quite evident from the speeches of prominent Muslim League leaders. Suhrawardy, while addressing the Calcutta hawkers and vendors Union, said: "Marwaris have challenged me to prove allegations of bribery with which they purchase some members off and defeat the Muslim League ministry."²

The twelve Muslim League members who voted against the party later came out with their statement blaming the cabinet for

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1. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, 4 Apr., 1945.
 2. Star of India, Calcutta, 7 Apr., 1946

acting against the given promises.¹ Their statement revealed signs of internal fissures in the party on the issue of the working of the cabinet and programme and policies of the party. On the other hand, the efforts to externalize these internal feuds by making scapegoats of the Hindu Baniya or Marwaris, expose the arguments that communal riots of 1945-47 were in reality popular protest or that communalism is an epistemic construction of the post enlightenment knowledge. Moreover, the imposition of guilt on 'the other' went well due to the situational realities : Bengal was passing through the acute cloth famine where again one could easily turn a tirade against the Hindu Baniya, etc.

1. "The 11 members who joined the opposition in voting were Nawab Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca, Md. Barat Ali, Shamsuddin Ahmed Choudhuri, Rajibuddin Tarafdar, A.M.A Zaman, Halim Ali, Hazi Safiruddin Ali, and Md. Mohsina Ali. Their statement said:

"Bengal lay prostrate and even today she is bleeding from the wounds inflicted on her by grossly corrupt and inefficient administration. Between the food crisis of 1943 and cloth famine of 1945 Bengal administration presented a sorry chapter of gloom and despair unrelieved by any ray of hope. On the top of these two crises, the doubling of sales tax, agriculture-income tax, indiscriminate and unjudicious distribution of contracts, patronage to relations and friends, nepotism and favouritism of a reprehensible character, bribery and corruption did constitute the ugly feature of the administration and did naturally put the greatest strain on our loyalty and patience. Yet we gave Nazimuddin a chance to mend matters before it was too late.

As early as the autumn session of 1944, 46 members of the Bengal Coalition party submitted a memorandum to Sir Nazimuddin for satisfactory solution of certain pressing doubts before the assembly was prorogued. Sir Nazimuddin took no action. Our demands were:

contd..

The political rhetoric of the League became more aggressive when the greater Calcutta League conference met. It declared that under no circumstances would an anti League ministry be tolerated.¹

(contd..)

1. That consideration and passing of the Secondary Education Bill be finished during the budget session of the Assembly.
2. That receipts of agricultural income tax for 1945-46 be earmarked for improvement of Nation-building departments.
3. That non-agricultural tenancy bill be pressed within the Budget session.
4. That immediate steps be taken to put into operation the recommendation of the flood commission regarding the permanent settlement.
5. That increment of salaries of parliamentary secretary and whips be brought before the party meeting and discussed.
6. That save and except the Chief Minister, all other Muslim members of the Cabinet and Parliamentary Secretary who happen to be members of the Provincial Muslim League Working Committee to forthwith resign from the said working committee.
7. Policy and performance of individual ministers be reviewed at party meeting.
8. Annual election of leader and deputy leader of the party,
9. Bengal coalition party be named as Bengal Muslim League Coalition Party.
10. Leader be authorised to reshuffle the cabinet.
11. Nomination in the local bodies be abolished.
12. Maximum price of jute be raised in the interest of agriculture much higher than that already fixed."

The Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, 21 Apr., 1946.

1. Star of India, Calcutta, 7 April 1945.

In the meantime, the All India Muslim League was carrying on its blocking tactics in the negotiations rounds, for settling the "Indian problem. "Wavel's invitation to the leaders and the subsequent Shimla Conference turned out to be a fiasco which only highlighted Muslim League's posture to be accorded the status of 'sole spokesman' of the Muslim community and thereby a status at par with the Congress, (which, it was implied, was to be accorded the status of the spokesman of the caste-Hindu population). The intrasigence of Jinnah was pampered by the Governor General who virtually gave Jinnah a power to veto over the entire talks. This enhanced Jinnah's prestige which already had a facelift during his talks with Gandhi in 1944.¹

Two quite unrelated events, meanwhile, took place. First, the new Labour Government in London took the initiative to have fresh elections to the Indian Legislatures- both central and provincial. Secondly, the post-war Bengali society saw a resurgence of strong anti imperialist sentiments culminating in the INA Day demonstration on 22 and 23 Nov. 1945. INA issue soon became a pointer to the fact that despite deep penetration of communal ideology there still was space and potential for anti imperial Nationalist upsurge which cut across religious and communal lines. On 22-23 November 1945, when the electioneering

1. Sir B. Glancy, Governor, Punjab to Field Marshall V. Wavell, "since Jinnah succeeding by his intrasigence in wrecking Simla Conference his stock has been very high with his followers and with a large section of Muslim population. He has been held as the champion of Islam." Mansergh, N., ed., Transfer of Power (hereafter TOP), vol VI, pp. 71-2

was still in progress, Calcutta saw the violent demonstrations by the students which was soon joined by the common people - against the Raj.

To the Muslim League, however, the Muslim participation in these demonstrations seemed dangerous for its politics. This was because the continued campaign of hate and exclusivity could still be broken on an anti imperialist front.

It could also see the strong anti-imperialist content in the whole episode which even the Bengal Governor was aware of.¹ Hence the fragility of the communal dividing lines in the face of anti-imperial upsurge was clear to the leaders who followed the 'two nation theory' based on mutually antagonistic interests. Thus any common struggle could easily have been fatal to the entire ideological basis of the League. Therefore, the league officially denounced the Muslim participation in the INA Day demonstrations.²

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1. Governor Cassey was impressed by the "very strong anti British feeling behind the whole demonstration" and consider the whole situation "very explosive and dangerous". Wavell to Pethick Lawrence, TOP Vol. VI, p. 553.
 2. The Calcutta league secretary, S.M. Usman's, statement ran: "The demonstration by the students and the Hindu public against INA trial has created a critical situation in Calcutta. Mobs are getting out of control and in some places the police is resorting to firing. It has been brought to my notice that Muslim league flags were also flying amongst the demonstration" He further stated, " I would like to inform the Muslim citizen of Calcutta that Muslim League has abstained from all such demonstration. The Muslim League flags among the demonstrators should not mislead the Muslim citizen of Calcutta. They should abstain from all such demonstration. They should not be even sightseers of such demonstration." Star of India, Cal., 22 Nov., 1946.

This united front of Hindus and Muslims, could also have been a threat to the coming election in which the ex-INA officers were either running or campaigning for either the Congress or the nationalist Muslims who were fighting the leauge candidates. Thus, both ideologically and politically, I.N.A. issue was a challenge to the Mulsim League in India and especially in Bengal where the 23th November demonstration had shown the potential for united people's front against colonial rule.

On the other wing of the Bengal stage the electioneering was in full swing. For the Muslim league in Bengal, the election of 1946 contained two prime issues - first, the election was a plebiscite for Pakistan and secondly, also related to the first, whether the Muslim League was the sole spokesman of the Muslims. The Election Manifesto that Abul Hashim issued, contained the entire 'rhetoric' and the mood of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. It brought to a finale the construction of an aggressive ideological standpoint chief ingredient of which was to paint the Muslims as "plain and blunt" who were not addicted to clever machinations" and thus finally to assert that the Muslims are midst of a war as the "General election was going to be the first pitched battle for Pakistan with enemies of Mulsim India."¹

The language of the Manifesto was a virtual invitation to the Muslims for a Jihad, though the economic content of it tried to hide the communal content. The words

1. LET US GO TO WAR, The Muslim League Manifesto. See Appx. 1.

'enemy', 'defensive', 'war' were indications to the fact that a war had really begun in which the Muslim League was an active participant.

The aggressive tone of the Manifesto was matched by the fascistic, terrorising tactics used by the Muslim League during the elections. The real motive behind the terrorising acts was to consolidate and close the Muslim ranks behind the Muslim League. To have 'internal solidity' of the Muslims, it attacked the Nationalist Muslims. This was effected in two ways. First, they were tried to be 'delegitimised' of their credentials of being the representatives of the Muslims. This was done by branding them as, 'not true Muslims' 'Kafirs' and 'agents of the Hindu' Congress and Mahasabha.

On the other hand, the League tried to terrorise them into silence. Thus, Bengal witnessed a wide spread phenomenon of attacks on the nationalist Muslims. Newspapers brought regular news of assault, breaking of meetings and even abduction of candidates. Humayun Kabir was assaulted,¹ Major Shahanawaj who was constantly attacked by the Muslim League press as a stooge of the congress, was assaulted in front of the Nakhoda Masjid until the Khaksars rescued him.² Habibur Rahman Chaudhuri, a non-league candidate from Kasba- burichang in Comilla, was kidnapped

1. Hindustan Standard, Calcutta, 12 January 1946.

2. Ibid, Calcutta, 28 January 1946, The Muslim Leaguers who attacked him, denounced INA and asked him to join the Muslim League.

by 100 hooligans near Salbandi Railway Station and was taken to Gaffargaon from where he was released after 8 days.¹ Non League candidate, Barat Ali, was also abducted and returned after 5 days.

Why these attacks on the Nationalist Muslims? There was an attempt to fight the Muslims League by some other Muslim Organisations. The initiative was taken by the Jamait-ul-Ulama, a strong opponenet of the League and its Pakistan theory. A conference of the all the non-Leauge Nationalist Muslim Organisations was called in Delhi on 18th September, 1945. They decided on a common policy to fight the elections against the Muslim Leauge. This was followed by another conference on 2 October, 1945, in Karachi where it was decided to present a common front against the Muslim League during the election and create a new political alternative for the Muslim masses in the provinces.²

Jinnah, on the other hand, had declared that the elections would be a plebiscite of the Muslims on Pakistan demand. Thus, presence of the Nationalist Muslims opposed to the Muslim League ideology, was, if not a threat, always an irritant.

1. Hindustan Standard, Calcutta, 4 March 1946.

2. "The decision to set up a Nationalist Muslim Parliamentary Board to select candidate and conduct the forthcoming elections was taken up by the Nationalist Muslim Conference at New Delhi on 18 September. The Board will consist of 21 member having 8 representative of Jamial-ul-ulema and Muslims Majlis, 3 of momin conference and Krishak Praja Party each, 2 of Anjuman Watan & 5 other parties. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani was elected Chairman of the Board." IAR, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 163-4.

Not only this, "any element which came in way of the League's efforts to organise the Muslims in opposition to the congress demand for a United India was countered with the construction of an exclusivist psyche. Hence the organisation of the Ulama, labour and the student became very important.

The November INA uprising had indicated that the student and the youth could be swayed by the anti-imperialist and national sentiments running counter to the Muslim League campaign. Though the students of Islamia College and those of the Backer Hostel of Calcutta and the students of the Dacca University were the chief ideological and organisational supporter of the Pakistan Movement in Bengal, it was the students of Islamia college who first joined the November demonstrations.¹

One may point to the fact that the Muslim League's Organisational efforts since 1943 were targetting the students with utmost care. In fact, it was quite a successful campaign despite the fact that even the League's student movement witnessed the same kind of infighting which marked the Provincial League.² The situation reached the extent that the All Bengal

1. Star of India, Cal., 24 Nov., 1945.

2. The Muslim leaders exhorted the Muslim students not to remain aloof from politics. They instead should take active part in it. Their emphasis, they said, should be on "educating the Muslim masses agitate for a Muslim University in Bengal and take steps for primary education." After 1945 gradually the students were asked to come directly into the Muslim League's aggressive politics. Moreover, Muslim students of Dacca and various other institutions most after instead of any anti-imperial struggle, gave seat to their feelings through demonstration against the singing of Vande Mataram, i.e., Dacca Students clash, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 1 Feb., 1945.

Muslim Students League (ABMSL) disaffiliated itself from the All India Muslim Students' Federation (AIMSF), the central organ of the Muslim League's students wing. However, as an all India activist, associated with the AIMS F, has written later that the Students though divided between the camps of Nasiruddin and Akram Khan and that of Abul Hashim, showed unflinching support for the Pakistan cause and the leadership of Jinnah.¹

Notwithstanding this dedication to the cause of Pakistan and that of a communal ideological stand, enough space existed for communist and nationalist ideological strands. Leaders quite often had to ask the students to shun the chimera of communism which they held was opposed to the Islamic concepts and especially that of the Islamic concept of Pakistan.² The leaders swearing allegiance to the central leadership of the Muslim League, were often heard speaking on these lines which easily betrayed their fear of radical politics and loss of leadership. However, as history of the period showed, the ideological pull of communalism proved stronger than any other strands and students quite enthusiastically supported the League

1. Zaman, Mukhtar, Students' Role in Pakistan Movement, Qaid-i-Azam Academy, Karachi, 1978.
2. Liaqat Ali Khan, while addressing the Bengal students said: "my young friend who believe that communism or through communism they will serve Pakistan are greatly mistaken. They may secure Pakistan of the conception of communism but they will not secure the Pakistan of Islamic Conception. Pakistan has no meaning for me if it is not of Islamic conception.

I warn you against the great danger of communism to Islam." He even equated a communist Muslim with Shivaji "I do not want any Muslim to come to the Muslim League received with open arms and then to play the part of Shivaji." Star of India, Cal., 12 May, 1945.

during the elections and the post election years. The labour, which had been for quite a few years, target of the Muslim League's organising efforts especially under Suhrawardy's 'White Unions', were again targetted in a reinvigorated form. The Jute mill workers and Railwaymen were sought to be organised under the banner of Muslim League Unions.¹ Here the Chief Contender were the communists.

However, the group which became a major target of Muslim League's Organisational activities and one of the main resource of Muslim League's penetrating efforts was the Ulama. In the elections, the Congress and especially the non-League Muslim candidates were being supported by the Jamait-ul-Ulama and its head Maulana Madani had been touring Bengal to make people aware of the absurdity of the claim of the Muslim League to represent the Muslims and that of the impracticality of the scheme of Pakistan. Muslim League, while its propoganda campaign targetted the Jamait as being an enemy agent.², and broke up its meeting,³

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1. The Railway Muslim League's first session was held at Lilloah on 23 April 1945 under the presidentship of Mr. S.M. Nauman (M.L.A.), Star of India, Cal., 3 May 1945.
 2. Hamidul Huq Choudhury addressing a meeting of the Noakhali Muslim League executive members, said: "Those Muslims whom the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha have been using against the league are now in real fright. They are running hither and thither for some support in search of some magic to decieve the masses. They are putting a garb - Jamait-ul-Ulama which is a branch organisation of the Congress. These are the people we are going to fight." Ibid., Cal., 20 Sept. 1945.
 3. There are innumerable references of breaking Jamait meetings even before the declaration of election took place, i.e., on 22 March 1945, the Jamait-ul-Ulama conference was broken up at University Institute Hall, "Amrita Bazar Patrika," Cal., 24 March 1945.

organised the Jamait-ul-Ulama-i-Islam in October as a counter to the Jamait-ul-ulema. Its first conference was held in Calcutta from 26 to 29 October 1945 "to mobilise forces of Islam for Pakistan and the renaissance of the Millat."¹ The objectives which were fixed for Jamait-ul-ulama-i-Islam quite clearly reflected the way a politically oriented religious appeal was launched. The objectives quite clearly spoke for themselves. First, to support Pakistan and the Muslim League and to fight for the Islamic Millat in India. Second, to guide, advise and help Muslim League in matters concerning the Islamic Shariat and religion fully respecting the recognised schools of Fig of the recognised Islamic sects. Third, to work for the protection and progress of Islamic culture and education, Islamic arts and science, Islamic traditions and institutions, social reforms and Tabligh-i-deen (propaganda of Islam). Fourth, to establish respect for *deen* and the *Ulama-i-Deen* who were the teachers and expounders of Islamic laws and culture.

Fifth, to work for the establishment of the complete system and order of Islamic-Shariat-Nizam-i-Shariat and the supremacy of the laws of Islam's, and particularly to struggle for the following statutory institutions in Hindustan and Pakistan. Qazi Courts with power and authority to administer Islamic laws concerning Muslims respecting the FIQ schools of all recognised Muslim sects; Shaikul islam; Great Mufti; Baitul Mal;

1. Star of India, Cal., 5 Oct. 1945.

Majlis-i-ulama - a statutory council of expert ulema and Mujtahids to guide and advise legislatures and Muslims in general on matters concerning holy Shariat and Islamic culture.¹

It becomes clear from the objectives that the conference was organised to complete the Muslim League's efforts to be seen as the representative of Islam and Muslims and their socio-cultural-political destiny. In fact, the statement of the Bengal Muslim League President, while opening the conference, summed up this objective. Maulana Akram Khan said : "As one of the founders of the Jamait-ul-Ulama-i-hind, Delhi, I wholeheartedly welcome the first session, of the newly formed All India Jamait-ul-ulama-i-Islam in the capital of Islamic Pakistan."²

The resolution passed in the conference in fact pointed to the idea discussed above, i.e., a solid Islamic unity behind the Muslim League. The resolution asked, Muslims of Bengal to sink their differences."³ Why should they sink their differences? The answer came from the rhetoric of Maulana Azad Subhani, a respected Leaguer, who said: "we are weak, we are being beaten, crushed, destroyed but there is a spark which burns, an inspiration which shivers through our frame the

1. Ibid., 5 Oct. 1945.

2. Ibid., 24 Oct. 1945.

3. Ibid., 29 Oct. 1945.

unmistakable signs of our revival - a supreme renaissance the time is not far when Muslim nation will rise."¹ In fact the period witnessed a radical change in the rhetoric used which now abounded with words such as 'enemy' and 'war'. One of the best exposition of the theme came from Lt. Col. Hussain Suhrawardy who, while speaking at Pakistan club, identified Muslim League's fight with the fight of the Muslims and asked Muslims to "suffer as an enemy Nation suffering to get freedom."²

Thus a total identification was sought to be constructed between the Muslims, the Muslim League and the interests of the Muslims. The election of the 1946, as we have already seen, was presented as the finale of this identification where the interests of the Muslim Nation would be satisfied with the creation of a Nation state called Pakistan.

The electioneering, while witnessing attempts at creation of a United Muslim front, at the same time, was presenting a villified 'other front' - the Hindu front which was the 'oppressor' and 'enemy'. The election was presented as the first battle against that enemy. The logic of separate electorate came into play its own role as the Muslim League had to fight the Non-League and Nationalist Muslims only. The villified 'other' - the Hindu was enemy but what to do with the non-League Muslims and the Nationalist Muslims. They were branded as the agents of the Hindus. The game was clear - Muslims had to fight it out with

1. Ibid., 27 Oct. 1945.

2. Ibid., 30 March, 1945.

these agents by forming a solid front and then they would take on the Hindus.

Any united front of the Hindus and the Muslims was dangerous too this strategy. In its bid to destroy the possibility and potential of any such united front, the Muslim League, after the experience of the November disturbances, began to paint the I.N.A. as communal. This was proved to be a double edged effort. First, it could blunt the edge of INA leaders like Sahanawaj's anti League stance; and, secondly, by delegitimising I.N.A. of its secular credentials, the League could easily play upon the communal element it itself had been propagating. Observance of 'Rashid Ali Day' on February 12 may be seen in this context.

The Muslim League press distorted and presented Capt. Rashid Ali's statements and soon made him the centre of Muslim League's supposedly anti-colonial agitation. The newspapers printed Rashid Ali as saying : "I joined Indian National Army to protect Muslim interests." He was further said to have stated, "I was cut off from the world, I was convinced that non-Muslims who were the moving spirit in the I.N.A. were going to invade India with the help of the Japanese. I was convinced that this would result in domination of India by the Non-Muslims and Japanese. In order to safeguard the interest of my community, I decided like most of other Muslims to join the I.N.A. in order to

arm myself and thus be in a position to safeguard the interest of my community in India."¹

To add to it, a sustained campaign was initiated to give communal colour even to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose who was branded as communal because "he did not have any Muslims in his Cabinet."² Thus people like Shahnawaz were declared to be flying under false colours and the League now decided to organise Capt. Rashid Ali Day.³ This saw Calcutta again in the mood for an upsurge.

On 11 Feb. 1946 the Muslim Students League (MSL) gave a call for students' general strike in Calcutta demanding the release of Capt. Rashid Ali. The All India students Federation (AISF) supported this call. Next day a students' procession marched towards Dalhousie Square. The procession, composed of Hindu and Muslim Students started from Wellington Square. The procession soon became the focal point for people to give vent to their anti-Imperialist feelings; and Calcutta was soon paralysed with public transport completely stopped, barricades thrown up at

1. Ibid, Cal., 26 Jan. 1946.

2. Ibid, 13 Feb. 1946.

3. Ibid. It wrote : "I.N.A. aimed at Ram Rajya, Muslim excluded from position of Trust. Thus Shahnawaz is false in saying I.N.A. was a secular front."

all major street crossings and finally, around four lakh people shouting "Hindus and Muslims unite" and down with imperialism slogans, marched towards Dalhousie Square after being addressed by H.S. Suhrawardy, Satish Ch. Dasgupta, Somnath Lahiri and Moazzen Hossain.¹

The destabilising demonstration of Rashid Ali Day, however, soon became a point of controversy. Historians blame the leaders for not coming into an agreement when the people were in a mood for a united national fight against imperialism.² But then one has to keep in mind the fact that this demonstration was started and organised on the basis of a fractured and divisive heritage - that I.N.A. was communal and Rashid Ali was more of a Muslim hero fighting for the cause of the community than a national hero. Even the most staunch supporter of the unity proposals, i.e., the communist were quite hesitant as they recognised this communal overtone.³

Whatever the other implication of this demonstration might have been, it certainly had added to League's prestige. The demonstration caught the imagination of the Muslim masses in Bengal, who for the first time in post-war era could vent their anti-imperialist feelings. Amidst all these, however, the

1. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 13 Feb. 1946. See also Chattopadhyay, Gautam, Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle, ICHR, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 201-2

2. Chattopadhyay, G., op.cit., p. 203.

3. Sengupta, A., Uttal Challis Asamapta Biplab (Tumultuous Forties - Unfinished Revolution) Pearl Publishers, Calcutta, 1989, p. 82.

sharpening communal overtones was a parallel political stream that the Bengal society was witnessing. Muslims were asked to sink their differences because, as the Muslim leaders had said, the political enemy of the Muslims "had declared war against Muslim aspirations."¹ Similarly, in Calcutta and surrounding areas, a victory celebration on 11 January 1946 was organised to pray for the victory in the ensuing elections.²

The Muslim League issued detailed directions for the celebrations;

- "1. Special thanks giving prayers for the success achieved and for the cent per cent success in the coming elections;
2. Meetings in the Central Mosques to be held, the printed message of the Calcutta Muslim League to be read out;
3. Charchanai - illumination of the Muslim houses;
4. Muslims of Howrah, Calcutta, Metiaburuj, 24 Paraganas should make house to house collection for the Muslim League Election Fund;
5. Muslim League broadcasting centres will be opened where National poems of Pakistan will be read out."³

The 'celebrations' and the way the Bengal Provincial League thought of observing it, gives us a clue to the later events. It is not just a coincidence that some of the worse

1. Let us go to war. See Appendix I.
2. Star of India, Cal., 9 Jan. 1946.
3. Star of India, Cal., 9 Jan. 1946.

affected areas during Calcutta riots of August 1946, i.e., Metiaburuz, Howrah, 24 Paragnas, etc., were also the areas where the Calcutta Muslim League concentrated on 'celebrating' and campaigning for election funds.

In these circumstances and created situations, the elections took place. As expected in the political circles, the Muslim League swept the Muslim seats validating its position as the 'sole spokesman' of the Muslims. Its rivals, the Krishak Praja Party and the Nationalist Muslims were routed. On 3 April the Governor invited Suhrawardy to form the Cabinet who after the initial hobnobbing with Congress leader Kiran Shankar Roy, finally constituted the Muslim League Cabinet.

IV

The elections of 1945-46 was, from the Muslim League point of view the final battle for Pakistan. It succeeded in the battle. In the elections for Bengal Assembly, it won 113 seats as compared to 3 by the Krishak Praja Party. Nationalist Muslims did worse. It failed to gain any seat. A detailed analysis of sectoral votes would show the extent of penetration of the League in rural areas where the Krishak Praja Party had an edge in the previous election of 1937. The table below shows the votes polled by different parties in the 1946 elections for Provincial Legislature.

Table I

1945-46 Elections

	No. of votes polled	% of votes	No. of Muslim votes polled		% of Muslim votes	
			Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Congress	2,337,053	42.2	-	11,759	-	0.5
Muslim League	2,057,830	37.2	(n-a)	205,805	95	89.6
KPP and Nationalist Muslims	2,72,880	3.1	713	-	2.7	7.1
Hindu Mahasabha	78,981	1.4	-	-	-	-
Communists	7,36,883	13.83	556	-	2.2	7.7
Pro-League Muslims	1,57,197	2.8	-	-	-	0.1

Source : Return showing the Results of Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Legislatures in 1945-46, New Delhi, Government of India Press, 1948.

The table clearly shows that the penetration of Muslim League in rural areas was almost complete. Thus the period took a qualitative turn as regards the Pre 1937 period was concerned when Muslim League was still confined to the urban areas. This could be easily seen if we compare the sectoral votes that the Muslim League and Krishak Praja Party polled.

Table II : 1937 Elections

	% of Total Muslim votes polled	% of Urban Muslim votes	% of Rural Muslim votes
Muslim League	27.10	61.47	26.52
Krishak Praja Party	15.39	31.78	31.5

Source : Return Showing the results of Elections in India, 1937, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1937 as quoted in Momen, Humaira, Muslim Politics in Bengal, A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937, Sunny House, Dacca, 1972, pp. 63-4.

Thus, from a meagre 26.52% in 1937, Muslim League increased its votes in rural areas to 84.6%. This in a way sounded the death-knell of Krishak Praja Party. This also vindicated Abul Hashem's efforts at making the party broad based and giving it a new orientation. But what was more important was the fact that the Elections of 1946, as we have seen, were fought on extreme communal lines. Thus the mild communal orientation of Krishak Party lost its sway to the extreme communal rhetoric and politics of Muslim League. Henceforth, Muslim League was to be the sole arbiter of the destiny of Bengali Muslims while the fascist tactics and Limited Franchise kept at margin lot of other voices which had been visualising the destiny of the Muslims quite differently.

Despite this resounding victory, the Muslim League did not have an absolute majority in the Bengal assembly and

Suhrawardy, once called upon to form the Cabinet, met both Maulana Azad, the then Congress President, and Kiron Shankar Roy, the leader of the Bengal Congress Assembly Party, from April 11 to April 14. The Congress Working Committee set up the guidelines for Roy's talks with Suhrawardy. They were :

- "1. Barring the Premier, the number of Ministers from the Congress and the League parties must be equal;
2. either the Home or the Civil Supplies portfolio must be allotted to a Congress minister;
3. an anti-corruption Board must be established;
4. all categories of political prisoners, convicted or otherwise, should be relaxed;
5. comprehensive steps for ameliorating the hardship of the masses in response of cloth and food storage should be taken.
6. there should be no introduction of any communal legislation of a controversial nature without mutual agreement."¹

The talks for a coalition ministry finally broke down as the League could not agree either to equal number of Minister or to give Home portfolio to the Congress. The 'political prisoners issue' was also problematic for the League.

Kiran Shankar Roy, on the other hand, came out with the statement that he would like to made it clear that there was no ideological bar to the Congress party co-operating with the Muslim League provided the issue of Pakistan was kept out of the

1. The Statesman, Cal. 15 Apr. 1946, as quoted in Chattopadhyay, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

Provincial politics.¹ However a critical perusal shows that the Congress was not very keen on joining the Cabinet, nor was the All India Muslim League in taking it in. However the same cannot be said about Suhrawardy. Historians of the period are of the opinion that he wanted League-Congress coalition quite seriously.² But why? Here I think Suhrawardy was motivated by the idea of a greater Bengal. In his meeting with the Cabinet Mission he had demanded a "Redistribution of boundaries of Bengal so as to include Jharkhand State, Singhbhum, Manbhum and Santhal Paragana."³ In quite the same vein, he said later that "the question before the country now was one of Pakistan and Hindustan. Once this was conceded it would be for the Pak State to define the status of its constituent unity." The unity, he added, should so far as possible be workable unity and should conform to the conditions of "linguistic and cultural affinities."⁴

He was, even at this point, conscious of the communal divide of the province and anticipated the demand for the partitioning of the province. He had said, "Bengal ought not to be dismembered and I believe that my Hindu friends also would like Bengal to remain one entity."⁵

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1. STAR OF INDIA, Cal., 23 Apr. 1946.
 2. Chattopadhyay, G., op.cit., 205.
 3. STAR OF INDIA, 10 Apr. 1946.
 4. Ibid., 12 Apr. 1946.
 5. Ibid.

One may point here, at this juncture, to the Muslim League's and especially Suhrawardy's support to the Tribals demand for a separate Jharkhand State neighbouring Bengal²⁵ Muslim League's policy of using all divisive avenues included this particular issue. It not only supported the cause of the Jharkhand, but even effectively campaigned for the Scheduled Caste organisations' demands.¹ From the beginning of 1945 we encounter Muslim League actively supporting the President of Scheduled Caste Federation, P.N. Rajabhoj's diatribe against the Congress.² This, I believe, was done in part to divert the Congress energies. It is equally important that in East Bengal, i.e., Faridpur district, etc., the Federation had organised support to the Muslim League.

On similar lines, the Jharkhand demand was also supported. Here Subhrawardy came out quite actively to help Jaipal Singh, the President of the Adivasi Mahasaabha, to address public meeting alongwith the Muslim League. He even formed the League-Jharkhand Friendship Council on Feb. 1946, which was called Jharkhand-Pakistan conference.³

1. From the beginnong of 1945 (and even earlier) the League leaders supported Scheduled Caste Federations' demand for a communal settlement where Scheduled Caste also would be given share of separate Communal representation, Rajabhoj's statement were given prominence in this regard. For example, "Scheduled Caste people are not Hindus," said Rajabhoj, who criticising Gandhi said that "it is only through potential power and not through social and religious ways that Questions of Scheduled Caste will be solved." Star Of India, 17 Jan. 1945.

2. Ibid., 25 Feb. 1946

3. Ibid.

Now, at this juncture, Suhrawardy anticipated a demand for the division of Bengal. He, therefore, wanted the Muslim League's reach to extend to the other flank of the West Bengal so that he could utilise this friendly base in case a demand for partition would come. Therefore, the support to Jharkhand was basically a counter move to check any future demand for partitioning of the province. This reasoning emerges from the incongruities in Suhrawardy's technical as well as ideological stands on the Jharkhand issue. On the one hand, he supported Jharkhand, on the other, he wanted it inside Bengal. Again he was supporting a separate Jharkhand state while simultaneously demanding cultural and linguistic affinities should be recognised and therefore "in case Jharkhand state is not carved out then Bengali section he added to Pakistan."¹

It becomes clear, then, that the plan for including the whole of Bengal into Pakistan had already existed with Suhrawardy and his move to bring the Congress into the Cabinet was a tactical move to forestall any counter moves and also to build a joint front against the partition of Bengal.

Suhrawardy finally formed his Cabinet on 23 April and thus began the last Muslim League Ministry in pre-partition Bengal.

During the Election process, League propaganda and rhetoric as well as the methods adopted by it had substantially

1. Ibid., 12 Feb. 1946.

vitiated the communal situation in Bengal. There was a sharp deterioration in the law and order situation especially in eastern Bengal¹. The declining state of law and order situation in the Eastern Bengal was intimately connected with the growing communal aggressiveness taking the forms of dacoity, burglary, abduction, etc.² The communalisation of the already surcharged atmosphere was again attempted during this time by the Muslim League by taking up the case of eviction of the illegal immigrants from Assam. The preponderance of the Muslim among the immigrants and the presence of a Congress Ministry was very convenient for the Bengal Muslim League to colour the entire episode as a drive against the Muslims.³ The campaign was launched in a massive way by the League and it even thought of taking Direct Action against the evictors who, according to the terminology of the League leaders, were the Congress and the Mahasabha people. The issue raised a lot of passions in Bengal.⁴

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1. See for example, Newspaper reports that "there has been an increase in the robbery in trains in Dacca-Bhairav Sector." Hindustan Standard, Cal., 5 January, 1946.
 2. By March 1946 the pattern of robberies becomes clear. A Newspaper reported, "Goondaism in Bhairav sector is increasing. One feature of these robberies is that generally Hindu passengers have to bear the burnt of the depredation of these gangsters and Muslim passengers are left untouched. It must be recalled that Bhairav bazar was the area where the great devastation took place in 1941." Ibid, 4 March 1946. Similarly in Madaripur "Muslim League volunteers defiled the National flag and portrait of Netaji" Ibid, 1 Feb. 1946; while in Chittagong the famous "CHANDRANATH TEMPLE was desecrated", Ibid, 17 May 1946.
 3. STAR OF INDIA, Cal. 2 May 1945.
 4. Ibid. 2 July 1946.

But while this was going on in Bengal, on the central stage an entirely different act was being played upon. Cabinet Mission deliberations finally concluded resulting in the announcement of the 'Draft Plan' on May 16. The Mission criticising the Pakistan plan as impractical and unable to solve the communal problems, suggested instead, a loose federation with three major groupings of provinces. Sufficient autonomy was granted for the groupings.

Though the Muslim League did not like criticism of the Pakistan proposal, it welcomed the grouping system which it said would form the basis of Pakistan. It then accepted the scheme on June 6, 1946.

However, the League soon retracted from its position when it became clear that the British Government would not sacrifice the Congress for the sake of the League. It termed the Cabinet Delegation as a betrayal by the British. This "betrayal" was made the cause for the Muslim League to resort to "Direct Action". All India Muslim League, in its council meeting at Bombay on 27-29 July 1946, passed two resolutions. The first rejected the Cabinet Mission plan and, by the second, it resolved to resort to Direct Action to achieve Pakistan. The second resolution said ;

Whereas the council of the All India Muslim League has resolved to reject the proposals embodied in the statement of the Cabinet delegation and the Viceroy dated 16th May 1946 due to the intransigence of the Congress on one hand; and the breach of faith with the Muslims on the other; and whereas Muslim India has exhausted without success all

efforts to find a peaceful solution of the Indian problem by compromise and constitutional means; and whereas the congress is bent upon setting up of caste-Hindu Raj in India with the connivance of the British; and whereas the recent events have shown that power politics and not justice and fairplay are the deciding factors in Indian affairs and whereas it has become abundantly clear that the Muslims of India would not rest contented with anything less than the immediate establishment of independent and fully sovereign state of Pakistan and would resist any attempt to impose any constitution making machinery or any constitution, long term or short term or the setting up of any interim Government at the centre without the approval and consent of the Muslim League; Council of the All India Muslim League is convinced that now the time has come for the Muslim Nation to resort to Direct Action to achieve Pakistan to assert their just rights, to vindicate their honour and to get rid of present British slavery and the contemplated future caste-Hindu domination.

To make this effective, the working committee of the Muslim League declared 16 August as "Direct Action Day" and instructed the Muslims to "suspend all business on the 16th of August and observe complete Hartal" and directed the provincial district Leagues to "hold public meetings throughout the country on Friday" in order to explain the two resolutions to the Muslims.

The call for the Direct Action Day was taken up quite zealously by the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the Day witnessed the aggressive character of the communal passions that had been accumulating in society during the past. Evidence

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1. Resolution No. 2 passed at the meeting of Council of ALL INDIA MUSLIM LEAGUE on 29 July 1946 cited in Sen, Shila, op.cit, p. 210.

suggests that the aggressive manifestation of the Direct Action Day were not simply an organised affair by the League. Before such an organised action played havoc with society, the society had already been divided virtically and the League's race was to provide apart from the wherewithal for organised outlet of the communal outburst, ideological sustenance to this divide. Direct Action Day rioting which resulted in the worst communal carnage in Calcutta was in fact violent manifestation of the ideological communal divide of Bengali society.

Soon the other parts of the province were to divulge this fact. For example in Chittagong, the Hindus passed a "restless day". A letter from a Chittagong resident informed that Hindus were so panic stricken that a large portion of them had left the town". "On the 17th Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia came to this town and his meeting was disturbed by the Muslim League processionists." If further said that the Hindus were being stabbed here and there".¹ The News came in from other quarters also but Calcutta was the epicentre of the disturbances. It looks now from a chronological distance, that Calcutta was preparing herself for this communal holocaust. The way intense communal propaganda had been carried on its heart, it was but natural that the city would have exploded sooner or later. The city was the hub of the entire electioneering activities/campaign

1. A letter from Chittagong to Dr. Shyama Prosad Mukherjee, S.P. Mukherjee Papers, Sub File No. 151, p. 111.

and the intense communal feeling generated there of.² Calcutta riot has recently been studied thoroughly by Suranjan Das who has brought out the fact that the riot started as a planned confrontation as the 'parties, i.e., the Hindus and the Muslims, were preparing themselves for it'.

Calcutta riot from one point of view shows other facades of the League's politics. On the eve of the Direct Action Day we find that the charge and direction of the observance of the Direct Action Day had been vested on the Calcutta District Muslim League³ and hence the Bengal provincial Muslim League was not very much aware of the preparations being made. This may be the reason why Abul Hashim, one of the stalwarts of the party, said later that he took his children with him to the Maidan where the meeting was scheduled to be held.⁴ To substantiate our argument we find that the areas assigned to

2. The pamphlets issued just before the Direct Action Day, by the Calcutta District League's Secretary S.M. Usman bears this out. For example, in one of his pamphlet he gave enough indication of the impending danger; "In this month of Ramzan, the first open war between Islam and Kafirs started and Mussalmans got the permission to wage Jihad... and Islam secured a splendid victory.. according to wishes of God, the All India Muslim League has chosen this sacred month for launching this Jihad for achieving Pakistan." English Translation of an urdu Pamphlet published by Usman, Modern Review, Calcutta, Sept. 1946, p.170.

3. Star of India, Cal. 9 Aug. 1946.

4. Hashim, Abul, op. cit., p. 105.

the Calcutta District League for organising the victory celebrations in January and later on for organising people for Direct Action Day were the spots where the trouble really occurred. The areas were 'Howrah, Hooghly, Metiaburuz and 24 Paraganas'.¹ On this circumstantial evidence, the Calcutta District Muslim League stands convicted for the riotings.

Again, the Calcutta District Muslim League under the control of the non-Bengali Muslims and business class of Calcutta who supported the politics of the All India Muslim League and were the traditional loyalist supporters of M.A.H. Ispahani and Nazimuddin section of the Provincial League.

The Calcutta District Muslim League's preparations for the Direct Action were elaborate. Secretary of the Calcutta District League published Munajat to be read out in Mosques. One of them read: "Muslims must remember that it was in Ramjan that the permission for Jihad was granted by Allah, it was in Ramjan that the battle of Badr - the first between Islam and heathenism was fought and won by 313 Muslims and again it was in holy Ramjan that 10,000 Muslims under holy prophet conquered Mecca and established the kingdom of heaven and the commonwealth of Islam in Arabia. Muslim League is fortunate that it is starting its

1. Star Of India, 9 Aug. 1946.

fight on this month...."¹

Thus Direct Action no longer remained a political fight but was rather elevated to the pedestal of a fight between "the Muslims" and "the heathen", it became a jihad - a sentiment which had echoed in the League Meetings earlier in July when the resolution to observe the Direct Action Day was passed.

Calcutta District Muslim League was working in close cooperation with the Muslim National Guards which again was under the direct supervision of the All India Muslim League and which suddenly became very active in the province from the beginning of July, when it started its training camps for its cadres. On August 2, it began its preparation for the Direct Action. It is quite evident that the National Guard was also working very closely with Nizamuddin and Akram Khan.

The directives as to how the Direct Action Day was to be observed came from the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League which was presided over by Khwaja Nazimuddin. The directives asked people to

1. Star of India, Cal., 9 Aug., 1946. Similar pamphlets were also circulated. For example, 'By the grace of God, we ten crores in India, through bad luck have become slaves of the Hindus, and the British, we are starting a jihad in your names in this very months of Ramjan. We promise before you that we entirely depend on you. Make us victorious over the Kafirs, enable us to establish the kingdom of Islam in India.' Extract from a pamphlet containing a special prayer for Jihad, issued by S.M. Usman, Let Pakistan Speak For Itself, Information & Broadcasting Ministry, Government of India, New Delhi (1947) p. 6, cited in Sen, Shila, op.cit., p. 213.

1. observe complete Hartal and general strike everywhere,
2. to explain and reiterate the resolution of the League Council about Direct Action before the congregation in all mosques before the jumma prayer;
3. to offer Munajat for the freedom of the Muslim India, Muslims of the world and for the people in general;
4. to hold peaceful procession and demonstration;
5. to hold open air meeting and to reiterate the full support for the League Council resolution;
6. to request all other parties to observe complete Hartal on that date and to take part in the demonstrations but the request must be made in peaceful manner.¹

These instructions were no indication to the violence that was to descend on Calcutta on 16 August 1946. However the 'construction of the other' was also complete as the pamphlets of Calcutta Muslim League had indicated. This was added to the already mobilised people. Whether there was any counter mobilisation going on the Hindu front will be discussed in subsequent chapter, but the fact remains that when Calcutta erupted an Anglo Indian newspaper had to describe it as the Great Calcutta killings.

An ICS officer intimately connected with the period says, "we had gone about wearing iodine masks for three days and nights preceeding this visit (visit of the Youemur General Lord

1. Star Of India, Cal. 8 Aug., 1946.

Wavel) and picked up from the street 5,869 dead bodies, whole and mutilated, and disposed of them through Mass burials and cremations."¹

The fact that the hooligans and even common people were well equipped with deadly weapons, and that the entire affair was well arranged was born out by the reports of the on the spot correspondents as well as the accounts given by eye witnesses."²

Tarashankar Banerjee, the Nadia District Congress Committee President, describing his experience on his arrival at the Sealdah Railway Station on that eventful day, said :

"the elaborate arrangements I found in front of the station on the day of the proposed Direct Action could by no means be construed as meant for peaceful observance of the day, as meant for peaceful observance of the day, nor could they be described as a full fledged armed action against imperialism. A crowd of over one thousand fanatics armed with big lathis, drawn daggers, iron rods and house breaking implements and shouting slogans like "Larke Lenge Pakistan" and "Muslim League Zindabad" had collected at the road crossing and breaking heads of passers by of other community."³

1. Mathur, P.S. "The great Calcutta killings" in Illustrated Weekly Of India, Bombay 19 Aug. 1973, p. 47.

2. For detailed study of the composition of the rioting crowd and the other items of 'the violence' that is associated with the Calcutta Riot, See Das, Suranjan, op.cit., pp. 161-192.

3. IAR, 1946, Vol. II, p. 182.

Very soon the entire North and Central Calcutta became the scenes of civil war. Report from Kidderpore, Metiaburuz, Howrah were also not good.¹ It took five days to quench the fire of this, what the joint appeal of the Bengal leaders called, "Fratricidal War."²

The Kidderpore area and especially the Metiaburz, were the scenes of utmost cruelty. Busteas were wiped off and loss of life here alone amounted to 600 according to the lowest available figure. But at the same time near the Kesoram Mills of the Birlas, sources reveal, around 500 Oriya workers were brutally killed which forced the Orissa Chief Minister to come over to Calcutta to enquire about the events.³

The killings of the Oriya workers brings out an element of the communal ideology which though ubiquitous, as far as communalism is concerned, goes unnoticed. This is the idea of revenge which is transferred irrespective of context.

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1. Files containing reports on 'violence, police actions and actions taken by various departments during and after the riot are available in West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta. See Home (Political) Deptt. Confidential File Nos. 351/46 Part B; 351/46 Part B, 1-XI; Report on the Muslim Hindu conflict in Calcutta on Direct Action Day' No. File No. 1946; Diary of events of Eastern Command Intelligence Centre from 16th August to 20th August' No. File No. 1946. Recently Suranjan Das has done a comprehensive work based on Report of police and the Calcutta Disturbances Enquiry Commission Report, See Das, op.cit., pp. 161-190.
 2. Sengupta, A., op.cit., p.188.
 3. Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry, Minutes of evidence, No. II, p. 28. Reports of DMS of Howrah and 24 Paragana as quoted in Das op.cit., p. 175.

On January 7, 1946, the Provincial Labour Unit stationed at Chittagong attacked the villagers of Kasaipara and killed a few people and set houses on fire after some personnel of the corps had been attacked by the villagers when he tried to molest a woman Surujjueval wife of Bidgha Mian of Kashipara.¹

Congress and all other political parties and people rose against it and Bengal society felt outraged at this barbarity but Muslim League attempted to give it a purely Muslim colour. So that, it seems, it could help it villifying 'the other' a bit more.

Report etc., soon came that the Chittagong unit of the Provincial labour unit was from Ganjam (Orissa). Since Muslim League media was already making it a Muslim cause.² They publicised it and soon during the Calcutta riots workers from Orissa were killed brutally. This may be cited as an example of transference of vengence and hate in a communally divided society.

There were also attacks on non-League Muslims during this riot. They became victims of the communally charged

1. Report of Chittagong District Congress Committee, Secretary Mr. Baroda Prasana Nandy, 16 Jan. 1946, All India Congress Committee papers, File No. P-5 (Pt-I).
2. Akram Khan issued a statement after the incident saying that the 'Muslims were aggrieved and demand punishment'. Ananda Bazar Patrika, Cal., 15 Jan. 1946. Muslim League instituted an Enquiry Committee under Habibullah Bahar and observed Jan. 15 as the Chittagong Day. Star of India, 16 Jan. 1946.

aggression. One of the worst sufferers was Syed Nausher Ali, who had been offending the League since long. "I distinctly remember," he said, "that four or five days before August 16 a number of people went past my house at about 3.30 crying "Finish Nausher Ali, enemy of the community. I had heard similar slogans previously also. Reports of similar speeches and meetings reached me and I was warned by some friends against apprehended danger."¹ He was finally rescued by the police and when on 24th October he could return with military pockets, he found his house in a devastating condition with Muslim League flag hoisted at the top and a notice at the gate saying 'Muslim League office.'²

Unlike the transference of vengeance on the Oriya Labourers because of the micro identity affinities (Ganjam corps and Metiaburuz workers both having Oriya identities), Syed Nausher Ali was a direct offender - he had forced the Nazimuddin Ministry out by giving his now famous Speaker's ruling.

V

Calcutta has given indication that the life of two communities had drifted beyond repair. Now the time was for the rural Bengal to reveal the fact that the Muslim League as well as the ideology and politics associated with it, had influenced even the rural psyche.

1. IAR, 1946, Vol. II, P. 182.

2. Ibid.

Rumours played quite an important role as the 'Massacre of Muslims' or 'Molestation of Muslim girls' were transpired to the people through media.¹ However, rumours did not become the cause of the rioting that began in Noakhali but rather they became the elements which helped the local politicians to fan the communal fire. Noakhali-Tipperā riots provided the best example of this. According to a recent author, the Noakhali-Tipperā riots were unique in being deliberately organised by an individual with patronage from the world of organised politics. However, because of strengthened communal identities, the riot evoked considerable local support once it began."²

The District of Noakhali is a narrow strip of land 55 miles long and 22 miles broad lying along the Bay of Bengal. It also included a large number of islands situated in the Bay. Noakhali had been a fighting ground of Muslims politics since 1941. The political tussle between the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party leader Fazlul Huq resulted in the Muslim League workers beginning a trade against the Hindus. This was in order to gain the leadership of the Muslim masses. The kind of animosity that had been prevailing between the Muslim League and Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party can be gleaned through the official description of the situation. It says: "On 10 Jan. 1942 Nazimuddin and his colleagues went to Noakhali where a black flag

1. See Satyabarta, Noakhali, 22, 23 August 1946.

2. Das Suranjan, op. cit., p. 192.

demonstration against them was organised by some people. The volunteers of Muslim League under the leadership of Maulavi Mujibur Rahman, Secretary Noakhali District League tried to snatch the black flag... As a retaliation, when the Chief Minister (Fazlul Huq) went to Noakhali the Students and Muslim League Members behaved disgracefully. Maulavi Mujibur Rahman issued an objectionable leaflet which was a political squilo attacking the coalition party."¹

This report graphically represents the situation prevailing in Noakhali Muslim Politics where the space for leadership was attempted to be occupied by the Muslim League either by criticising the Krishak Praja Party or the Ministry of Huq. The 'modus operandi' through which the criticism was done, was manouvred in such a manner as to radicalise the rhetoric against the Hindus. Muslim League, though not in the office, had

As a perusal, we have the District Magistrate's letter of 4 Feb. 1942 saying "Suhrawardy visited Noakhali in this connection and represented about the police action against Muslim League Members. "He then accused me of taking strong action against the Muslim League leaders of this place and said that he had a discussion with the Governor about them. I told them that action had been taken in the district where necessary as the local leaders of Muslim League were propagating class hatred and

1. Government Of Bengal, Home Political File 96/42.

communal passion in connection with their propaganda. He said that the policy of the Muslim League was not to quarrel with the Hindus and that all their quarrel was with Fazlul Huq. I told him that if it was so, why did Sir Nazimuddin allow Khan Bahadur Abdul Gafoor, the President of District League, to make a highly communal speech. I also mentioned him that Secretary of District Muslim League Maulavi Mujibur Rahman Mukhtar had issued highly inflammatory pamphlets attacking not merely the Hon. Chief Minister but the Hindu religion, Hindu culture and Hindu society. Suhrawardy had then to admit that these leaders had gone to some excess."¹

The Muslim League received, if not the tacit support, at least an attitude of favourable leniency from the permanent officials. This made even the Chief Minister to complain about the attitude of the permanent bureaucracy.² However what was also important was that Fazlul

1. D.O. C. 217C, dated 4 February 1942, from J.N. Mitra, District Magistrate to O.M. Martin, Commissioner, Chittagong, Government of Bengal, Home Political, File 96/42.

2. "I know that officials are league minded and I do not mind saying so very frankly to you "I wrote Fazlul Huq to the Chief Secretary. He continued: "But as a Minister in charge of the Home Department, I have had to resent very much the manner in which my administration is being flouted by even responsible officers. I am not making this remark on account of what had happened at Noakhali but this is my general impression."

Government of Bengal, Home Political, File No. 378/42, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dacca as quoted by Sen, Shila, op.cit., p. 272

Huq was quite conscious of the fact that the Muslim League was carrying a strong anti-Hindu communal tirade in its fight against him. "During the last seven months the leaders of the Muslim League", wrote Fazlul Huq, "have had the greatest latitude in carrying on their propaganda throughout the province. In each meeting atrocious lies have been circulated about me and my cabinet generally. The sympathy of the Muslims officers for this anti-Hindu propaganda is well known and well established."¹

Thus, we have a situation where an anti-Hindu communal tirade was already going on since the beginning of the 1940s, and during the 1945 electioneering witnessed the worst of communal propoganda. Sources blame the election propoganda as the chief reason behind the communal riot which erupted in Noakhali but placing the riot in its historical and spatial context we can easily discern the fact that the society in Noakhali especially that of the Muslims was getting rapidly communalised even before the election campaign had begun.² And what made the people to take recourse to the frenzies of communal orgies was the height to which the electioneering took this communal passions and metallite.'

The communal holocaust in Noakhali began on 10 October 1946. Suranjan Das calls it an extension of the Calcutta riot³,

1. Ibid.

2. See Secretary Noakhali District Congress Committee's report, before the Noakhali riots. All India Congress Committee Papers (hereafter AICC Paper), File No. G-65, NMML, New Delhi.

3. Das, Suranjan, op.cit., pp. 195-196.

the colonial administrators saw in it the intensive phase of the Direct Action Day activities.¹ Again, given the historical background of gradually hightening communal pitch of the politics, it becomes obvious that it was not just a reaction to what had happened to the Muslims of Calcutta; what the NOAKhali riots did was to bring these hightening notes to a crescendo.

What then had caused the riots? Was it because "an image (Hindu) was installed in front of a place of worship (Muslim) which was a grave provocation caused by Rajendra Lal Roy; who was a man of evil reputation disliked both by Hindus and Muslims. During the last pujas^{also} he had a big Murti which was installed for Kali Puja, just in front of the place of worship."²

But eyewitness accounts counter these reasonings. One of these says, "on the 10 October 1946, at about 8 A.M., a Muslim crowd of several thousand men, in batches of about 200 persons arrived with deadly weapons passed by our house shouting Muslim League and other slogans as 'Pakistan Zindabad', Larke Lenge Pakistan 'want Hindu blood', and 'Calcutta retaliation' and moved towards Ex. M.L.A.'s house forcibly tried to drag away one Manoranjan Bose of our house who was taken back by Rajasaheb and others. Immediately we sent one Shailesh Roy of our house to P.S. Ramganj to lodge an ejahar but to our misfortune he could never come back. On the same evening the mob looted and set fire to Shahpur Bazar. On 11 October at about 10 A.M. a crowd of

1. Government Of India, Home (Political), File No. 18/10/461.

2. Star Of India, Cal., 23 Oct. 1946.

about 700 Muslims looted and set fire to all the houses of Southern Karpara and shouting Muslim League slogans... after an hour a mob of about 8/10 thousand Muslims led by Ghulam Sarwar with a gun in hand proceeded towards our house shouting league Slogans - 'Sarwar Zindabad' Hindur Rakta Chai' (want Hindu blood) Rai Sahaber Matha Chai (want Roy Sabheb's head).... On reaching our house Sarwar gave the lead by opening fire and the mob started wholesale looting and setting fire to all our houses. By about 4 p.m. our defence completely broken down and they set fire to the building by spraying petrol and kerosene oil of which they had an abundant stock".¹

This still does not make a clear statement regarding the cause of the riot and why the people wanted Roy Saaheber Matha (Head of Roy Saheb). Roy SAheb was the landlord of that particular area hence some may point to the economic factor and see the Noakhali riot as basically a class struggle in which the Muslim Peasantry rose against the Hindu landlords. But the falacy of this view comes out when it faces the reality. Roy Saheb might have been a 'landlord' or had installed an image in front of the 'peace of worship' but the fact remains that Hindus outside Karpara and that too the very poor Hindus including the large number of Scheduled Caste Hindus of Haimachar were also the victim of the communal attack. This disproves the pure economistic explanation. However, economic factor did play a

1. Mohendra Mohan Roy of Karpara, Shahpur, Noakhali to the District Magistrate, Noakhali, AICC Papers, File No. G-65, pp. 17-20.

very substantial part in evoking communal animosity and economic content was quite substantial in the communal mobilisation.

The riot, as we have said, started with organised hooliganism by riotous mob with weapons, affecting a total area covering 200 sq. miles of the Sadar and Feni Sub divisions of Noakhali, began on the Thursday, 10th October. In the early part of the period the situation was bad in Feni subdivision but by 18 October 46, the disturbances had spread to the western part of the district. Serious lawlessness prevailed in Ramgang, Begunganj and Lakhimpur of Noakhali and Hajigunj police station in Tippera.

The 'outbreak' looks like a spontaneous one but in reality it was not. Instead, it was the manifestation of the organised communal propaganda and mobilisation. A victim's account may give us some clue to this point. It says that while coming back from Bilonia before the Puja, the victim's boat was searched by 40-50 Muslims near Chatkhil Bazar. "Before that our vigraha (particular image installed in traditional Hindu house hold) was stolen by some people about which we had already informed the police." The victim further says, "after Maulvi Fazlul Huq joined the League, Maulvi Ghulam Sarvar started propagating hate against the Hindus and in one of his meeting at Shahpur Bazar where I was present, the essence of his talk was to avenge the killings of Muslims in Calcutta." "On the 10th October 1946, Thursday, there assembled around 10 thousand Muslims in the Shahpur bazar by the afternoon. Almost everyone

was equipped with dangerous weapon and shouting slogans like Allah-O-Akbar and Pakistan Zindabad. Then Sarwar gave an excited speech after which the enraged crowd rushed to our houses but Zalaluddin Qazi and some other Muslims stopped them. On the same day the crowd attacked Dasgharia and Nazir Kaderi."¹

Another proof of the riots being organised comes from the fact that the rioters sprayed petrol in houses before setting them on fire. "Who supplied this rationed fuel ? Who imported Stirrup pump into this area ? Who supplied the weapons ?" Again forced conversion operation required a vast amount of cloth for "the cap (with Pakistan insignia) and the Muslims attire which was forced on to the neo-converts. Bengal had been, as we know, passing through the acute cloth-famine hence we immediately will think about the authority which had issued that amount of this precious rationed thing ? Circumstantial evidence again indicts the Muslim League party to have organised the entire happenings.

The atmosphere in which the rioting of such magnitude took place had been created by the local religious and political leader, Ghulam Sarwar, the local press especially the newspaper 'Satya Barta' (True Message) published by a leaguer and finally by the partisanal role of the administration.

1. Jnanendra Mohan Guha Raya, P.S. Ramganj, Noakhali, AICC Papers, File No. CL-8, 1948, pp. 353-355.

Apart from the news coming from Calcutta in an exaggerated form --- exaggerating the number and share of Muslim suffering during the Calcutta riot --- the newspaper 'Satya Barta', whose name meant True Message, was carrying on rumours of magnifying proportions. "It has been rumoured that around 250 Muslims girls, who stayed at a Muslim Girls' Hostel at Vivekananda Road, a Hindu locality, of which some went to hoist the Muslim League flag on the top of the university building on the 16 August morning. Then the Hindu goondas entered the Hostel and killed, abducted and even they did not hesitate in cutting off the breasts of the girls." "If the rumour was true," the newspaper pursued in a very strange manner, "not a single Mussalman would want to be alive in this world."¹ The newspaper carried more of these rumours and even carried news of attacks on Muslim League leaders. According to the paper, Dr. T Kudarate Khuda D.Sc., Mr. A.R. Siddiqi and especially Khawaja Nazimuddin were either killed or wounded by the Hindus goondas."²

Some rumours were made to spread through informal circulation. It was widely believed that the world was coming to an end and it was the duty of all good Muslims to convert non-Muslims to islam.³

1. Satyabarta, Noakhali, 23 Aug. 1946.

2. Ibid.

3. Photo Eur. 148, IOR, Mclnery to Habakkuk, 14 Feb., 1976 on his 1946 experience as quoted in Das, Suranjan, op.cit., p. 277.

This rumour, it seems, was given a very organised form by the Muslim League leaders of the area and, what was important, no Muslim League provincial leader thought it important to condemn the acts of forcible conversion of the Hindus. While the leaders and the League Press tried to play this down, the administration which was otherwise unresponsive and had no intention of criticising the Muslim League, accepted that there had been a large scale "forcible conversion.

The modus operandi of the phenomenon of forced conversion indicates certain points which went into making the Noakhali riot qualitatively different from any other communal riots.

"The same night local Muslim in batches of 5 to 7 came to our house and asked us to get converted into Islam. We, out of fear did not meet them", wrote one victim. He continued, "On the morning of 12 October around 200 Muslims came to our house and threatened that if we do not convert ourselves, they would kill us. We, to save our lives, agreed to their proposal. Thus the Maulavi Saheb of Sahapur high school converted me and other Muslims of my family into Islam. Then from amongst the crowd that particular Maulavi Badu Miah and Mamud Mian Patari forced us to destroy the images and photographs of all gods and goddesses.

On 13 October they constructed a mosque in front of my house and later on Kudrus Miah, Mujibul Huq, Kerani (Peon) and Khaliq Miah demanded one thousand rupees from me as contribution

to the League".¹

Refusal to 'get converted' often met with violent reaction, as this particular victim's letter suggests : "these leaders assisted by the Mohammedans of locality and neighbouring localities joined the mob and looted everything they could. When this was finished they attacked my sons Late Jasoda Kumar Roy, Prosanna Kumar Roy and Chitta Ranjan Roy and my son-in-law, Binode Behari Roy Majumdar of Babupur and asked them to be converted into Islam and take beef. When they expressed unwillingness, Mehdi Mian of Abirpara cut the throat of my eldest son Jasoda Kumar Roy in the nature of Jabai and killed my other two sons like wild beasts."²

The Hindu population was generally forced to committ acts sacrilegeous to their religion and perform Islamic practices e.g., eat beef, recite Kalma; wear lungi and caps which had Pakistan slogans on them. Achrya Kripalani in his report gives an account of forcible conversion. "Even after looting and arson and murder, the Hindus in the locality were not safe unless they embraced Islam. The Hindu population further to save themselves, had to embrace Islam en masse. As a sign of their conversion they were supplied with white caps used by the Muslims

1. Jnanda Mohan Guha Raya of Shahpur Village, AICC papers, File No. CL-8, 1946.
2. Annadi Sundari Roy of Baragobindapur, Noakhali, to the offier-in-charge, P.S. Begumganj, Noakhali, Ibid.

of the locality. Very often these caps were new and were stamped with the map of Pakistan with the words 'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Larke Lenge Pakistan'.¹

Amidst such a general uprising against a particular community, what surprises us is the reports from almost all the affected villages that the method of conversion was the same everywhere. Secondly, the supply of caps of Pakistan Zindabad written on them and supply of the copies of Quran. As the party of the Congress President which toured the villages, found that in one particular village, Khilpara, "all the Hindus had been compelled to embrace Islam. Some Qurans had been distributed and people were compelled to wear Muslim dress. New caps printed with League flags, Pakistan map and the slogan 'Pakistan Zindabad' had been distributed in thousands. The fact clearly proves that all the arrangements were made by some very resourceful 'organisation in advance which had no difficulty in obtaining enormous quantity of cloth in the day of strict cloth control."² To me the pre-arrangements of organised attack on the Hindu population seem to be the result of a conglomeration of factors. It seems quite clear that the attacks were organised but what was most puzzling was the way people indulged in the brutalities including the attack on Hindu women. It is not that

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1. Acharya B. Kripalani's First Report, S.P. Mukherjee Papers, File No. 90.
 2. Bengal Provincial Congress Committee's report to J.B. Kripalani, the Congress President's tour in Noakhali, AICC Papers, File No. CL-8, 1946, pp. 371-373.

they were only being forced to convert into Islam but they were abducted and forced into marriages with Muslim youth.¹

The local Muslims either tacitly or actively supported these acts and what was most glaring was the fact that even Muslim women also quite approved these forcible marriages. "A brave girl who gave her whole story "says Prof. N.K. Bose, "without reserve for Gandhiji's sake. What surprised me most was that the women of the Muslim household where she had been taken, seemed to have enjoyed the sight of a helpless woman being dragged into their midst. They had spoken encouragingly to the girl and asked her to become one of themselves, instead of exercising any control over their menfolk."²

A bit of similar pathetic experience was detailed by Miss Murial Lester who stayed in Noakhali during the period doing relief work. "Worst of all was the plight of the women. Several of them had to watch their husbands being murdered and then be forcibly converted and married to some of those responsible for their death. Those women had a dead look. It was not despair, nothing so active was there. It was blankness the eating of beef and declaration of allegiance to Islam has been forced upon many women as price of their lives."³

1. The Government sources accepted that the "Muslim Section of the population entirely or totally supported the conversion that were carried out", Chief Secretary, GOB to Home Secretary, Govt. of India., Government of India, Home Political , File no. 18/10/46.

2. Modern Review, Cal, Sept. 1946, Vol.II

3. Ibid.

These harrowing tales showed the depths of the penetration of communal ideology. In Noakhali, people were not revolting in a manner that presented a threat to the colonial authority nor to the imposed epistemic identities. It was a plain and clear attack on a group whose identity was defined by a particular religion and the politics of the Muslim League was to give that identity the character of an enemy identity which had to be suppressed and even exterminated for a particular political goal, i.e., Pakistan.

How did the Muslim League as an political organisation and as the party in power react to the situation, one may be tempted to say, of its own creation? Its attitude was that of minimising the gravity and effects of the Noakhali happenings. The best that the provincial Muslim League leaders did was to pass a resolution condemning the lawlessness in Noakhali and Tipperah district exhorting Muslim Leaguers to behave well. They however at the same time condemned the Hindu Press for printing exaggerated news of the happenings in Noakhali.¹ On the other hand the Press of Muslim League here was constantly ignoring the truth and reality of the situation and asserting that there had been no incidents in Noakhali after 17 October but the situation was definitely under control.²

1. Star of India, Calcutta, 21 Oct. 1946

2. Ibid., 25 Oct. 1946

The League's Enquiry committee Report also played it safe and denied the basic truth of Noakhali events. It said : "There has been no mass upsurge and the incidents do not prove that it is a rising of one community against the other. There are instances of conversion of stray marriages. The total number of death due to outrage in Tripura is 15 and in Noakhali is less than 100. Not a single scheduled caste man either killed or injured."¹ Thus even at this stage the League was trying to make the scheduled castes its political ally whereas in reality the local people, who rose in communal fury, did not spare the scheduled castes. 'Scheduled caste persons might have been spared their life but at the cost of either their religion or property'.

League Ministry put pressure on the police to withdraw all criminal cases connected with the rioting and the manner in which the local leaguer as well as the Muslim League minister defended the persons accused of murder, rioting, arson, dacoity and in a few cases rape,² was revealing of the character of the "uprising". This led to lawlessness to the extent of driving the local Hindu population out of Noakhali - Tripura villages.

On the other hand, flood of refugees in big towns in these areas was treated in a manner which apart from signs of antipathy, shows the intensity of the Muslim League campaign and

1. Star of India, 25 OCT, 1946.

2. Carter, M.O. Trouble in 1946, M.O.C. PAPERS PP 10 ff as Quoted in Singh, Anita Inder, Origin of Partition of India (OUP, 1989) p.196

one may surmise that "the only interpretation that seemed possible was that the Bengal..ministry was privately sponsoring a kind of Transfer of population in an effort to create "cells" of Muslim resistance over the heads of its own officers."¹

On the face of it, the governments policy was to minimise the nature of the upsurge and dub it merely a law and order problem created by mischief mongers. In the Calcutta disturbances, whatever might have been the attitude of the Muslim League government, it at least did put a semblance of tackling the situation and Suhrawardy along with the other other leaders, toured the city, for bringing peace. But in Noakhali even this semblance was gone and added to it was a far worse ingredient, i.e., ministers prevented the administration from bringing to book the real culprit's whose names were listed in almost all the complaints. The Government also tried to prevent the Voluntary Organisations from carrying out relief works in these areas.

Though at times lines were blurred, but there still was a thin line separating the administration and the government & the party in power. The Muslim League as we have seen was actively supporting the Leaguers to go for riots and the party's activity was encouraged by its Ministry which extended covert as well as overt support. But what was the role of the Administration ?

3. JNU BELL PAPER file No.3, item 4, quoted in Singh, Amita Inder, op.cit, p.200

Governor Burrows was on holiday and the first report he sent to the centre was dated 16 October - 6 days after the riots broke out and that too when asked for by the Governor General. ¹ This may be accidental and not showing the real tone of the administration. At the local level, however, some of the Muslim officers connived while the violent preparation was going on. A few encouraged them. There was a general belief among the Muslims that the government would take no action if any thing was done against the Hindus" said the congress president Acharya Kripalani in his Report submitted to the working committee of the congress.² There is truth in this accusation because the way the newspaper of the locality supporting the Muslim League was taking the side of the District Magistrate; the newspaper proclaimed "Chittagong would have seen the spilling of blood. Hindus would have been wiped out. F.A. Karim is God sent for the Hindus of Chittagong." ³

This was happening in Chittagong while in Noakhali, long after the riot had taken place, the administration was acting in a partisan manner. This is what a communalised society looks like. Here responsibility must be squarely on the Muslim League efforts at whipping up public emotions and pandering them

1. TOP, vol.VIII, pp 729, 743-45
2. J.B. Kripalani, 'The Congress President's Report'. S.P. Mukherjee Papers, File No. 74. Also see Report of Noakhali District Congress Committee, AICC, Papers, File No. G-65.
3. Satyabarta, Noakhali, 23 oct, 1946.

with lies and untruth. The election of 1945-46 and the subsequent call for the Direct Action Day were the high water mark of these divisive politics based on emotional, false outcries. An eyewitness account puts it well, " Last election propaganda by the Muslim League completely changed this relation. Vilest anti Hindu propaganda unscrupulously indulged in by the leaguers had been successful not only to vitiate the whole peaceful atmosphere of Noakhali. In their madness for Pakistan Muslim League forgot all measures of reasonableness. Hindus were made the prime enemy and the target of Pakistani Jihad. The calamity of Noakhali is the first expression of the impatient zeal created for a fight against the Hindus in the minds of Mussalman. Noakhali is the weakest district for Hindu Bengal and consequently it has become the first victim of Pakistani jehad."¹ One might be disturbed by the impatient tone of the author but what he said was historically true.

Calcutta riots had already fractured whatever communal commonality existed at the level of politics; Noakhali rather substantiated the fracture and destroyed the chances for a commonality in future.

Second Noakhali riots were far more consequential than the Calcutta riots because whereas the Calcutta riots can be situated in the series of communal riots that the country had

1. "Version of Eye Witness About Noakhali" by Prof Samar Guha, National Service Institute, Calcutta, S.P. Mukherjee Papers, File No. 74.

been experiencing, the mass conversion and atrocities on women in Noakhali was a departure from the hitherto experienced communal violence. Communal violence had now qualitatively moved into a new arena.

However this new face of violence gravely disturbed the sensitivity and psyche of the population outside Bengal and fed communalism there, the reflection of which was the communal riots that erupted in Bihar as a sequel to the observance of Noakhali Day. Bihar riot provided the Bengal Muslim League with space to justify itself morally as well as factually. Contrary to the minimising efforts during the Noakhali riot, the Muslim League and its press now began maximizing the happening & facts of Bihar riots. An example of this typical stand was A.K. Fazlul Huq's interview to the AZAD in which he said that 'One lakh people had been killed in Bengal,' a figure which he corrected later into 30,000 and tried to escape criticisms for this intemperate statement by uttering vague explanation, i.e., "actual casualties in Noakhali or in Bihar will never be known, but what is more important is not the extent of devastation of which the miscreants have been guilty but the startling revelation that Indian Society could contain miscreants of this character."¹

2. Star Of India, Cal., 5 Nov. 1946

The rioting in Noakhali was never simply an act by miscreants. It was, to simply put, a 'simple Organised attack on the Minority Community.' This went a long way to destroy any hope of political reconciliation of the two major communities till the British brokered the partition.

CHAPTER - II

COMMUNALISM REPRESENTED - II

THE HINDU MAHASABHA

CHAPTER II

Communalism Represented - II : Hindu Mahasabha

Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal worked under a different situational context than the All India Hindu Mahasabha -its central organ. This was because of the different socio-economic and political realities of Bengal.¹ However the basic digits of All India Hindu Mahasabha's politics, i.e., fighting Congress for space among the Hindus in order to legitimise its own standing as the sole spokesman of the Hindus, was the guiding principle even in the case of Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha.

In the context of Bengal, the radicalisation of the Muslim League politics and the rapid intensification of its communal overtones during 1945-47² had a direct bearing on Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha's influence and its politics. The events that Bengal witnessed during the "Direct Action Day" demonstrations in Calcutta, Howrah, Dacca and other places and subsequently the communal riots in Noakhali-Tippera helped Hindu Mahasabha to increase its influence/appeal among those whose interest it claimed it had been championing.

From the very beginning Hindu Mahasabha was conscious of its lack of mass base and organisational defects. Bengal

1. Bengal like the Punjab was a Muslim Majority province but the economic structure of the rural East Bengal was such that the land owning and rent receiving class was predominantly Hindu while most of the middle or small peasants were Muslims. This description may sound simplistic. For detailed study see Bose, Sugata, op. cit., Chatterjee, Partha, op.cit.;

2. See chapter I For details

Provincial Hindu Mahasabha leaders were quite conscious of the fact that this weak mass base would not enable them to initiate any large scale and militant political exercise. In the All India Hindu Mahasabha Committee meeting in August 1945, held in Delhi, a representative from Sind, Bhojraj Ajwani, moved a resolution to the effect that "If the Government did not accept the Mahasabha demands, the Mahasabha should resort to direct action."¹ The representative from the Punjab Lala Hardayal supported the amendment by saying that if "direct action was carried out, the Congress would lose its popularity."²

The response from the representatives from Bengal was, however, marked by caution. N.C. Chatterjee, President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, opposed the resolution and said that "it was useless to decide on direct action without making sure whether Mahasabha had adequate resources."³ Similarly Asutosh Lahiry, the Vice-President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, who was also the person in charge of the organisational matters, said that 'he had been to different places recently and nowhere he found Mahasabha powerful so as to launch a Direct Action'.⁴

A definitive statement however, came from D.N. Mukherjee who was also the Mayor of Calcutta. "If the committee approved the proposal of the direct action," he

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1. IAR, 1945, Vol. II, p. 154.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.

said, "he would be glad to enrol himself for the purpose of launching it, but the question was whether they had considered their position fully. His tour of U.P. and Lahore had showed that they did not have sufficient support. Their first requirement was to organise the people and establish mass contact."¹

Earlier, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had been emphasising the need for solidarity and organisation. "If Mahasabha remains an organisation confined only to a section of the educated upper classes completely detached from mass contact, it is bound to prove a distant failure."² But if Mahasabha had to take recourse to a movement or direct action, against whom was it to be directed? Shyama Prasad Mukherjee saw the targets to be both Congress and the Government. "Some sort of movement by way of direct action would be taken up in September. This was not merely a movement against the Government but against the Congress as well as who initiate the policy of Hindustani."³ He also said, "He had no doubt that young man would rally under the Mahasabha and give account of themselves."⁴ Organisation for Mahasabha was important for an another reason also. For Mukherjee, "A strong and a virile Hindu Movement must to-day be a necessary part of India's political life. Only this will make the saner elements among the Moslems realise that a harmonious communal

1. Ibid., p. 155.

2. Mukherjee, S.P., Awake Hindustan, published by S.J. Ramesh Chandra Banerjee, Calcutta, n.d., p. 34.

3. IAR, 1945, vol. II, p. 156

4. Ibid.

relationship is essential for the safety and welfare of Moslems themselves and it is not a matter which is the primary concern of Hindus."¹

This need for organisation was a constant refrain to Mahasabha's policy of stealing space from Congress - its main rival. This refrain became acute during the elections of 1945-46. N.C. Chatterjee, in his election tour, declared that "If Hindu Mahasabha wants to be successful, it is vital that the organisations should be strengthened throughout the country. The Working Committee's appeal should be responded to in right earnest. The leaders in the districts are generally with the Hindu Mahasabha, but they lack contact with the masses and the students. In some districts Hindu Student Federation has been organised and the Mahasabha has secured the willing allegiance of a batch of young workers."²

These utterances however were not devoid of any groundwork altogether. The work for organising the party had been taken up with right earnest in 1944 itself. In 1944 ad hoc committees were formed in almost all the districts with special emphasis on the East Bengal districts. The Vice President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha was made in-charge of the organisational matters. In this regard, in one of his circulars to the President of Rajshahi District

1. Mukherjee, S.P., op.cit., pp. 83-84.

2. Nationalist, Calcutta, 21 Sept., 1945. Nationalist was a Hindu Mahasabha organ and one can get some issues of this in S.P. Mukherjee papers and N.C. Chatterjee papers, in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Hindu Mahasabha, he said: " I am confident that you are going forward and moving in the matter with determination"¹ we soon learn that a person, Dharendra Kumar Biswas was sent to organise the Mahasabha branches in Rajshahi district within two months.²

In some districts, however the Mahasabha was quite active even before this reorganisation process had begun. Noakhali District Hindu Mahasabha was one of those active Mahasabha branches. But a peep in its working gives an indication to the fact that it was involved more in condemning the constitutional position taken at the central leadership level rather than seriously making efforts at reorganisation.³ Despite this, the fact emerges that even at the district level, the issue of Pakistan and the stand taken on it were watched with all seriousness.

At the provincial level the efforts at organisation were given encouragement. At the annual general meeting of the Provincial Hindu Mahasabha held at Jalpaiguri on 24th and 25th February 1945, prizes were given to the branches of Hindu Sabhas for their contribution to the membership

1. A letter to the Rajshahi District Hindu Mahasabha President, Rai Surendra Nath Gupta Bhayo Bahadur, date: 9 Jan., 1945, S. P. Mukherjee Papers, NMML, File No. 74, part III, p. 66.

2. Ibid., Sub. File No. 90.

3. In the annual meeting held in Sept. 10, 1944, the members of the Noakhali district Hindu Mahasabha passed a resolution saying that "This meeting of the Noakhali district Hindu Mahasabha emphatically protests against the proposals of Sri Raja Gopal Acharya for Congress-League unity as it is based on the principle of Pakistan and is anti-national and in the opinion of this Sabha detrimental to attainment of national freedom." S P Mukherjee Papers, File No. 74, pp. 491-3.

enrollment campaign.¹ Bhola sub-division of Bakerganj district topped the list of the branches and 'its office bearers were presented with a Khukri as taken gifts.'²

The digits on which the solidarity of the Hindus with the Mahasabha was tried to be invoked were basically related to the role of the Muslim League towards the national freedom struggle and the Congress attitude towards the Muslim League demands. Hindu Mahasabha saw itself as the true representative of the Hindu interests which it proclaimed "coincided with those of the nation itself."³ Hindu Mahasabha was declared to be an organisation exclusively serving the Hindu interests. On the question of allowing non-Hindus to become members of the Mahasabha, it was said that "If for economic and political reasons non Hindus are allowed to join the Hindu Mahasabha then only the unity of the Hindus will be destroyed. It is because in Bharatvarsha every political problem is related to the religious or cultural problem and every religious and other problems are part of the political problems. On the other hand, though the Pakistan movement has taken a political shape yet it is enmeshed basically with religious problem. Hindu Mahasabha is the temple of the Hindus. Here only the Hindus have right to worship National Shiva. We dare not change this temple into

1. IAR, 1945, vol.II, p. 205.

2. Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 28 Feb., 1945.

3. In his presidential Addresses to Hindu Mahasabha Conferences in Bilaspur (1944), United Provinces Hindu Conference, Gorakhpur (U.P. Oct. 1944), Hindu Sabha Conference (Mahakosal, 1940), etc., Shyama Prasad Mukherjee repeatedly stressed this point. See Mukherjee, S.P. op.cit.

Mosque or Bazar. In case we commit this mistake Hindus will lose their freedom, as Congress has seen its downfall."¹

To argue that the Hindu Interests were being sacrificed, the situation and condition of the Hindus of Bengal were put before the Hindus. The language of propaganda reminded one of the language used in Muslim League propaganda. " We are disorganised and unable to resist attacks on our rights and liberties which are often perpetrated with the direct and indirect support of the state administration."² The linguistic usages in the propaganda campaign indicated the fact that Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League both attempted at painting the community they claimed to represent as a community which was defeated, oppressed and being constantly attacked.³ However, there lay a major difference between the way and the meaning inherent in the two sets of propaganda campaigns. While the Muslim League painted the Muslim community as a community at the receiving end, the language and content of its propaganda was aggressive and betrayed the signs of confidence arising out of its sense of a superior might. On the other hand, the Hindu Mahasabha campaign could never become aggressive in its overtones due to the fact that the Mahasabha lacked a strong

1. Veer Savarkar's wire to S. P. Mukherjee on 17 August 1945, S.P. Mukharjee Papers, File No. 90.

2. Mukherjee S. P., op.cit., p.

3. See Appendix I & II.

mass based organisation.¹

Its leaders were also aware of the fact that the party lacked contact among the peasants and the labour - a fact which the Mahasabha leaders constantly complained of in their speeches.² This was the acute situation under which the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha worked and as we will see in this chapter, this limited its scope in transforming itself into an aggressive political outfit in the manner the Bengal Provincial Muslim League could with the organising efforts of Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim.³

However, with a renewed effort to reorganise itself, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha entered the election arena in the winter of 1945. The Election Manifesto of the Mahasabha declared that the "National unity and full independence" were the two points which would be put before the electorate.⁴ The manifesto also blamed the system of

1. The Character of its leadership might also have played a part in it. Whereas the local leadership, it seems, was in the hands of the leading local Hindus such as Rajendra Lal Rai Choudhury of Noakhali, the provincial leadership was under people like S.P. Mukherjee, N.C. Chatterjee, Makhan Lal Sen who were at ease with constitutional talks and debates rather than mass politics. This was a restraining factor for the Mahasabha preventing its spread. But at the same time it was the stature of S.P. Mukherjee which helped Hindu Mahasabha to revive itself after the 1946 riots because for Bengal Hindus only he seemed to have the stature to take on Suhrawardy or the Muslim League intransigence. The number of letters he used to receive from Hindus during this time quite often gives an impression that he was considered a bit of a saviour of the Hindus in Bengal. See S.P. Mukherjee Papers.

2. See S.P. Mukherjee S.P., op.cit.; Chatterjee, N.C., Hindu Politics, published by S.J. Ramesh Chandra Banerjee, Cal, 1944. Election tour speeches of N.C. Chatterjee in Nationalist, 21 Sept. 1945 and other issues, also other Provincial Newspapers carrying the tour reports, i.e., Ananda Bazar Patrika and issues of Amrita Bazar Patrika.

3. See chapter I.

4. See the Manifesto Hindu Mahasabha in Appendix II.

separate/communal electorate as the chief culprit for spreading communal virus. It said that 'one could never have true representative voice on real issues through this system of separate electorate. As long as separate electorate was not replaced by joint electorate no judicious election could take place',¹ It also argued that "India was the land of the Hindus and Pakistan was an absurd concept."² It proclaimed that a Hindu would not be a party to any partition as long as he was alive.³ "In this religious battle Hindu Mahasabha will not be deprived of the Hindu sympathy,"⁴ the Manifesto expected.

Hindu Mahasabha's attack on the Communal Award was one of its chief plank in its attack on the Congress. Mahasabha's attack was especially harsh on this point because the operation of the principle of separate electorate had proved detrimental to the political aspirations of a large section of the Bengali Hindu populace. Though nobody with a knowledge of the consequences of the separate electorate would advocate its operation,⁵ a closer scrutiny brings home the fact that Mahasabha's opposition to it was more strategic than a

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. The question of communal Award and its effects on Bengal politics had been the subject of discussion in Gallagher, op.cit., see also B.N. Dutta Roy ed., Sir N.N. Sircar's speeches and Pamphlets, Cal., 1934.

Mahasabha leaders repeatedly made this a point to attack as well as to show the plight of the Hindus. For example "the policy of appeasement continued and we find the same tragic mistake....One of the greatest handicaps to Indian Swaraj Manufactured by the governmentwas the communal decision popularly known as Communal Award." Mukherjee, S.P., op.cit., p. 78.

principled one. The truth came out at the Tarakeshwar Conference where as the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee of Uttarpara said: "a claim for joint electorate in United Bengal is also no solution because in that case not a single Hindu will be returned from East Bengal."¹

Moreover, the Mahasabha, given its community-based, and communal character, could hardly contest any of the Muslim seats and it had never contested one. This was quite in contrast to its support and even collaboration with the Muslim candidates in the local and municipal elections.² This supports Bipan Chandra's argument that "though different communalism were supposedly directed against each other, in political practice they quite often cooperated with one another in Municipalities, district Boards, legislatures and provincial governments...Communal identities were seldom permitted to stand in the way of class or group interests."³

1. The Hindustan Standard, Cal., 6 April 1947.

2. In a letter to Dr. S.P. Mukherjee from the President of Dacca Hindu Mahasabha wrote : "I have been in receipt of your kind note sent through Khan Saheb Abul Hasnad, sitting Vice-chairman of the Dacca Municipality regarding election of Chairman and Vice-chairman of Dacca Municipality. In obedience to your kind direction, we decided not to support the Congress alliance and to support Rai Bahadur Satyendra Kumar Das and Khan Saheb Abul Hasnad, who are outside the Congress League influence. I therefore issued instructions to all the four nominees of the Hindu Mahasabha giving directions to support the candidatures of the above Rai Bahadur and Khan Bahadur for position of Chairman and Vice-chairman." S P Mukherjee Papers, sub. file. 90, pp. 93-4.

3. Chandra, Bipan, op.cit., p. 119.

S.P. Mukherjee expressed the Mahasabha design to capture local bodies when he addressed the Bilaspur session of the Mahasabha, He said : "while the political aspect of Indian problem must absorb close attention...attainment of power and a full participation in all local, municipal and political bodies must remain an important duty." Mukherjee, S.P., op.cit., p. 24.

For the Hindu Mahasabha the logic of separate electorate meant that given its character it had to contest only for the Hindu seats. This in turn implied that the Mahasabha had to capture a predominant space within the Hindu community. This necessitated delegitimising all those political forces which also claimed to represent interests of Hindus as Indians. Mahasabha had declared that the Hindu interests were identical with national interests. Any act of compromise with the anti-national demand of Pakistan could easily be termed as an anti-national act. Congress which had been trying to come to terms with the Muslim League was attacked on this ground. Any overture towards the Muslim League was termed as an act of appeasement. This policy of appeasement, according to the Mahasabha was the chief obstruction in the way of getting independence. Since Mahasabha did not have to fight the Muslim League in elections, its only enemy was Congress and its policies. As Shyama Prasad Mukherjee said: "The Indian National Congress does not itself claim to represent the Hindu point of view. It has therefore happened that although the Congress has entered the parliamentary bodies in India through Hindu seats, it has allowed Hindu interests to be sacrificed and jeopardised in the vain hope of pleasing the reactionary Muslim demands."¹ On the other hand, "the Hindus", he declared, "will not accept any composite government which will give undue weightage or disproportionate strength to the Muslims or other minority in excess of what their proportion in the

2. Mukherjee, S.P., op.cit., pp. 141-42.

population justify."¹

Delegitimising Congress of its representative character vis a vis Hindu interests, Mahasabha claimed itself to be the unequivocal guardian of the Hindu interests. "We must have courage to face the stern realities that the Congress policy of appeasement has merely widened the national resistance and has greatly jeopardised the legitimate rights of the Hindus as such,"² declared Shyam Prasad Mukherjee.

What was the Hindu Mahasabha's alternative then ? For the Mahasabha, answer to the vexed problem of Pakistan or 'Muslim League's reactionary demands' lay in a strong and mobilised Hindu opinion. The All India Committee of the Mahasabha declared in its annual meeting in 1945 that they had offered a just and fair basis for political settlement between Hindus and Muslims. "If Hindu opinion is correctly mobilised there will be no occasion for any non-Muslim organisation to run after the Muslim League for a temporary patched up solution. The Muslim community is bound to discover their folly and unwisdom of its own leaders and come to an agreement on with a just and equitable basis."³

The same line was adopted by N C Chatterjee in his election tours in Bengal. For him, "Quit India could not be a real election issue."⁴ Why? Because Hindu Mahasabha as well as the Communist Party were at a loss to explain their

1. Ibid.

2. S.P. Mukherjee's speech at All India Hindu Mahasabha Committee's meeting at Delhi in April 1945, See IAR, 1945 Vol. I, p. 297.

3. IAR, 1945, Vol. I, p. 299.

4. Nationalist, Cal., 21 Sept., 1945.

passive or negative role during the Quit India movement where as Congressmen were still behind the bars. In Bengal, the Quit India movement and participation in it had given Congress a tremendous popularity and raised even the local leaders in popular esteem¹. When Quit India movement was made an election issue by the Congress, which was natural enough for it to do, Hindu Mahasabha tried to sideline it.

Then what were the issues on which the Mahasabha wanted to draw attention. "The three issues before the country are - 1. Pakistan. 2. Parity and 3. Communal Award",² said N.C. Chatterjee. He accused Congress of accepting Pakistan by accepting the Wavell Plan. "The Wavell Plan was based on the Bhulabhai - Liaqut Ali Pact. That tragic pact had the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. The pact was based on Congress-League parity. It was unfortunate that Congress which calls itself a national organisation reduced itself to the same position as that occupied by an avowedly anti-national and communal organisation. The recent resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee declared its opposition to Pakistan but its provision connotes the acceptance of Pakistan by the back door. The resolution declared that Congress cannot think of compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain within the Indian union against their will. That really means that if the majority of people of any district or of any province or of any territorial unit chooses to accept Pakistan, then the Congress will not oppose

1. Sengupta, Amalendu, op.cit., p. 35.

2. Nationalist, Cal., 21 Sept., 1945.

it. That is destructive to India's integrity."¹

Regarding the question of Pakistan, N.C. Chatterjee invariably brought home the point that the Mahasabha was fighting its Hindu rivals rather than the Muslim league as such. "We can understand a Muslim advocating Pakistan because he is misled into thinking that a communal rule based on the shariat will further his communal interests. But it is the clear duty of the Hindus not to cast their votes in favour of any Hindu who accepts either Pakistan or parity in any shape or form."²

The question of parity was, for the Mahasabha, the major point of attack against the Congress. It accused the Congress for accepting parity with the Muslim League and thereby sacrificing national interest.³ This was because parity meant "horizontal distribution of communal poison throughout the body polity."⁴ Further, the acceptance of the principle would have meant conceding the Muslims equal rights and concessions in every walk of life. Mahasabha was not prepared to concede this because it could not accept that "30 crores of Hindus should be reduced to the position of a minority of 8 and 1/2 crore."⁵ Thus to accept the position of parity with the Muslim League by logical extension meant accepting the parity of Hindus and Muslims in other fields

1. N.C. Chatterjee Papers, pp. 48-49.

2. N.C. Chatterjee in his Election Speech at Rangpur, N. Bengal on 20 Sept., 1945. Nationalist, Calcutta, 21 Sept. 1945.

3. Nationalist, Cal., 21 Sept., 1945.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

also. Since the interests of the Hindus coalesced with the interest of the nation, Congress was said to have sacrificed national interest. Hence, Hindus should not vote for it.

Similarly "Congress did not reject the demand for Pakistan unequivocally whereas only the Hindu Mahasabha has the courage to reject the triple curse of Parity, Pakistan and anti-national Communal Award."¹ Hence, people should favour the latter.

These were the issues around which the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha strove to develop its support base during the elections.

In the election for the central legislature in late 1945, the Mahasabha and the Congress fought all the six non-Mahomedan seats. Initially there was some lack of confidence in the Congress leadership which tried to have an electoral understanding with the Hindu Mahasabha.²

This however did not come through. But the election results proved disastrous for the Mahasabha because not only Congress swept all the six seats and got even the landholder's seat, the Mahasabha candidates polled

1. Ibid.

2. Sardar Patel to Rajendra Prasad : "I do not think that the Hindu Mahasabha can get any seat except in Bengal. It has no strength in any other provinces. My view is that excepting Shyama Prasad there is hardly any man whom we can accept and sacrifice out seat instead. On the side League is attacking us and we have to rely largely upon our strength in non-Muslim constituencies. We cannot afford to surrender without cause any of the seat which can easily secure. If in an individual case we find that Hindu Mahasabha has a 50% chance against the Congress we can settle with them and allow them that seat. But I personally feel that there will be no such case in the whole of India." Shankar, V., ed., Sardar Patel : selected correspondence, Vol. 2, p. 25.

insignificant number of votes. For example Sarat Chandra Bose defeated the Mahasabha candidate by 7,290 to 88 votes while Shyama Prasad Mukherjee notwithstanding his stature could secure only 346 votes against 10,216 of his Congress rival Nagendra Nath Mukhopadhyay.¹

II

Assumption of office by the Muslim League provided Mahasabha the scope to sharpen its rhetoric as this provided Mahasabha with what it wanted - a physical manifestation of Muslim domination. The Muslim League Government represented the physical presence of Muslim majority. However, this itself was not enough to show that Hindus were suffering at the hands of the Muslims or the Muslim League Government. But Calcutta riot of August 1946 soon changed the entire scenario. Now it could be easily shown how irresponsible and discriminatory the Muslim League Government could be. Noakhali-Tippera riots left no room for doubt in the Hindu mind of the truth of Mahasabha rhetorics.

We have seen how a collective psyche for a mass violence was prepared by the Muslim League.² A preparation on similar lines by the Mahasabha though apparently on grounds of defence was also going on. Hindu Mahasabha pamphlet entitled '16th August Beware' asked the Hindus to give a suitable answer to the Muslim League hartal. It read:

1. Return Showing the Results of the Central Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Legislatures in 1945-46, Government of India, New Delhi, 1948, pp. 13-15. as quoted in Gordon, Leonard A., op.cit., p. 559.

2. See chapter I.

"It is the duty of every Hindu to carry on as usual his normal occupation. The Hindus must make organised efforts to see that no Hindu, non-Muslim or non-League Muslim is forced to join the hartal. We therefore request the public to continue on that day their normal work. They must not yield to any coercive measures. Remember that to join the hartal is to support the demand for Pakistan."¹

The student wing of the Mahasabha also joined the platform to urge Hindus not to join the hartal. It said : "The Hindus must make organised efforts to see that (none) is forced to join the hartal (on 16th August) ... Remember that to join the hartal is to support the demand for Pakistan."²

This propaganda was, however, not suggestive of a very aggressive overtone or Hindu Mahasabha challenge to the Muslim League sponsored 'Direct Action Day' hartal of 16th August. Did Mahasabha have organisational strength to pose such a challenge or to mount a counter attack ? I do not think so, and as we have already seen, its leaders were always conscious of their organisational weakness. Then what did it want to do ? or can we ask the question as to whether the Mahasabha had any independent role to play ?

Though Suranjan Das in his recent study has tried to bring out every fact which can show that a communal mobilisation parallel to that of the Muslim League was going

1. Government of Bengal, Home Dept., Political Notes on the Causes of the Calcutta Disturbances. August, 1946 (Calcutta, 1946) p. 20 as quoted in Das, *op.cit.*, p. 169.

2. Star of India, Cal., 21 Sept., 1946. Also See Das *op.cit.*, p. 169.

on, ¹ it would be quite far fetched to equate the Hindu Mahasabha mobilisation to that of the Muslim League mobilisation.

To me, the Hindu Mahasabha was still in the phase of what Bipan Chandra calls liberal communalism.² This was because of several factors which included its lack of mass base and the nature of its leadership. And last but not the least, it did not have any radical aggressive supportive front organisation as the Muslim League had in the Muslim National Guard. The Mahasabha did try to create Hindustan National Guard but that was in 1947.

The riot in Calcutta however had shown how in a mass frenzy all other boundaries were forgotten. Once riot began, it required no political party, let alone Hindu Mahasabha, to tell people how to kill each other. Yet one may enquire as to how did Mahasabha look at the communal riots and whether it had any action plan to counter them.

Unlike Congress and the Communist Party which always tried to mediate between the two rioting communities either through peace missions or by actively working against the communal forces, Hindu Mahasabha did not have any direct role in stopping the communal fire during the Calcutta riot. The basic prerequisite for Mahasabha's idea of communal harmony

1. Das, op.cit., p. 166.

2. "The liberal communalist demanded separate communal rights, safeguards, reservations, etc, within the broad concept of one Indian nation-in-the making. He accepted national unity as the ultimate goal as also the concept of the ultimate common interests of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians. Liberal communalism had also a rather narrow social base. Political it was based mainly on the upper and middle class", Bipan Chandra et.al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin, Delhi, 1989, p. 428.

was that the Hindus should be strong and organised.¹

In this strategic perspective the problems were of two types. First what about the Hindus who were weak and not organised. Thus though Hindu Mahasabha could openly champion or incite the Hindu population of a predominant Muslim locality like Kidderpore, in situations of actual rioting it did not come to its help. Though the Mahasabha and its front organisation such as Shakti Sangha, had their branches through_out the city, they could hardly do any_thing except helping the Hindu riot victims. Given the intensity of communalisation of the society on the eve of the 16th August riots, responsibility of which squarely lay on the Muslim League leadership and its hightened communal overtones, Hindu Mahasabha's role has to be located in the process of communalisation rather than in the communal riot itself. For this venture however the present writer is not equipped with sources.

Secondly, on a larger scale, for example, what would the East Bengal Hindus have done as a minority left in a muslim majority area - a question that Hindu Mahasabha had faced while demanding the partitioning of the province.² The

1. See N.C. Chatterjee's speeches collected in Hindu Mahasabha Tracts, a collection of his Presidential Address. (one copy of it is available in J.N.U. central library, v, 44,4 N15`N5 PIJI)

2. Constant flow of letters form the East Bengal Hindus demonstrates this fear and insecurity. See S.P. Mukherjee Papers, File Nos. 74 and 90. In fact maximum number of complaints, First Information reports' copy and eye witness accounts of Calcutta and Noakhali-Tipperera riots are available in the files of S.P. Mukherjee Papers.

answer it gave was that the strong Hindu West Bengal would protect the Hindus of the of the East Bengal.¹

Whatever role the Mahasabha played during the Calcutta riots, the riot itself and the role of the Muslim League ministry gave credence to Mahasabha's stance that Muslim League was out to trample Hindu population. This was bolstered by the coverage given to Syame Prasad Mukharjee's spirited attack on Suhrawardy during the no-confidence motion moved in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. His attacking stance which included calling Suhrawardy the 'Biggest Goonda' must have catered to a large number of frustrated Hindus who felt helpless because of the manner in which the Government had brought about this calamity.²

Direct Action Day riot soon culminated in the larger disturbances in Noakhali-Tippera districts. It was the Noakhali-Tippera happenings which catapulted the Hindu Mahasabha into one of the most active political forces of Bengal along with the Congress and the Muslim League. From here onwards Bengal provincial Hindu Mahasabha also began to assume the role of an opinion builder.

One of the earliest and prominent victims of the Noakhali-Tippera riots was Rajendra Lal Roy Choudhury of Karpara, who had also been elected president of the Noakhali district Hindu Mahasabha in 1944.³ His death, along with quite a few members of his family, was the most talked about

1. See Ananda Bazar Patrika, Cal., 5 April, 1947.

2. IAR., 1946 vol. II, p. 191.

3. S.P. Mukherjee Papers, File No. 74, pp. 491-3.

brutality of the Noakhali carnage. This also helped Hindu Mahasabha to attain certain mileage which became very clear when later on in May 1947 Mahasabha named the conference place at Tarakeshwar as Rajendra Lal Nagar.

What was more, the Noakhali - Tippera riots created an all India stir and people especially the Hindus reacted strongly against the Muslim League Government. Hindu Mahasabha became one of the rallying centres for relief rescue and rehabilitation works. From Simla to Pune and from Indore to Jammu, letters, appeals and volunteers began approaching the Sabha in large numbers.¹

The movement for partitioning Bengal was given a militant form by the Mahasabha. In March 1947, it convened a conference of Bengal Hindus, which was primarily a Hindu Mahasabha conference, at Calcutta. A Draft Resolution was presented before the conference. This was prepared by a committee constituted a day before, of which only two members were from East Bengal² whereas when the Draft was put before the audience, it seems that Mahasabha members saw to it that most of the speakers who supported the resolution were from the East Bengal districts. This was evident again during the Tarakeshwar conference which took place a month

1. See S.P. Mukherjee Papers, File No. 74, Part II and IV.
2. The Committee which drafted the resolution comprised N.C. Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra Guha, Makhan Lal Sen, Kumud Chakravarty, Rajendra Lal Sen, Sarat Ray Choidhury, Shibendra Sekhar Ray, S.N. Modak and Rai Bahadur Tarak Chandra Ray. Only Sarat Chandra Guha and Kumud Chakravarty belonging respectively to Barisal and Mymensingh were from East Bengal. see Ananda Bazar Patrika, Cal, 17 March 1947.



after this conference where the move to demand partition of the province was supported most vociferously by the East Bengal members of the Mahasabha.¹ This was to show that the demand had the support of the East Bengal Hindus because Mahasabha was accused of sacrificing the Hindus of East Bengal by demanding the partition. Mahasabha was quite conscious of this fact and the leaders always touched this point whenever they spoke of the partition. N.C. Chatterjee while supporting the resolution demanding partition said, "Partition did not mean surrender of the East Bengal Hindus to the Muslim League."² "History tells us that without one's own nation and motherland, political power is useless," he further stated, and "We could save the East Bengal Hindus only if we have a national state."³ The conference passed a Resolution which called for unity of all parties "in this grave crisis of the history of Bengal and to organise a strong anti-Pakistan front and to mobilise public opinion effectively on this demand for the creation of a separate province comprising the Hindu majority areas in Bengal."⁴

The resolution, apart from inaugurating the demand for the partition in a militant form, initiated some of the other steps which demonstrated the fact the Mahasabha had read the psyche of the Hindus and was trying to take the

1. People who supported the resolution included Surya Kumar Basu (Dacca) Satish Chandra Chakravorty (Noakhali) Narendra Nath Das (Barisal) Bhupendra Nath Lahiry (Mymensing), and Suren Haldar (Jessore), ibid.

2. Hindustan Standard, Cal., 17 March, 1947. Also See Ananda Bazar Patrika, Cal., 17 March, 1947.

3. Ananda Bazar Patrika, Cal., 17 March, 1947.

4. Ibid.

lead in launching a movement. They included, as the resolution stated, "calling upon The working committee of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha to place this resolution before the ensuing Bengal provincial Hindu conference which will be held at Tarakeshwar during the Easter holidays and to call upon all Hindu Sabhas throughout Bengal to form local committees and to enrol volunteers for educating public opinion on the lines indicating in this Resolution."¹ Further, "This conference calls upon the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahaasabha to appoint a special committee of experts to draw up a scheme for the delimitation of the areas which will constitute the new province."²

This move for partition was seen by S.P. Mukherjee as a 'counter-move to Pakistan and not outcome of a spirit of defeatism'³ But then what would the Hindus of the East Bengal do? In a reappraisal of this conference, Mukherjee attempted to answer this question. He said : "It is said that the minority Hindus in Eastern Bengal will be completely sacrificed. I believe, on the contrary, that the creation of Hindu Bengal which will be linked up with a strong and representative Indian union will be a source of tremendous strength in saving the minority Hindus in Eastern Bengal....Let us not forget that the Eastern Bengal province will for its own sake act with care and caution, surrounded as it will be by three predominantly Hindu states, Hindu

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1. Ibid.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.

Bengal, Assam and Nepal and having two Hindu native states, Tippera and Cooch Behar, by its very heart,"¹

Then this shows that the Mahasabha was completely oblivious of the problems inherent in case the partition would take place. The communalism of the Muslims League led it to believe that only by removing a Muslim communal party from the seat of power, and installing a Hindu power/Government could the entire communal scenario be changed. However one cannot blame only the Mahasabha for thinking on those lines at this juncture because the very thought of Pakistan with Bengal as a part of it was enough - with the experience of Direct Action Day disturbances and the Noakhali- Tippera riots -- to persuade the Hindus especially those of West Bengal to think along those lines. Moreover the Mahasabha was not the only party which began demanding partition. A resolution endorsing the movement for creation of a new Bengal with non-Muslim majority areas of Western and Northern Bengal and urging its union with the Indian Union was adopted at a largely attended conference convened by Maj.Gen. A.C. Chatterjee of I.N.A. at the Indian Association Hall. A committee with Major Gen. Chatterjee as President was formed at the conference under the name of 'New Bengal' Association' to conduct the partition movement in the province.²

It was quite interesting that I.N.A. men were demanding

1. Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 20 March, 1947.

2. Hindustan Standard, Cal., 23 March, 1947.

partition while Forward Bloc which was a staunch supporter of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was a staunch advocate of united Bengal and supported Sarat Chandra Bose in his campaign for united Bengal till the last.¹

The Bengal Hindu Conference was followed by the all important Tarakeshear conference of the Mahasabha which formally launched the Mahasabha's movement for the partition of Bengal. By the time the Tarakeshwar conference took place efforts of the League members and some of the Congress leaders to create Greater/United Bengal had come out in the open. This gave an added advantage to the Mahasabha campaign and its demand. N.C. Chatterjee said while addressing the Tarakeshwar conference : "Some people are talking of Greater Bengal. They suffer from greater delusion. No one will be happier than myself if we can build up a greater Bengal, as an integral part of Great India, as a self respecting unit of the Indian federation. But if Greater Bengal means Greater Pakistan, then it will be insanity to accept such a plan."²

From the Presidential dias, Mr. Chatterjee then presented the audience with an action plan for the movement.

(a) We shall have a committee of experts to delimit the boundaries of the new province.

(b) Immediately the areas are settled, we shall call upon Hindu MLAs to demand that this territory should be constituted into a new province. If necessary, they should come out of the Assembly and form a separate legislative body.

(c) A declaration should be made guaranteeing the fullest protection to all minorities in this new province and safeguarding their religion and

1. See Gordon, Leonard A., op.cit., pp.

2. The Sunday Statesman, Cal., 6 April, 1947. Also see Ananda Bazar Patrika, Cal., 6 April, 1947.

culture and assuring every citizen living in that state equal rights of citizenship.

(d) Every Hindu living in East Bengal should be treated as a citizen of this new province.

(e) We shall present our demand to the President of the Constituent Assembly and ask the Assembly to frame a constitution and to include this new province as an integral part of the Union of India.

(f) We shall place this demand before the British Premier and the British nation and call upon them to implement the principle which the Cabinet Mission formulated in their plan that the Hindu majority areas in Bengal and the Hindu-Sikh majority areas of the Punjab must not be made parts of sovereign Pakistan states.

(g) We shall form a council of action to devise ways and means to secure the establishment of the new Bengal state.

(h) We shall enrol at least 50,000 volunteers, which will be the nucleus of the national army for the new province, form local committees in each village, union and district in order to galvanize public opinion and carry on a campaign in support of this move.

(i) We shall make arrangements for setting up a provisional Government which will take over power from the British Government.

(j) We shall work in co-operation with all nationalists, irrespective of party affiliations, who will support this demand.¹

To mobilise people for this movement, we find that the Mahasabha leaders began asking people to join the 'Hindustan National Guard' and declare a religious battle against the Muslim League as the latter's aim was said to be "to remove the Bengali Hindu from existence."² In this mobilising mission the torture of Hindu women in Noakhali became the major symbol to arouse people. "One thing must be remembered -

1. Ibid., also see Hindustan Cal., 5 April, 1947. Hindustan was a Hindu Mahasabha organ and some of its issues are available in the files of S.P.Mukherjee Papers. It wrote in its editorial that "these were all workable propositions. There is no amount of imaginative thinking or emotionalism."

2. S. P. Mukherjee's speech at All India Hindu Mahasabha committee's Meeting at Delhi in April 1945, see IAR, 1945 vol.I, p. 297.

impotence is the greatest sin. We have to avenge the inhuman torture which is being carried on upon the womenfolk of East Bengal. For this we need strength."¹

Was this movement for the partition of Bengal solely a movement by the Mahasabha and did it spearhead it ? Leonard Gordon in his treatment² seems to suggest that it was Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who alone could be blamed for or credited with creating and leading this movement. But as we will soon see in the next chapter and as we have seen in the earlier chapter the movement was the result of a definite societal rupture in Bengal. This even Gordon accepts³

1. Ibid.

2. Gordon, Leonard A., op.cit., pp. 589-612.

3. Ibid.

CHAPTER - III

CONGRESS AND COMMUNALISM :

BENGAL, 1945 - 47

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Congress and its role in the politics of Bengal have been studied mostly from the point of view of assessing the effects of internal dissensions¹ or its decline². Similarly its failure to take on the challenge of different forces operating in the political realm of the province has also been subject of quite a few studies. Muslim communalism and the increasing influence of the Muslim League in politics (as well as on the psyche) of the province has become a major arena of discussion as part of the study of Congress's failure.³ However, the years 1945-47 require a study to see how Congress confronted the communal problem in these years when communalism as an ideology had already taken an extreme form and had become part of the consciousness of a substantial section of the province's population⁴

It has been quite convenient for some historians to brand Congress as 'Hindu Nationalism'.⁵ Yet it is obvious that its position in Bengal vis a vis communalism had some peculiar character owing to the fact that it operated in a province where Muslims were in a majority and the agrarian

1. See Ray, Rajat, Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism, Vikas, Delhi, 1979.

2. Gallagher, John, op.cit.

3. Broomfield J.H., Elite conflict in a Plural society : Twentieth Century Bengal, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968.

4. The details of Muslim communalism and its manifestation in Bengal's civic life have been discussed in chapter I. Also see Das, Suranjan, op.cit.; Bose, Sugata, op.cit.; Lahiri, Pradip Kumar, Bengali Muslim Thought 1818-1947, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta, 1991.

5. Gallagher, John, op.cit., p.160.

structure was such that it provided an easy way to the communal parties, i.e., the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, to mobilise on communal grounds. Similarly, the operation and acceptance of the Communal Award¹ which had reduced Hindus to a statutory minority² and the rapid emergence of the Muslim League as the ruling party (after it had overthrown the Krishak Praja Party in 1943) had been giving Hindu Mahasabha opportunities to push Congress towards a communal position. However, Congress's objective of representing all communities and classes had been an ideological imperative for it to recruit and win the Muslim masses. Thus it could not afford to succumb to the Hindu communal political line.

Congress was, thus, working against heavy odds. It was situated between the imperative of maintaining doctrinal purity of secular nationalism and political pragmatism of catering to the political exigencies of the provincial politics.

1. Acceptance of the Communal Award generated a lot of heat in Bengal and there were protests from Hindu Mahasabha and other section of Hindu population. See Advance, cal., 21 August 1932; Liberty, 5 September 1932. Protests were even heard from the Congress ranks, e.g., protests of Khulna Congress Committee, telegram, 6 September 1934; Pabna Congress Committee (Jessore), 12 August 1934, etc., addressed to All India Congress President Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, AICC Papers file No, G-24 of 1934-36 as quoted in Gallagher, op.cit., p.190.

2. It gave the Muslims 119 seats of the total 250 seats in the Provincial Legislature while giving 78 to the Hindus which was even fragmented later by giving 30 seats to the scheduled castes in accordance with the Poona Pact of 1932. See for detailed discussion AICC Papers, File No. G-24(I) 1936, NMML; Communal Award: General correspondence by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru; Bengal Anti Communal Award Movement: a Report, Calcutta: 1939; Gallagher, op.cit.; B.N. Dutta Roy ed., Sir N.N.Sirkar's Speeches and Pamphlets, The Book Company, Calcutta, 1934.

The present chapter, however, does not seek to enquire as to whether Congress maintained its doctrinal purity or took to political pragmatism. What is attempted here is an enquiry as to how far the understanding of communalism helped it deal with the extreme communal situation. Attempt is also made to see how it reacted to certain events which went on to constitute the over all communal situation in the province during these years. The Noakhali-Tipperia and Calcutta riots, of course, constitute the backdrop.

I

The first half of 1945 saw most of the Congress leaders still in prison and Congress committees banned.¹ Thus, the post Quit India movement period saw two parallel developments. While the Muslim League had organised itself in a massive way and in the distress period succeeded in giving its programme radical overtones, Congress was without its leaders and its rump leadership was involved in the debates within the precincts of the legislative assembly. They quite often agitated for release of the political detainees and for the removal of the ban on the Congress committees.²

On the other hand we have already seen that even the Hindu Mahasabha was engaged in organising the Hindus under its aegis. Communists were also at large and would attract a

1. In reply to the question of the release of political prisoners and removing the ban on the Congress committees, Chief Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin said that "he found that a ban was imposed on five district committees in Bengal in 1942." IAR, 1945, Vol.I, p.195.

2. Ibid., pp.192-197.

large number of Congressmen¹ in its fold when they would come out of their detention. Thus, from all quarters Congress it seems, was at a disadvantageous state though historians argue that imprisonment saved Congress leadership from sharing any responsibility as far as public criticism that it could have attracted due to the the war- time problems were concerned.²

However, as we have said, the imprisonment of leadership as well as the party workers and imposition of ban on the organisation proved fatal to the Congress's peasant base which its leaders had built up over the years.³

Announcement of the election and the subsequent release of political prisoners gave a new lease of life to the -----

1. A letter from the secretary of the Chittagong District Congress Committee to J.B. Kripalani, secretary, AICC, dated 7th August, 1945, provides an example of this. It says: "During the last few years, there has been a tremendous change over the mentality of the people. Some of the members of the then District Congress Executive have changed from right and left and some 4/5 owe allegiance to Communist Party of India." AICC Papers File No. P-5, p.467.

* 2. See for example Sarkar, Sumit, op.cit., pp. 404-405. He says: "From the point of view of the Congress leaders, imprisonment and defeat paradoxically brought certain benefits. Isolation in jail helped them to avoid taking a clear public stand on the pro or anti Japanese War issue... much more important was the fact as D.D. Kosambi pointed out... 'the glamour of jail and concentration camp served to wipe out the so-so record of the Congress ministries in office, thereby restoring the full popularity of the organisation among the masses (Bourgeoisie comes of Age in India, in Kosambi, Exasperating Essays. Poona, n.d, p.17)"

3. Even Sumit Sarkar agrees with this when he says, 'Brutal repression must have exhausted many peasant bases, built up through years of Gandhian constructive work or radical kisan sabha activity. It is significant that Bihar, Eastern U.P., and the Maharashtra, Karnataka countryside played little or no part in the anti-Imperialist upsurge of 1945-46, while most of the rural Gandhians of Midnapur and Hooghly found themselves largely pushed aside in Bengal Congress politics in the post War and post-Independence period." Sarkar, op.cit., p.405.

Congress. Electioneering saw Congress fighting the communists and the Hindu Mahasabha in Non-Muslim seats while it was left for the Nationalist Muslims to fight the Muslim League in the Muslim seats. The kind of propaganda launched by the Muslim League could not be answered back by Congress because of the differences in perceiving the election as such. While Muslim League declared the election to be the battle for Pakistan, For Congress "it was a small test....a preparation for the greater things to come".¹ It cannot be denied that Congress also took the election seriously but the kind of appeal to the emotions and psyche which the Muslim League had generated among the Muslim masses was not to be matched. In this atmosphere, the Nationalist Muslims faced tremendous problems and even Congress had difficulty in supporting them for reasons of political expediency. Any kind of Congress help would easily had attracted flack from the Muslim League and had strengthen its oft repeated claim that the Nationalist Muslims were stooges of the Hindu Congress. This could easily have proved detrimental to the interst of the Nationalist Muslims as well as that of the Congress.

1. Congress Election Manifesto declared: " Many a time the people of India have taken the pledge of independence; that pledge has yet to be redeemed, and the well beloved cause for which it stand, and which has summoned us so often, still beckonds to us. But the time is coming when we shall redeem it in full, *but not by the election but what comes after it. Meanwhile this election is a small test for us, (italics mine)* a preparation for the greater things to come. Let all those who care and long for Freedom and the Independence of India meet this test with strength and confidence, and march together to the free India of our dream." IAR, 1945, Vol.II, p.112.

To add to it, the Muslim League had succeeded in its efforts to bring the election campaign down to the issue of Islam where election itself was termed as a religious battle. The Nationalist Muslims were, it seems, forced to fight on Muslim League's terms because, unlike the 1937 election, by this time the Muslim League had embraced all other non-communal issues, for example, abolition of Zamindari without compensations. The Nationalist Muslims took help of the Jamiat-e-Ulema-i-Hind and its leader Maulana Husain Ahmed Madani to counter Muslim League's religious and separatist appeals.¹

To compound the problems, the Nationalist Muslims had to face League's fascist tactics² and latter's governmental support despite denials by the League leaders³

However, what seems to have proved fatal for the

1. A big conference of the Nationalist Muslims was organised inviting Moulana Madani in which there was a clash with the leaguers and Ashrafuddin Ahmed Choudhury, who had organised the conference, "mustered his forces and challenged the League to a free fight. The Conference passed off with minor mishaps." Secret Report on the Political Situation in Bengal for the first half of Feb. 1946, I/p and J/5/153, India office records and Library, as quoted in Bose, Sugata, op.cit., p. 222.

2. See Chapter I.

3. There were series of claims and counter claims regarding the fairness of the election. Moulana Azad issued a statement saying that "the election in Bengal had been reduced to mockery." Allama Mashriqui, the Khaksar leader, said that he "entirely agree with the Congress President that the Muslim League could not possibly have secured the number of seats that it has if British officials had not openly supported it everywhere."

On the other hand Suhrawardy replying to the Congress President's statement said: "If there has been any official interference during the recent elections in Bengal, it has been on behalf of the Congress." IAR, 1946, Vol.I, p. 48.

Congress's attempt to fight Muslim communalism at this stage was the fact that the Nationalist Muslims themselves failed to understand the Muslims psyche. They also failed to understand the logic and the very phenomenon of communalism which even for a veteran Congress leader like Ashrafuddin Ahmed Choudhary " was a fight between the top leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League...masses had no role in it."¹

This was unfortunate for Congress which, as Kripalani wrote to Ashrafuddin Ahmed Choudhury, 'depended on the Nationalist Muslims for its policies regarding the Muslims.'²

Congress had on the other hand, had to fight the forces of Hindu communalism especially that of Hindu Mahasabha. But given the latter's limited mass base and its failure to capture the imagination of the people, Congress had no difficulty in defeating the Hindu Mahasabha candidates in the election arena.³ However, in the post election phase, changes in the over all situation in Bengal brought the Hindu communal forces to the forefront and, then, Congress had to

1. Later, writing to the Congress President, he deplored the Working Committee resolution on accepting Pakistan and the partition of India. He wrote: "It is a fight between the Congress and League organisations. If it is inevitable (Partition) which appears to be so let the members of two organisation fight it out amongst themselves with whatever arms they can secure and decide the issue once for all." Ashrafuddin Ahmed Choudhury to J.B.Kripalani, 30th April, 1947, AICC Papers file no., CL-8 (1946).

2. "In its policy towards the Muslims or the League, the Congress was first guided by the Ali Brothers and then by Dr. Ansari and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. After the death of Dr. Ansari it has been guided by the Maulana Saheb and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. What more could it do." J.B. Kripalani to Ashrafuddin Ahmed Choudhury, 13 May, 1947, Ibid.

3. See Chapter II for detail.

face a lot of problems.

While the electioneering was in progress, Bengal saw the mass upsurges of 22-23 Nov. and 11-12 Feb. in Calcutta. The INA day demonstration of November did not raise questions of Congress's role in the context of communalism but the February upsurge brought certain issues to the fore which have remained unanswered.

Disturbances broke out in Calcutta on the 11th February, 1946, following demonstrations protesting the sentence imposed on captain Abdul Rashid of the Indian National Army. There was an upsurge of people on the 12th February who came out in a mile long procession to protest against the police firing on the student on the previous day. "Calcutta, on February 12, presented a grim picture. Public transport was completely paralysed. Tram, Bus, and Rikshaw workers had gone on an indefinite general strike, responding to the call of CPI controlled union".¹ A mammoth meeting was held at the Wellington Square to condemn police lathi charges and firing. The procession was led by Mr. H.S. Suhrawardy and Satish Chandra Das Gupta of Khadi Pratisthan, the two leaders moving arm in arm under Congress and League flags tied together and held aloft by the volunteers.²

The sequel to the meeting and the procession was a complete paralysis of the city's civic life with frequent opening of fire by the police on people trying to set on fire military lorries, post offices and tram depots. On the third

1. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 13 February, 1946, as quoted in Chattopadhyay, Gautam, op.cit., ICHR, 1984, pp. 200-201.

2. IAR, 1946, Vol. I, p. 271.

day, i.e., 13 February, police opened fire about 15 times and some sections of the town was soon handed over to the army.¹

The echo of the anger against the colonial authorities were heard from almost all over Bengal. Complete hartal and protest meetings showing complete Hindu Muslim unity were held in various places.²

The Marxist historian Gautam Chattopadhyay, chronicling the upsurge, says that "the stage was set in February 1946 for a victorious conclusion of the long and complex struggle for Indian independence," This is because he feels that the Hindu Muslim unity shown during the tumult could have easily been channellised into the anti-imperial struggle.³

But why did the Congress play a very limited role in the entire event and why did it fail to take charge of the situation and lead it to a successful anti-imperialist fight as Chattopadhyay wants it to have done.

The first reason which may be given for such a back seated role was the Congress disavowal of any isolated violent action at this stage as the Congress President Abdul Kalam Azad in his statement on February events would argue. He said: "our struggle for Independence has reached a stage

1. For details see IAR, 1946 Vol. I, pp 269-284

2. "Protest Mettings against military firing in Calcutta are being held all over Bengal. Complete hartal and huge Hindu Muslim rallies were held on February 13 and 14 in scores of towns including Berhampur, Meherpur Krishnanagar, Ranaghat, Kushtia, Pabna, Bagra, Jiaganj, Jessore, Khulna, Barisal, Madaripur, Chittagong, Chandpur, Tangail, Mymensingh, Sirajganj, Rajshahi, Dangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Kurseong. Transport was completely paralysed and trains were held up everywhere." Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 17 February, 1946, as quoted in Chattopadhyay, Gautam, op. cit., p. 203.

3. Ibid.

when sporadic and isolated action of individuals and groups served as a hindrance rather than help."¹

The local Congress leaders were in fact very apprehensive of the law and order situation and "apprehending danger the leaders of public opinion, including B.P.C.C. President and other responsible Congress leaders, Muslims League and Communist Party leaders met at Khadi Pratisthan to devise ways and means how to ease the situation. They decided to organise a meeting next day as a protest against the police firing and lathi charge on peaceful processionists."² Thus, the leaders were working out ways to avoid 'danger' and it was not only the Congress which was involved in such an operation.

However what was important was the communal colour under which the Rashid Ali Day was organised on 11th February. Though, Congress report does not say anything about this fact but its absence from any initiative³ (The strike on 11th February was called by the Muslim Student League and supported by the Students Federation -- the Communist students wing)⁴ suggests that the leaders were conscious of the fact that calling an all India demonstration demanding the release of Capt. Abdul Rashid was culmination of Muslim league's attempt to communalise the issue of I.N.A.⁵ As we

1. IAR. 1946 Vol. I, p. 283

2. A Report by the Secretary, Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (hereafter BPCC), to Mahatma Gandhi, dated 18 February 1946. AICC Papers, File No. P-5 (pt-I), 1946-47.

3. The Report says, "On the 11th February the Muslim League and the Communist Party organised a demonstration and a procession as a protest against the conviction of Capt. Abdur Rashid of the INA." Ibid..

4. Chattopadhyay, Gautam, op.cit., pp. 199-200

5. For details see Chapter I.

have seen in Chapter I, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and its newspapers were busy in painting I.N.A. including even Netaji in communal colours and depicting Capt. Abdul Rashid as a Muslim rather than an I.N.A. hero.

True, the demonstration was joined by the Muslim masses in a big way, but it seems that the mobilisation which was going on for the election had more to do with it than the sheer anti-imperialist impulse. To add to it, even the Communist leader, Somnath Lahiry, who had criticised the Congress leaders for their betrayal¹ confessed later that "there was a limitation in the Rashid Ali Day - it had a communal side. Since the League had supported it, ordinary Muslims from bustees jumped into it. Entire bustees got involved into it. As soon as the League became silent they also went back."²

To us what is important is the question whether even at this stage Congress lost a chance to forge a Hindu-Muslim front through an anti-imperial upsurge. It appears that the limitation that Somnath Lahiry talked of and the spontaneous character of the entire reaction made it difficult for Congress to forge this unity.

That there was no radical change in the consciousness of the people could be seen from their action during the August

1. In his article 'Prostut Hou' (Prepare Yourself) which appeared in the Communist organ Swadhinata on 16th February, he wrote that the Communists had to take the reign of the movement against the Imperialist powers, as the other parties, i.e., Congress and the League were not ready to fight." Quoted in Sengupta Amalendu, Uttal Chollis: Asamapta Bilab (Tumultuous Forties : Unfinished Revolution) Pearl Publishers, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 79-82.

2. Ibid., p. 82.

riot. Even Suhrawardy who was most glad to see the Hindu-Muslim unity in February was threatening the Hindus and the Congress in April in the League legislators' convention.

The same Hindu-Muslim crowd which was attacking the European pedestrian in February was killing each other while the Europeans suddenly became the safest persons in the burning city amidst the August carnage. Hence, the February crowd had some revolutionary potential but how much Congress could have made out of this is a matter of deep probe.

II

'Calcutta-Riot' was in fact the first testing ground of Congress's ability to take on the extreme communalism of the Muslim League. The ground for communal mobilisation on the part of the Muslim League had already been prepared. The question which naturally agitates one is the role of Congress in the entire episode. Was it in a mood to confront the Muslim League on the question of 'Direct Action Day' strike and thereby help in preparing the ground for a large scale confrontation between the Muslims and the Hindus of Calcutta? Again one may ask as to how Congress perceived the entire confrontation between the two communities and whether it developed any ideological or strategic counter to communalism which had led to this confrontation. On 16th

August, 1946 crowds in Hawrah,¹ Chandpur² and in the suburbs of Dhaka³ created violent situations by attacking Hindu shops and temples, etc., Calcutta was no exception, rather this centre of the radical politics saw to it that even this communally mobilised people get the most radical version of communal texts.⁴

On the question of how the Hindus reacted so fast and so ferociously, historians have argued that there was a parallel communal mobilisation going on among them.⁵ They argue that Congress itself was fast getting influenced by the Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu communal elements. This made the Congress create a confrontational situation vis a vis the Muslim League as regards the observance of 16th August as Direct Action Day. Thus, Congress, according to this argument, was pushed to the Hindu corner and prepared the Hindus for a counter attack.

The Congress party in the assembly moved on the 12th August an adjournment motion on this issue to censure the Government and to place the view of the opposition in this connection, but the speaker (Muslim Leaguer) ruled the motion

1. Report of the Howrah District Congress Committee on 'Muslim Leaguers Violence at Howrah, Direct Action Day and Aftermath Incidents', AICC Papers, File No. G-53 (1946), pp. 113-127.

2. 'A short statement of the tragic happenings on the 16th August '46 in observance of Direct Action Day in Chandpur', District Tippera. AICC Papers, File No. G-53 (1946), pp. 103-111.

3. Sen, Satyen, 'Pratyakhya Sangram Dibas' (Direct Action Day) 1968, in Amitabh Dasgupta ed., Parichay - (Calcutta May-June 1991), pp. 32-41.

4. See Chapter I.

5. See Das, Suranjan, op.cit., pp. 166-167; p 169; p.180.

out of order whereupon the Congress party withdraw from the House as a mark of protest against this arbitrary decision of the speaker.'¹ Was Congress's an attitude of confrontation ? It seems it was not because Congress adjournment motion aroses from its belief that it was thought absurd that the party in power should declare a Public holiday to support the party's political action. Moreover, given the communal attitude of the Ministry, its step in declaring a holiday created greaat deal of apprehension.

To add to it, the popular mood, as it appears from the newspapers and other writings, was also quite confused and apprehensive.² This mood was heightened by the utterances of responsible Muslim League leaders. Thus the declaration of public holiday was naturally perceived with all kinds of suspicion and Congress, it seems, was correct in taking up the issue with the Government.

The disallowance of the adjournment motion and the opposition walk out naturally intensified the apprehensions and confusion. Obviously self-defence mechanism attracted organised self-defence in the form of Hindu Shakti Sangh and the up country roughs.³ But what was Congress doing in this situation ?

On 14 August the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee organised a mass meeting in which 'all "shades of public

1. Report on Calcutta Riot, Secretary BPCC to the General Secretary All India Congress Committee (thereafter AICC), dated 18th September 1946, (hereafter Report on Calcutta Riot) AICC Papers, File No. G-53, pp. 77-91.

2. See Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 7,8,9 Aug. 1946.

3. Das, Suranjan op.cit., p.169.

opinion were expressed "1 The meeting was described as 'provocative' because 'K. S. Roy urged the audience to pursue normal business on 16 th August'2 while 'Congress President Surendra Mohan Ghosh described the declaration of public holiday on 16 August as an attempt to force the hartal on the Hindus.'3 'A Sikh and a Gurkha leaders promised their community's support to the Congress and prophesied a 'good thrasing' for the Muslims ?'4

The Muslim League leaders alleged that the Hindu Mahasabha and Congress created an air of 'coming disaster on Hindus' in Calcutta by raising the fear of an impending Muslim violence.5

On the other hand the Congress sources said that it had organised the meeting 'to combat the 'feeling of helplessness, insecurity and frustration among the general public.'6 The report of the provincial Congress Committee contradicted any supposition that the Congress leaders had built up a confrontational atmosphere in the meeting as the official Muslim League charges suggests. It rather said that " A joint appeal was issued requesting the people to remain calm and peaceful and to avoid provoking or being provoked

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1. Report on Calcutta Riot, AICC Papers, File No. G-53, pp.77-91.
 2. Tucker, Sir F., while Memory Serves (London, 1950), p.156. as quoted in Das, Suranjan, op.cit., p.167.
 3. Extracts from the Report by the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta on the Political Situation and Labour Unrest, West Bengal Home(poll) Dept., Writers Building, Calcutta, ending 17 August, as quoted in Ibid. p. 167.
 4. Ibid.
 5. L/p8 J/8.655, India Office Library and Records as quoted in Ibid.
 6. Report on Calcutta Riot.

under all circumstances." ¹ It further said that "As a result of this most of the Hindu shops and business houses remained closed on 16th August to avoid clashes".²

Thus the Congress source absolves Congress of any provocative posture altogether. In final analysis, however, Congress actions added to the constitution of that collective Hindu psyche which was apprehensive of the aggressive postures of the Muslum League.

The riot started in the morning of 16th August and took a serious turn by the evening when the crowd reurning from the Muslim League's Direct Action Day meeting at 'Maidan' meeting began attacking the shops and houses on the way. Till 20th August calcutta remained in the grips of communal violence. And Congress as an organisation of public opinion found itself helpless in the face of the communal fury. There was no anti communal strategy or drive to be launched and the best that the Congress could do was to organise peace-missions³ and issue appeals to stop the fratricidal warfare.⁴

The situation however revealed the fact that Congress was fast accepting the reality that the Muslium League had hegemonised the Muslim mind and thus any appeal to the Muslim

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. 'Congress leaders Sarat Chandra Bose, Surendra Mohan Ghose and Kiran Shankar Ray together with H.S. Suhrawardy, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Abul Hashim, et.al., issued a joint appeal on the 17th August requesting people to stop the fratricidal war.... and to stop the fighting at any cost.' Sengupta, Amalendu op.cit., p.187.

had to be routed through the Muslim League. The Congress report on the riot makes this very clear. It says: "On the 16th morning when we found the communal situation fast deteriorating and the mad orgy of violence being let loose, we contacted several times the League secretary and the League Mayor Mr. Osman and sought to explain the real situation in order to enlist their sincere co-operation in the matter of restoring peace and communal harmony in the city. But unfortunately our efforts failed to evoke sufficient response from League Headquarters, However the Mayor of Calcutta was prevailed upon to go out with me (Kalipada Mukherjee, the secretary, BPC) on a joint peace mission. But before we could actually go out on the peace mission, the BPC office was attacked... of course the mayor Osman and myself went out on a peace mission and visited some of the affected areas and sought in vain to bring about the communal harmony."¹

The irony of the entire efforts of the BPC secretary was that he had to 'enlist the support' of Mayor Osman who, as evidence presented in Chapter I shows, appears to be, one of the persons who had been giving direction to the fury of the communally charged and mobilised Muslim populace of the city on the eve of the Calcutta riot.

To add to it, the Congress, from the very beginning, had been viewing the entire riot as a law and order problem and soon became frustrated by the fact that the Muslim League

1. Report on the Calcutta Riot.

ministry had failed to carry out its primary responsibility of maintaining law and order. Sarat Bose's attack on the Governor was also directed to the same point, i.e., 'he failed to maintain the law and order'. He said. "The Governor has completely failed in the discharge of his special responsibilities to maintain law and order in the city. Whether it is due to utter incompetency or to surrendering himself completely into the hands of the Bengal ministry, it is difficult for me to say... the Governor has proved himself unfit. The Governor should be recalled and the present ministry should be dismissed... what has happened in Calcutta will be very useful to British imperialists and reactionaries in working on their propaganda that India is not fit to govern itself."¹

He was quite correct but what he was not saying was that the Congress was now completely banking on the same 'British Imperialism' for maintaining law and order in case of the outbreaks of communal violence. Hence it was indirectly a surrender to the extreme communalism of the Muslim League. This attitude will reach its logical conclusion during the Noakhali - Tippera riots and the post-Calcutta riot events.

III

As far as ground realities were concerned Congress's ideological posture vis a vis communalism in general and the

1. Bose, Sarat Chandra, I Warned My Countrymen, pp.155-157. Also see Gordon, Leonard A., Brothers Against the Raj, Viking, Delhi, 1990 p.; IAR, 1946 Vol. II, p.185.

Muslim League in particular had to be strengthened by winning over the predominantly Muslim peasants of Noakhali-Tippera. The privations of the war period, the famine of 1943 and the subsequent problems faced by large section of the peasantry amounted to sharpening of class bitterness in a society where the peasantry was predominantly Muslim while land and credit owning section was Hindu. This class bitterness was soon channelled into communal lines. What had caused this channellisation ? For Sugata Bose this channellisation occurred owing to the operation of two factors. First, the lack of credit in the rural society due to the market operations which had sapped the symbiotic relationship in the rural society of East Bengal .¹ Secondly, this was acted upon by the economic issues and politics of the period, finally forcing Muslim peasantry to act against the Hindus. He however fails to answer the key question as to why suddenly the 'Hindu' became enemy even if when he was not a creditor or landlord. Why the scheduled caste Hindus of Haimachar for example who lived in abject poverty also became the target of Muslim fury?² Here comes the 'concept of communal ideology' and its penetration as a probable answer. Different elements of this ideology went on to add to the consciousness of the

1. Bose, Sugata, op.cit., pp. 218-227. According to Bose 'slump, war-time Scarcity and finally the artificially depressed prices of jute at a time of scarcity and high prices of grain had brought considerable hardships to the districts of East Bengal after the middle of 1946. The demobilised ex-servicemen, who were unable to find any employment, formed a new and particularly volatile element in post-war rural society."

2. A.V. Thakkar's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, AICC Papers, File No. G-65.

people. On the eve of the communal riots, communal consciousness was the dominant consciousness in these villages. This channellisation of class bitterness into communal consciousness and the communal orgies of the winter of 1946-47 were facilitated by the election campaign, which was waged on extreme communal lines, and the rumours emanating after the Calcutta riots. This helped the 'tension of communal feeling to reached its climax.'¹ The Noakhali District Congress Committee in its report to the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee could sense the prevailing collective psyche in Noakhali as disclosing a "state of mind amongst the Muslims that if the Hindus are to live in the District, they must live according as the Muslim neighbours want them to behave"² This perception of the local Congress was quite correct as the later evidence and the moments of Gandhi's Noakhali visit proved.³

Appreciating the situation correctly, what did the local Congress do to alleviate it? It seems that it felt helpless in the face of strong and collective communal antipathy. Its helplessness, as its report suggests, was increased due to its finding that "In some cases the officers have been poisoned with communalism. The Hindu officers are apathetic and studiously cautious not to incur the displeasure of the other community and for the a matter of

1. 'Noakhali Situation after the Calcutta Killing and Suggested Remedies', the Report of the Secretary of Noakhali District Congress Committee (hereafter Noakhali Situation), AICC Papers, File No. G-65, p. 93.

2. Ibid.

3. See Chapter IV.

that the Muslim League Government and almost all Mohamedan officers are inclined towards the Muslium League and do not hesitate to condone the aggressive acts of the Muslim hooligans, by helping suppression evidence against them and submitting false reports."¹

This created an impasse as regards facing and fighting communalism in such a situation. This was because all the remedies suggested by the local Congress were addressed to and depended on the active help of the bureaucracy. There was none which it addressed to itself. Hence, the Congress at the local level, which had fought for the peasants' cause and was quite active in Krishak Samity movement,² by 1946-47 found itself relegated to a position where it had to depend on the colonial bureaucracy.

However the 'suggested remedies' of the Noakhali District Congress Committee³ had anticipated some basic principles of fighting communal forces, which Gandhi sought to apply in his Noakhali Sojourn. They included formation of Peace Committees in every village consisting of persons in whom both the communities had confidence and holding them responsible for maintaining peace', Similarly the Report contained some suggestions which, if they had been timely implemented, could have at least minimised the level of lawlessness. They included the suggestion of increasing armed forces and most important, of improving communications so that the interior might become easily accessible.'

1. 'Noakhali Situation', p. 97-99.

2. Sea Bose, Sugata, op.cit., pp. 191-214

3. 'Noakhali Situation', p 99-101.

The Provincial Congress Committee and its leaders were soon flooded with telegrams¹ reaching it from the affected persons in Noakhali-Tippera. The leaders grasped the gravity of the situation but unlike the days of Calcutta riotings this time they did not bank on the Muslim League Party and ministry for restoring law and order. They rather went straight to the Governor and the Additional Home Secretary for taking immediate action. The President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee 'impressed upon the Additional Home Secretary, P.D. Martyn, of the necessity of taking strong action,'² including 'sending military to the locality.' The report says that 'A European ICS magistrate (in place of an Indian) was sent by airplane to take charge of the district.'³ Does it not sound ironical and proves the

1. The first telegram reaching the BPC office on 10th October was from the Secretary, Congress of Sandwip P.S. It said :

"HORRIBLE OPRESSION ON MICROSCOPIC SANDWIP HINDUS LOOTING DACOITY KIDNAPPING, RAVISSING EXTORTION GOING ON POLICE FAILS TO PREVENT ONE CONSTABLE STABBED TO DEATH SOME ASSAULTED RIFLE AND CULPRITS SNATCHED AWAY HINDU LIFE PROPERTY IN IMMINENT DANGER PROTECTION SOLICITED."

'A Short Report of the Communal devastations in the District of Noakhali (Bengal)', prepared by the Kalipada Mukherjee, Secretary BPC, AICC Papers, File No. G-65, 1946, p.51. Seriousness of the Noakhali riots could be sensed by the long telegram received by the BPC Jointly from Kamini Kumar Dutt (leader of the Congress party in the Upper House) and Dharendra Nath Dutt (Deputy leader of the Assembly Party) from Tippera. It read:

"SERIOUS COMMUNAL CONFLAGRATION DESTROYED LIVES AND PROPERTIES OF HINDUS OF RAMGANJ THANA DISTURBANCE AFFECTED SOME PART OF BEGUMGANJ AND LAKSHIMPUR THANAS THOUSAND MUSLEMS ATTACKED HINDU COMPELLED TO SLAUGHTER COWS AND EAT COOKED BEEF HINDU HOUSES BURNT ON MASS SCALE HUNDREDS BURNT TO DEATH HUNDREDS KILLED OTHERWISE LARGE NUMBER HINDU GIRLS FORCIBLY MARRIED TO MOSLEMS AND ABDUCTED. ALL HINDU TEMPLES AND IMAGES DESECRATED HELPLESS REFUGEES COMING TO TIPPERA DISTRICT..." , ibid.

2. Ibid., p.53.

3. Ibid.

colonial authority's much vaunted claim of being the honest arbiter between the two warring communities?

Apart from 'impressing the bureauracy' the Provincial leaders 'rushed to Delhi to appraise the Central leadership of the situation' and immediately sent 'Girija Prosasna Chakraborty, a member of the B.P.C.C. and inhabitant of the District to Noakhali with a batch of volunteers with some money to help the situation and do whatever work of *relief and rescue* (italies mine) they could."¹

Meanwhile the situation had worsened considerably and forced the Congress President elect, J.B.Kripalani, to come over to Noakhali and see for himself the communal devastation. In the meantime the Congress Working Commiittee passed a resolution on Bengal situation on 24 October in which it blamed the Muslim League for its 'politics of hate and civic strife that it had practised for years past' and which it thought was responsible for this outburst of brutality² It appealed to all 'decent persons of all communities in Bengal and elsewhere not only to condemn these crimes, but also to take all adequate steps to defend the innocent from lawlessness and barbarity, no matter by whomsoever committed. At the same time the committee must sound a warning against retaliatory outbreaks of communal violence.'³

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1. BPCC President, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, issued appeals for volunteers, etc., for relief and rescue work., Ibid., p. 53 A
 2. Resolution of the Congress Working Committee on Bengal Situation (hereafter CWC Resolution) passed on 24 October 1946, AICC Papers, File No. G-53, 1946, p. 139.
 3. Ibid., p.141.

Now, there was no guidelines or thinking behind the utteraness which called for 'adequate steps to defeated 'the innocent'. Congress utterly failed throughout its long history to provide for any organised anti communal ideological drive rest aside and organing an anti-communal organization to intervene in cases of communal violence. So at this stage, when an entire community had risen against the 'other', it seemed quite a wishful thinking on the part of the Congress to ask for the coming into exitence of such a body (if it thought in those terms). Whatever might have been its meaning, the warning against retaliatory action, also was hollow and fell on deaf ears as the very next day, i.e., 25 October, the Bihar Riots began.

Congress Presindent J.B.Kripalani also failed to set any agenda as to how to confront the situation except that "there should not be any retaliatory action by the Bengali Hindus and that relief organisations to coordinate their efforts."¹

The only person who even at this stage was calling for a volunteer body to take on the communal challenge was Sarat Chandra Bose. After his return from the Noakhali tour he said; " I have also advocated the formation of volunteer corps in each and every district of Bengal and... I took steps to form voluateer corps in some districts ... Such volunteer corp should be drawn from all communities and sections of the people and they should be above communal and

1. Congress President J.B. Kripalani's statement, S.P Mukherjee Papers, File No. 74 pt II.

party considerations....Our volunteer corps should be inspired by the ideal and spirit of the I.N.A."¹

However, Bose had fallen out with the 'Bengal Congress and he even criticised it for its inaction and keeping out tried and active workers.'² This criticism, it appears from the constant complains regarding membership, elections and inaction, was to a great extent valid. Even a long time Congress worker Ashrafuddin Ahmed Choudhury, who was one of the prominent peasant leaders of Congress from East Bengal, had to complain against the provincial organisation for not issuing membership forms, pledges, etc., despite all his repeated requests and that too when the elections were near.³

Regarding Bose's claim of raising a volunteer corps i.e., based Bengal volunteers, and to make it fight communal forces, one tends to be critical of its effectiveness and organisation despite its leader Jyotish Joardar's claim that it had enlisted 12,000 volunteers.⁴ This is because nowhere in the next one year when Bengal was witnessing communal flare ups, did it ever surface to fight communal forces.

In spite of this, Bose's attempt was novel and

1. Bose, Sarat Chandra, op.cit., p. 164 as quoted in Gordon, Leonard A., op.cit., p.570.

2. Ibid., p.167.

3. Ashrafuddin Ahmed Choudhury to Acharya J.B. Kripalani, dated 6th December 1945, AICC Papers, File No. p-5 (ptI). This shows the factionalism in the Bengal Congress in its true colours. Since Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chowdhury was close to Subhash Bose, he and his group it seems from his letter, was not welcome to the people controlling the BPCC.

4. Gordon, Leonard A., op.cit., p. 570.

practical in the sense that Congress as an organisation hardly bothered to fight communalism on the active lines and concentrated on peace missions. On the other hand, Hindu Mahasabha tried to raise 'Hindustan National Guard' (to counter the 'Muslim National Guard'). In that sense Bose's volunteer corps could have played a very crucial anti-communal role. But like Bose's other attempts, this also failed to reach its finale owing to an ever present rupture between his 'plans' and the required organizational groundwork.

In the myriad of all these arguments and criticism what remains hidden from the scene is the fact that the Noakhali riot reflected the extreme form of communalism as a result of the virulence and completeness of the communalisation of society in Bengal. What becomes important for us is not what was happening in Noakhali but how Congress tried to deal with this form of communalism and how its own perception was getting shaped by it. A detailed study of the Congress movement in Noakhali might indicate the nature of resistance that it offered to the ideological penetration of communalism in the peasant society of Noakhali. But in the winter of 1946-47, the District as well as the Provincial Congress Committees found themselves utterly helpless in the face of the communal mass upsurge and were banking on the colonial authorities to bring peace and order. It showed inability to come out of this impasse and one might surmise that the support that the Provincial Congress leaders later gave to the pro-Bengal Partition demand was more due to its

helplessness borne out of its long term failure to evolve ideological counterfoil to communalism than to the technical niceties of Partition talks.

IV

The demand for creation of a separate province of Bengal out of the Northern and Eastern part gained momentum in March after the Congress Working Committee had passed its resolution on the Punjab. Hindu Mahasabha, as we have seen, had given the demand its formal approval in its Calcutta conference. However it would be wrong to suggest that it was a move only by the Hindu Mahasabha. Various political and social organisations had begun demanding partition of the Province. Gradually as the deliberations and negotiations at the central level dragged on the demand, which had now been given a mobilised form, took a strong turn with Congress joining in. Though the Hindus of West Bengal were most vociferous about the demand, yet the continuous flow of memoranda and petitions from East Bengal districts like Pabna Barisal, Jessore, Noakhali, etc., to the Congress office indicated the direction of the Hindu public opinion. Thus as far as can be gleaned through available textual sources, the cry for a separate homeland for the Hindus had caught on. However, one should keep in mind that Bengal had recently passed through violent manifestations of 'extreme communalism' and the demand could have been reflective more of reaction to it than of reason.

In this whirlpool of demand for the partition of

Bengal, Congress had to defend its position in quite a number of ways. First and foremost, the very acceptance of Pakistan by the Congress was tantamount to Congress being blamed for accepting the 'Two Nation Theory'. In other words by accepting the *physical truth of Pakistan*, Congress could be easily shown as accepting the *ideological truth of the two nation theory*.

Demanding partition of Bengal could easily ^{be} pointed to as Congress sacrificing its long cherished principle of the unity of India and its long drawn ideological battle against the demand for Pakistan and Two Nation Theory. But, on the societal plane, the demand was getting 'mobilised' and the Hindu Mahasabha was thinking of spearheading a movement to force of this demand. What was Congress to do? Was there any way to save its *doctrinal purity* without sacrificing political exigency? Similarly, by demanding partition of Bengal would it not sacrifice the Hindus, the scheduled caste population and the nationalist Muslims of East Bengal who had stood all these years by the Congress and Nationalism which it stood for.

Third, and most important from the point of view of Congress's position vis-a-vis communalism was the question as to how did it weigh the partition against communalism. In other words, was not the demand for partition (and acceptance of Pakistan) a surrender to communalism? In this arena, surrender meant both to Hindu Mahasabha which began demanding the separate Hindu province of Bengal and to the Muslim League which wanted Pakistan for the Muslims. The first attack however came from the ranks within. A

section of Congress leaders led by Sarat Chandra Bose began to counter the demand for partition. Their opposition to partition of the province was based both on ideological and practical levels. Ideologically they felt that the partition of the province meant sacrifice and surrender of the Congress ideal of nationalism on the altar of communalism. Communalism for them was "just a passing phase and succumbing to it by demanding partition showed a defeatist mentality."¹ On the practical level, they argued that this demand amounted to surrendering the Hindus of East Bengal into the hands of the communal forces.²

In the first week of March a meeting of these leaders was held in Calcutta in which criticising the 'partition demand' they issued a 7 point statement.³ In their second meeting held in the last week of

1. Ananda Bazar Patrika, Cal, 10 March 1947. Also see Hindustan Standard, Cal, 25 March 1947.

2. Ibid.

3. These included :

"1. Partition of Bengal cannot save Hindus as it was supposed to;

2. This demand feeds the demand of Pakistan;

3. The entire movement is suffering from a defeatist mentality and communalism will take an aggressive form and problem will take a complex turn due to this demand;

4. This is a reactionary and backward looking movement. Communalism is a passing phase in our national life. Political and Economic forces will actually regulate the destiny of our nation. Partition of Bengal will create a permanent cleavage between the two communities which will be bad for the Nation;

5. Partition of Bengal will destroy social, cultural and linguistic unity;

6. This will greatly harm the Scheduled Castes because they constitute a large section of the East Bengal Hindus;

7. Census shows that the population of Hindus in East and West Bengal is same hence a policy of separate Hindu Homeland is not adoptable." Anand Bazar Patrika, Cal., 10 March, 1947.

March, the speakers stressed 'the need for a tearing campaign against the proposed partition',¹

Soon we find Sarat Chandra Bose, who had earlier resigned from the Congress Working Committee when it passed the resolution accepting the "British government view of the procedures to be followed in the sections in the constituent Assembly"² engaged in talks with Suhrawardy for regarding maintaining a united Bengal. This created a confusion in the political circles. The East Bengal Muslims and the Provincial Muslim League leadership aligned to the central leadership, while opposing any move by Suhrawardy to create an independent Bengal, opposed any move to partition it. It helped as a catalyst so far as the demand for partition was concerned. This was because it strengthened the fear that the whole Bengal might be passed on to the Muslim League as part of Pakistan.

This might have been the reason why provincial Congress began demanding partition in a much more organised way from April onwards. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee passed a resolution on 4th April 1947 demanding partition and before that on 2nd April members of the central legislature from Bengal issued a joint statement demanding 'creation of a separate autonomous province in Bengal within Indian Union

1. Hindustan Standard , 25 March 1947.

2. He said: "I was opposed to the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's proposals.... the resolution drafted by the Congress Working Committee stultifies the Congress, makes Constituent Assembly a subservient body and irreparably destroys the integrity of India and actually compels provinces to accept grouping against their will and to surrender provincial autonomy..." Bose, Sarat Chandra, op.cit., pp.173-74. Also see Gordon, Leonard A., op.cit., p.572.

for 'protecting the life, honour, liberty, religion, education, culture, language and economic interests of the Hindus and other Nationalists of Bengal.'¹

The Congress Committee reiterated its demand by its resolution on 20th April which, while enjoining upon the public "to cultivate a feeling of common citizenship and good neighbourliness... irrespective of community." It demanded that ;"(1) the recently recruited police force from outside Bengal which has already become a sort of terror to the public and against which serious allegations of hooliganism and organised lawlessness have been lodged, should immediately be discharged; (2) that the present Bengal ministry having woefully ignored its primary duty of maintaining law and order and having lost all confidence of the law-abiding and peaceful citizens particularly of the minority community should be immediately dissolved; and (3) that pending the final partition of Bengal into two provinces as has been demanded in our resolution of April 4 immediate steps should be taken to set up a regional ministry in Bengal."² This meeting of the Provincial Committee also felt "its obligation to organise mass support behind the political stand of Congress."³ Subsequent to the resolution, Congress began organising mass meetings to press its demand and mobilise support. Countering the move for an

1. Statement by Lakshmi Kanta Maitra and other members of the Central Legislative Assembly from Bengal, AICC Papers, File No. CL-14C, 1947, p.51-57.

2. Resolution of the BPCC Executive Council, AICC Papers, File No. CL-14C, 1947, p. 159-61.

3. Ibid..

undivided Bengal, the Committee opined that the "Undivided Bengal divorced from the Indian Union does not fit in the context of divided India."¹

Similarly opposing the idea of the undivided and sovereign Bengal, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, member of the Congress Working Committee, said that "it was nothing but sugar coated Pakistan"² However, from the appeal he made to the East Bengal Hindus it appeared that he was voicing the demand of the West Bengal Hindus. He asked the East Bengal Hindus not to oppose the creation of a new province in West Bengal "as such an attitude would only embitter the relations between East Bengal and West Bengal Hindus."³

What was interesting however was the way the Congress leaders countered the charge that Congress by demanding partition was "leaving the Hindu minority of East Bengal to dire fate." The Congress sources are silent on the issue though the statement of the central legislators among whom quite a few represented the Congress gave a reasoning which was akin to that of the Hindu Mahasabha's reasoning behind the same questions. They said that they "feel that the apprehension is entirely baseless. At the present moment the people of West and North Bengal are absolutely powerless to render effective assistance to their persecuted brethren in East Bengal. But with full governmental authority in their

1. Report from Kalipada Mukherjee, Secretary BPC, to Congress President J.B. Kripalani, 28 May 1947, AICC Papers, File No 14-C, 1947, p.215.

2. Ibid., p.227.

3. Ibid.

hands they will be in a position not only to assist them in a variety of ways but to prevent any injustice or outrage being perpetrated on them."¹ It seems political boundaries were breaking down and differences were getting ironed out on this point. Surprisingly enough, this was also the point which was stressed by the anti-partition Congressmen. Kamini Kumar Dutta one of the prominent peasant leaders of Congress in the Bengal Legislative Council, said that the demand "not only surrenders the Hindus in general but in fact it ignores the interests of a large section of the Hindu population, i.e., the scheduled castes, who constitute a major section of the Bengal's Hindu population."²

Congress leadership in the province it seems never answered this question. In fact the question of transfer of population was also not brought to any serious attention. Then one might be tempted to ask the question whether the provincial Congress leaders were in the know of the problems intimately related to the partition or they simply wanted partition in order to get out of the impasse created by the irresponsible and communal government of the Muslim League. In fact this is the impression one gets from the statement of Lakshmi Kanta Maitra, M.L.A (central), who, while speaking at the Jatiya Banga Mahasamandan, attended by 5,000 people including almost all the legislators of the Presidency division, said that , "they were all agreed upon the question

1. Statement by Lakshmi Kanta Maitra and other members of the Central Legislative Assembly from Bengal, AICC Papers, File No. CL.14-C, 1947, p.57.

2. Ananda Bazar Patrika, 10 March 1947.

of division and they must have it". He appealed to all not to trouble their heads on details of division. "Those were matters which were entirely within the decision of the Boundary Commission when it would be set up. They would then have to help the Commission with maps, figures and also with their suggestions."¹

Going through the reports of the partition demand as raised in the different conferences attended and addressed by the Congress leaders, one is left with the impression that the critique that 'the slogan of partition of Bengal has come out of demoralisation and defeatism and the conception of the inevitability of Pakistan'² was true even in the case of the Congress in Bengal.

This sense of the inevitability of Pakistan however was the creation of the ideology of communalism which dictated the psyche and consciousness of people to act in the way they did on the 16th August in Calcutta or in the Winter of 1946-47 in Noakhali. The communal holocaust of these places brought out the urge to get out of this problem once and for all. This urge obviously shaped the Congressmen's perception who can not be blamed for not seeing the writing on the wall just for the sake of preserving the doctrinal purity of their credit of a United India. This perception guided the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee to join and lead the movement for the partition of Bengal. In this regard the Jatiya Banga

1. Report of the Jatiya Banga Mahasammelan held on 10th and 11th May 1947, AICC Papers, File No. CL-14-C, 1947, pp.233-241.
2. Memorandum presented on behalf of people opposing the partition of Bengal, Ibid., p.449.

Mahasammelan which was held at Singhee Park, Ballygunge on 10th and 11th May 1947, became important as it was 'attended by M.L.A.s, M.L.Cs, member of the Consituent Assembly, members of central legislatures, president, secretaries and members of district, sub-divisional and primary Congress committees of Calcutta and Presidency division.'¹ This was primarily the Congress counterpart of the Hindu Mahasabha's All Bengal Hindu Conferences held at Tarakeshwar.

The convention, while demanding that "those portions of Bengal which want to remain within the India Union should immediatly be constituted into a separate province within the Indian Union", asked people to observe 15th May as the Nationalist Bengal Day and "hold meetings and to adopt resolutions asking for the partition."²

Thus, the Congress had accepted the partition because there was no option left and because communalism reigned supreme. While the anti partition leaders perceived 'communalism as a passing phase in our national life', this view was criticised by Congress leaders "as an erronous one as it was based on an incorrect appreciation of the situation....far from being a passing phase, communalism was still growing as is evidenced by the recent tragic events in the Punjab and Bengal as well as by the steps which are being taken even now by the Muslim League to strengthen it. It is idle to expect that communalism in India, which has grown steadily during a period of more than sixty years, will die a

1. See the Report of the Mahasammelan. Ibid., p.233-241
2. Ibid..

natural death in near future."¹

It seems to me that their argument was correct. Despite historical conjectures the facts remains that the insistence of Jinnah and the enactment of violence on communal lines (aided even by people associated with the protective forces) were fast bringing the date, '14th August', nearear when Bengal would see a ruptured existence which it had heroically negated way back in 1905. In retrospect however, one can still argue that had partition not taken place, communalism would have had different contours than its persistence till date shows.

1. Statement by Lakshmi Kant Maitra and others, AICC Papers
File No. CL-14-C.

CHAPTER - IV

GANDHI IN BENGAL, 1946 - 1947

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GANDHI IN BENGAL 1946-1947

The happenings in Noakhali and the recurrence of sporadic communal flare up in Calcutta, Dacca and other places in the pre independence days brought Mahatma Gandhi to Bengal. Gandhi's presence introduced a new dynamic into the entire discourse on the question of communal riots. This dynamism was soon transported to the realm of active politics especially the politics which contained a steady undertone of violence, i.e., communal riots. To us his presence provides the backdrop to the study of the situation prevailing in Bengal during those fateful days and how this situation was reshaping men and their ideas. Man creates violence but violence recreates that man. The present chapter is an attempt to see the process of the reshaping of man in the geographical context of Bengal and the thematic context of communalism and its violent manifestation --- communal riots.¹

I

Gandhi had seen in the Calcutta riots the potential of yet more escalated violence - probably that of a civil war. "We are not yet in the midst of a civil war," he said, "but we are nearing it. At present we are playing at it."² In fact a close scrutiny reveals that he was taking a personal interest in the matters of Bengal especially the violence

1. Gandhi's Noakhali Experiment has been the theme of quite a few works which include Alexander, H., 'On the March with Gandhi', The Manchester Guardian, 3 March 1947; Alexander, H., Gandhi Through Western Eyes, Philadelphia, 1986; Bose, N.K., My Days with Gandhi, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1974.

2. Harijan, 15 Sept, 1946, p 312 as quoted in Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi : The Last Phase, Vol. II p. 245.

that had been taking place.¹ But what prompted him to come to Bengal was the news of happenings in Noakhali. "Why and why only Noakhali whereas riotings had been taking place in Ahmedabad, Bombay or for that matter in the neighbouring Bihar?"²

The question was important in the sense that it brought out the seriousness of the Noakhali situation and it explained as to why Gandhi thought it serious enough to come personally to Noakhali-Tipperia villages.

Noakhali - Tippera riots were qualitatively different from the earlier communal riots including even the recent Calcutta killings of August 1946.³ As brought out earlier, Noakhali - Tippera riots were unique in the sense that they transformed communalism from a politics based on religion to violence sanctified by religion.

1. Even during the violence that followed the Rashid Ali Day demonstration on 11-12 February 1946, 1946, Gandhi had asked the secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress committee (BPCC) to send him a report of the incidents. The BPCC Secretary's letter dated 16 Feb., 1946 said :

 v Revered Mahatamaji,

 I beg to confirm the telegram to you on 15.2.96 in reply to your query regarding Calcutta Disturbances. The Telegram was as follow: " REACTION AGAINST POLICE FIRENG AND PEACEFUL PROCESSIONIST EXCITED..... CITY UNDER MILITARY CONTROL"

AICC PAPERS, File No. P-5 (part-1), 1945-46, p. 123.

2. Gandhi's answer to this question was that 'he would have certainly gone to places mentioned (not Bihar) by the Friends if anything approaching what had happened in Noakhali had happened there and if he had felt that he could do nothing without being on the spot.'

COLLECTED WORKS (heveafter CW), Vol. LXXXVI, p. 65.

3. For Suranjan Das who has written a comprehensive account of the communal riots in Bengal till 1947, " Noakhali - Tippera riots completed the shift from the relatively unorganised and often class based communal violence to organised rioting with direct involvement of the organised political world." Das, Suranjan, op.cit. , p. 201.

"It was the cry of the outraged womanhood," said Gandhi, "which brought him to Bangal."¹ Abduction, forced marriages and violation of honour of women had been very much part of the Noakhali-Tipperera riots. This had a very strong emotional effect on the Hindus in Bengal as well as outside Bengal. Gandhi had a feel of this strong current of abhorrence at the happenings.² Thus, he was not only looking at the problem of Hindus in Noakhali but was looking beyond these acts of violence and violation. "In any war", he said, "brutalities were bound to take place. War is a brutal thing."³ He was, as his close aide of the Noakhali days suggested, not so much concerned about the casualties or the extent of material damage, but in "discovering the political intentions working behind the move and the way of combating them successfully."⁴

This attitude of combating the war brought out a novel form of experience in its train. The phase of Noakhali-Tipperera is often called Gandhi's Noakhali experiment. In this experiment, Gandhian principles were at stake. "My own doctrine", said Gandhi to N.C. Chatterjee, "was failing and I

1. Harijan, 10 Nov., 1946, p. 396 as quoted in Pyarelal op.cit., p.6,

2. All India repurscussions of the Noakhali-Tipperera happenings have been discussed in chapters II & III and it appeared from the Prayer meeting speeches and other utterances that Gandhi was in close touch with the feelings of the people.

3. Bose, N.K., op.cit., p. 43.

4. ibid.

do not want to die a failure."¹ Thus Noakhali days gave Gandhi those moments of self doubt. He "grappled in darkness" and told N.K. Bose, his secretary during those days, that "he might have to stay here for several years."²

Did he possess any coherent strategy when he landed up in Noakhali ? He was uncertain and did not know what to do next.³ We will discuss in this chapter whether his actions were just situational improvisations or were part of a coherent anti-communal ideology. A critical perusal of Gandhi's acts and utterances during his stay in Noakhali and Calcutta shows that crucial for him was to delegitimise communalism of its religious justification and legitimacy. A point worth examining is whether Gandhi succeeded in his mission. In this sense, therefore Gandhi's experiment was not merely a soothing or 'save Hindus mission' but rather a journey to establish ideological hegemony against communalism.

Apparaently however, Gandhi had no game plan. Even while on his road to Noakhali he did not know what he was going to do there. He kept on invoking God, "only who", he said, "knew what he could do. Only thing he knew was that his place was there at Noakhali. He had to be there."⁴ Before Gandhi could embark on his journey to Noakhali, Bihar erupted into ghastly communal riots. Ravaging Hindu crowds

1. BOSE, N.K., op.cit., p. 85. Also See CW , Vol. LXXXVI, p.200.

2. Ibid.

3. His numerous letters written during this time show this uncertainty. See CW, Vol. LXXXVI, pp. 47-63.

4. Ibid., p. 62.

began slaughtering Muslims in order to avenge what the latter's coreligionists had done to the former's in Noakhali. Gandhi's position became very delicate as the Bihar riots boomeranged on his peace mission to Noakhali. The Muslim League Government, which from the very beginning had been trying to minimise the nature and effect of the Noakhali-Tipperah riots, got a convenient counter argument to minimise its own responsibility regarding the entire episode. Now this could be easily done by exaggerating the effect of the Bihar riots and making them a kind of centre of projection.¹

Since the Muslim League government of Bengal did not like Gandhi's visit to Noakhali as it thought it would focus world attention on the misdeeds of the Muslim League, it exerted pressure through propaganda and personal insinuations on Gandhi.² Even people holding responsible positions criticised Gandhi and asked him to go to Bihar rather than staying in Noakhali. One of the Parliamentary Secretaries of the Bengal government, Hamiduddin Chaudhury,

1. The Bihar riots were presented as another act of anti-Muslims campaign by the Congress Ministry which wanted to annihilate the Muslims and their culture & religion. Star of India, Calcutta, a prominent Muslims League daily, dedicated an entire issue to the people killed in Bihar, 11 Nov., 1946.

As far as the number of people killed was concerned, Fazlul Huq went to the extent of quoting the figure 1 lakhs which he later on amended to 30 thousand, Azad, Cal., 12 Nov, 1946, also Star of India, Cal, 13 Nov. 1946.

2. Even a person of Fazlul Huq's stature urged his audience to make it impossible for Gandhi to remain in Bengal. Modern Review, March-Oct., p. 174 as quoted in Das, Suranjan op.cit. p. 202.

who had gone to Noakhali with Gandhi, issued a statement to the press asking Gandhi to leave Noakhali. He said: "Mr. Gandhi is in Noakhali only to focus attentions of the world on the happenings there and to magnify the issue."¹

Synchronising with the statements of this sort, the Muslim League workers in Noakhali began to harass Gandhi and his volunteers so that they would leave the place. Members of the Feni sub-division Muslim League sent Gandhi a 'post card' containing a copy of the resolution passed by that body which read : "It is appreciated that Mr. Gandhi's presence in Bihar is much more useful than at Noakhali where the situation is normal. He is therefore requested to leave for Bihar." Gandhi's reply to this was that he was unable to follow their advice which is definitely based on ignorance of facts. "In the first place I know that the situation is not normal here and that so far as I can contribute to the Bihar problem, I have to inform you that such influence as I have

1. The full statement ran :

Mr. Gandhi does not intend to go to Bihar.... will it be wrong if one feels that Mr. Gandhi is in Noakhali only to focus attention of the world on the happenings there and to magnify the same for keeping the Bihar happenings in the Background ?

Does Mr. Gandhi want to complete his organisation through the number of volunteers he has got from outside ? Mr. Gandhi may conveniently ask all the outside volunteers both male and female to quit while advising the refugees to return to their homes Mr. Gandhi is holding prayer meetings everyday in the evening and after the prayer he sometimes delivers lectures.... No more sermons or instructions seem to be necessary for the Hindus will realise that the mischievous propaganda of their so called friends has been the cause of (bringing upon them) more misery and discomfort, they will begin to think rightly. Free from outside propaganda, they will begin to repose confidence in their Muslims neighbours with whom they hence have been living peacefully for centuries."

Azad, Cal., 14 Dec 1946.

on Bihar can be and is being efficiently exercised from Srirampur."¹ A deeper analysis, however, reveals the fact that Gandhi could see the dynamics involved in relationship between Noakhali-Tipperah and Bihar riots. He had seen that it was Noakhali which was the disease and Bihar was just an outgrowth.²

At this juncture one can easily glean through the sound judgement that Gandhi displayed. He knew quite clearly, it appears, that he could exert influence on the ministers and the people of Bihar even from a distance. He neither had a hold on the ministers of the Bengal Government nor did he have any strong influence, as he had been witnessing, on the muslim populace of Noakhali-Tipperah many of whom even condemned him as an arch enemy of Islam.³

Thus, he stayed back and faced a barrage of criticism from the Muslims League quarters. Towards the end of his stay, however, opposition from Muslim League quarters began to take a turn towards worse. ~~He~~ He took it as the mistake of those who misunderstood him and his work. But he

1. CW, Vol. LXXXVI, pp. 265-66. See also Bose, N.K., op.cit., p.122.

2. Gandhi's reply to the statement of Hamiduddin Chaudhury bears out this understanding. He wrote : "It will not serve the cause of peace if I went to Bihar and found the Bihar Muslim League's report to be largely imaginary and the Bihar Government's conduct substantially honourable, humane and just. I am not anxious to give them a certificate of good conduct as I am to give you much though you may not want it. My spare diet and contemplated fast, you know well, were against the Bihar misdoings, I could not take such step in matters of Noakhali misdoings. It pains me to think that you a seasoned lawyer should not see the obvious." Bose, N.K., op.cit., p. 109.

3. CW, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 280.

resolved not to "surrender his love for men even if they were erring."¹ However, a detailed message from Dr. Sayyid Mahmud from Bihar whom Gandhi had asked to inform him about the happenings there forced him to immediately take the decision to go to Bihar as his presence, it was thought, "would do real good to the suffering Muslim minority there."²

II

Between October 1946 and September 1947, Gandhi visited Bengal on three occasions. All the three visits coincided with the most crucial phases of the history of the province. He was in Noakhali from November 6 to the end of February, 1947. In May 1947 he had come to Calcutta when the politics of united sovereign Bengal and that of partitioning of the province had been going on. His final visit to the province was in August 1947 when he undertook 'the fast' to bring sanity to the city's civic life so that people did not indulge in wanton killings which the other partitioned province the Punjab- was witnessing.

Gandhi left Calcutta on 6th November 1946 for Noakhali. Beginning his journey from the villages of Gopdirbag, Chaumuhani and Duttapara, he finally reached Srirampur on 20 November where he was to spend the next 43 nights till 1st January. The village soon became the nerve centre of Gandhi's peace mission in Noakhali.

1. Bose, N.K., op.cit., p. 132.
2. Ibid.

From January 1st onwards, he embarked on his journey into the interiors of the Noakhali villages. He wanted to get into the hearts of the Muslim villages so that his crusade against the communal ideology reached the real arena. He did not want police protection which was given to him as he wanted to dispel from the people's mind any suspicion by showing them that he had come to them without any fear.¹

In the later stage, he kept on minimising his needs and number of people whom he kept with him. He became a veritable lonely pilgrim. One of his close associates, who had gone to visit him in this later stage, described the life of this lonely pilgrim in a vivid manner. "I presented myself," he writes, "to the temporary host of Gandhiji and asked him if I might see his guest. He pointed to the little hut in which a lamp was burning and gave me permission to walk in. I peeped in and there he was, all alone, working away in the light of a kerosene lamp, a hurricane lantern with a broken chimney. My footsteps disturbed him and he looked up and there was the familiar smile of greeting."²

This smile greeted not only this visitor but also the villagers of the Noakhali-Tipperah who witnessed the old

1. He wrote to H.S. Suhrawardy, the then Chief Minister on 8 Jan, 1947 "... all my attempts at bringing about real friendship between the two communities must fail so long as I go about fully protected by armed police or military." CW, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 330.

2. Ghosh, Sudhir, Gandhi's Emissary, Cresset Press, London, 1967, p.191.

man of 78 walking through the villages which had recently been the field of the Muslim League sponsored communal onslaught on the minority. Given the penetration of communal ideology and the ferocity and scale of the communal attack, it was quite facile for anybody to suggest that the Hindus there should face the situation boldly. Here what became important was not merely the physical protection from death or violation but regeneration of a sense of confidence and courage. For Gandhi, the aim was "to build up a new basis of life for those whose morale had been shattered and to provide an antidote for the fanaticism and bigotry which was at the root of the disturbances."¹

In almost all the villages he visited and the congregational prayer meetings he addressed, he admonished the Hindus for being cowards and exhorted them to be fearless. His exhortation was better put into words by his secretary Pyarelal who advised the people of Karatkhal to become courageous. The gist of what he said to them was that "if they had a living faith in God and walked in His fear always, they would know no other fear. Fear of death turned men into cowards and yet was there a man who being born could escape death."²

It was not that Gandhi was unaware of the fear that stalked the Noakhali-Tipperah villages and of the fact that the Hindus were really in great danger without adequate

1. Pyarelal, op.cit., p. 69.
2. ibid., pp. 88-9.

protection. But what he was doing was to instil and inject courage and fearlessness among the people so that the situation of panic stopped and victims and the refugees started afresh.

To this was intimately related Gandhi's argument against providing permanent military protection to the Hindus. He felt that "it was like accepting defeat even before the battle had begun."¹ He said: "No police or military would protect people who are cowards."² He asked the Hindus to become courageous and shun their inferiority complex. In a meeting at Jagatpur on 10th January, 1947 Gandhi spoke to the audience about courage and need of 'never surrendering one's honour even at on pains of death.'³ Gandhi was very much upset about the violation of women's honour in the Noakhali-Tipperah riots. Therefore his emphasis on 'honour' became quite meaningful. It had desired results in many places. After a meeting, a girl came up to "to tell her story without the slightest fear" "and as N.K. Bose records,"being asked whether she could be able to come back and stay once more in the midst of scenes she could never forget," the girl answered in the affirmative. She said she could because "now she knew that she could save herself by dying."⁴ This forced Bose to think about this transformation. He is equivocal in his judgement but he

1. Pyarelal, op.cit., vol. II, p.15

2. Ibid.

3. Bose, N.K., op.cit., p. 126.

4. Ibid.

could not negate the influence of Gandhi's speeches on that girl.¹

Despite all these speeches of fearlessness, Gandhi was not a visionary.² Gandhi could see the problem of the Hindu minority when the entire Muslim populace was under the grip of communal antipathy towards them. Gandhi was in fact looking desperately for any point of 'commonality' or cooperation on which he could build up his mission of changing the hearts of the people for a permanent solution. He understood that without such change, the final solution was the total transfer of population.³

Here his advice towards building up a sense of trust and responsibility became a kind of supplementary to the idea of fearlessness. He wanted the Muslim League Government to take responsibility for the riot victims, the Muslim population to take the responsibility for the Hindu population and the Muslim villagers to take the responsibility for the Hindu villagers. On the other hand, he exhorted the Hindus to trust the Muslims who were ready to take the responsibility. Thus, in this way a bridge could be built among the Muslims and Hindus.

1. "Week afterwards, I asked myself, where did this woman gain the strength which she displayed ? She had come in contact with Gandhiji only once and had heard from him how a woman should lay down her life rather than surrender her honour. But could that speech have produced the courage which I witnessed on that winter morning ?" Bose, N.K., ibid., p.127.

2. "I am not a visionary as I am generally supposed to be. I am an idealist, but I claim to be a practical idealist." Ibid., p. 85.

3. He hinted at this by saying, " If there has to be a migration at all, it must be complete." Ibid

This insistence on responsibility on the part of the Muslim League and the majority community had wide ramifications. Gandhi wanted the guilty of the riots to accept their responsibility, the Muslim League Government to accept its responsibility towards the Hindu minority and the Muslim villagers to take care of the Hindu villagers. This became the cornerstone of Gandhi's experiment in Noakhali. By this he was not only trying to create the bridge for a permanent solution of the communal antagonism, but also attempting a blow at the very idea of Pakistan and the 'Two Nation' theory.

When told that the Muslims were willing to receive the refugees back in their villages provided they withdrew the criminal cases arising out of the the disturbances, Gandhi gave two alternatives to the guilty. "They could admit the crimes and justify their conduct on the ground that whatever they had done was under advice, solely for the establishment of Pakistan without any personal motive and face the consequences. Or, they should report and submit to penalty of law by way of expiation."¹ But he negated any compromise by dropping the cases. Hence personal responsibility was to be accepted but also the root of those acts which forced people to create such a situation.

He negated the idea of the Hindu Mahasabha that the entire Hindu population should be segregated in pockets. N.C. Chatterjes, the President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, personally came to Gandhi to

1. Pyarelal, op.cit., p. 416.

argue on this line. Gandhi's counter argument contained his idea of responsibility. For him it was an unworkable proposition. He said to N.C. Chatterjee: "Put yourself in Mr. Suhrawardy's shoes; do you think he would favour it, or even the Muslim residents of Noakhali ? For it would be interpreted as a preparation for war."¹ Again, 'by putting forth that demand they would practically be conceding the logic of the Muslim League's demand of Pakistan for what was Pakistan but a glorified pocket. If migration had to take place, it must be systematic and complete... It was not therefore to be thought of so long as there was any hope of cooperation.'²

The enactment of this idea of the sense of responsibility lay in Gandhi's idea of peace committees. Initially the idea of peace committees was mooted by the Bengal Muslim League Government while Gandhi was in Srirampur. The idea was that there would be equal number of Hindu and Muslim members in peace committees with a government official as chairman. Gandhi was favourably disposed to the idea because it fulfilled his *idea of responsibility*. This is why he asked the Hindu members to give it a chance to succeed when the latter insisted on first bringing the miscreants to book. Gandhi advised them not to summarily reject the proposal by putting any condition. Thus

1. Bose. N.K., op.cit., p.84. He countered the similar arguments from Muslim quarters during his visit to the Bihar riot scenes.

2. Pyarelal, op.cit., p. 404.

the Hindus had to trust & honour the work of these committees.

Similarly Gandhi asked people to trust the representatives of the Government. In Srirampur he said: "There were elected Muslims who were running the Government of the Province who gave them their words of honour. They would not be silent witness to repetition of shameful deeds. His advise to the Hindus was to believe their word and give them a trial. This did not mean there would not be a single bad Musalman left in the East Bengal. There were good and bad men amongst all communities. Dishonourble conduct would demean any ministry or organisation in the end."¹

The functions of the peace committies were defined to be: (a) to do ~~int~~ensive propaganda work to restore confidence; (b) to help in constructing shelters for the returning refugees, and in processing and distributing relief, e.g., food, clothing, etc.; (c) to draw up lists of disturbers of peace, who should be rounded up. These lists would be checked up with the first information report, already lodged with the police and arrests made on verification. If an innocent person was found to have been arrested, the peace committee would recommend to the magistrate his releas on bail or unconditionally as the case might be; and (d) to prepare a list of houses destroyed or damaged during the disturbances.

1. Bose. N.K., op.cit., p. 52,58.

When government efforts proved wanting, Gandhi even went to the extent of keeping 'one brave man' in a village who could lay his life if occasion arose rather than shun responsibility. Gandhi was of the firm conviction that a single man could change the entire complexion of societal thought by his acts and behaviour. In case of Noakhali-Tipperah, Gandhi was very pleased to meet the Maulavi in Muraim who according to him "helped sustaining his theory that one individual can transform the entire society".¹ There was no riot in Muraim where, according to Pyarelal, the Maulavi was like an oasis amidst the desert, and the Maulavi even saw to it that Hindus did not run in panic and made himself responsible for their well being.²

The third major ingredient of Gandhi's efforts in Noakhali was to attack communal ideology from a high moral and ethical plane. This had two aspects. First, he emphasised the point that everybody had an equal right to profess or follow any religion unless it negatively affected others' religious credo. Gandhi was literally appalled to see and hear about the religious intolerance shown during the riots and which continued even during his visits. In one of the villages. Mashimpur, which he visited on 7 Jan 1947, he said: "I am sorry that some of my friends had not been able to hear any name of God except Khuda but I am glad because they have had the courage of expressing their dissent openly and plainly. This small incident probably gives an inkling of the -----

1. Pyarelal, op.cit., p. 399.

2. Ibid.

mentality which had prevailed during the fateful October disturbances in the district."¹ He then appealed to the Muslim brethren to assure him "of that freedom which is true to the noblest tradition of Islam. Even from the Muslim League platforms it has been repeatedly said that there will be full tolerance of the practice of their faith by the minority and that they will enjoy freedom of worship equally with the majority."² Thus his stout defence of his Ramdhun and prayer meetings testified to his fight for religious freedom. In a place where all the symbols of a particular religion had been made target of attack, Gandhian defence obviously came as an attack on that particular undercurrent of communal ideology which propagated religious intolerance.

The second aspect of it was that by bringing up ethical moral questions, Gandhi was trying to delegitimise communal ideology and its forces of their claims to religious legitimacy. In retrospect, it seems really important because religious personnel and religion itself became the main prop and legitimising factors in the Noakhali-Tippera riots. Apart from the physical manifestation of it,³ Gandhi could glean the prevailing mentality from a discussion with Maulavi

1. This was in response to the incident when the local Muslims had left the prayer ground because Ramdhun was being sung in Prayer Meetings. Speech at Prayer Meeting at Mashimpur on Jan. 7 1947. CW, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 323.

2. Ibid., p. 324.

3. As we have seen pictures of Gods and Goddesses were removed or thrown out of the houses. In Raipur, Gandhi saw a temple was destroyed and converted into Pakistan club. Pyarelal, op.cit., p. 192.

Khalilur Rahman of Devipur village which he visited on 17th February. The Maulavi was, it was said, responsible for the conversion of a large number of Hindus during the disturbance."¹

On being asked about the truth of the matter, the Maulavi said that 'the conversion should not be taken seriously, it was a dodge adopted to save the life of the Hindus. Gandhi asked him if it was any good saving one's life (jan) by sacrificing one's faith (iman)? it would have been better if as a religious preceptor he had taught the Hindus to lay down their lives for their faith, rather than give it up through fear. The divine continued to argue that such false conversion for saving one's life had the sanction of religion, when Gandhiji grew inpatient and said if he ever met God he would ask him why a man with such views had ever been made a religious preceptor".²

He Gandhi tried to invoke Islam itself to counter the ideology basing itself on the name of Islam. He said, "It is only in order to serve the cause of Islam that the Muslims are being called upon to join the committees. The most important task is to restore the confidence among the Hindus that they would be able to pursue their religious practice in freedom."³

Again in another place when he was describing his meeting with Hindu women "who put on vermilion mark indoors

1. Bose N.K., op.cit., p. 130.

2. Ibid., p. 130.

3. Ibid., p. 64.

but wipe it off when they stir out in public", ¹ Gandhi invoked the name of the Prophet and Islam by saying: "I will ask my Mussalman friends to treat this as their sacred duty. The Prophet once advised Mussalmans to consider the Jewish place of worship to be as pure as their own, and offer it the same protection. It is the duty of the Mussalman of today to assure the same freedom to their Hindu neighbours."² He even brought Jinnah's name so that the local Muslim Leaguers did not commit misdeeds by using his name. He said, "Quid-e-Azam Jinnah has said that every Muslim must show by his conduct that not a single non-Muslim need be afraid of him, the latter should be guaranteed safety and protection. For, thus alone can the Mussalman command honour and respect." His continued references from Quran were also supportive of his argument that "if people had known the true meaning of their scriptures, happenings like those of Noakhali could never have taken place."³

Thus, we see that the major part of Gandhi's experiment in Noakhali was to attack the communal ideology with three ingredients i.e., advocacy of fearlessness, invoking the sense of responsibility and taking the discourse to an ethical-moral plane. In countering the prevailing communal mentality in the Noakhali-Tipperah, Gandhi had gone to the core of the problem. He understood that the communal consciousness was an ideology and had to be fought by

1. Ibid., pp. 64-65.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 57.

changing the man and not merely by changing the economy or politics. To change the man, Gandhi wanted to go into his consciousness and retrieve it of any inhibiting circumstance which could be taken advantage of by the communal ideology. That is why during this tour he wanted, as he told an audience; "to teach you a few essential things, as for example, how to get pure water in the villages, how to keep ourselves clean, how best to utilize soil from which we have sprung, how to breathe in life's energy from our surroundings and how best to use the sun's rays. Our country has become impoverished, I shall try to teach you so that you may, by making proper use of those resources, convert this into a land of Gold. I pray to God that during this tour I may succeed in performing such service to you!"¹

In a simple talk with the villagers of Fatehpur he said: "It is the easiest thing to harass the Hindus here, as you Muslims are in majority. But is it just as honourable? Show me, please, if such a mean action is suggested anywhere in your Koran. I am a student of the Koran...so in all humility I appeal to you to dissuade your people from committing such crimes so that your own future may be bright."²

Gandhi thought that the "attendance of both Hindus and Muslims at prayer meetings was dwindling and one day he would be left without anybody to listen to him at all'. But he said that even then there would be no reason for him to

1. Speech at the Prayer Meeting at Chandipur, Jan. 6, 1947.
CW, Vol. LXXXVI, pp. 318-19.

2. CW Vol. LXXXVI, p. 328.

give up his mission in despair. He would then roam from village to village taking his spinning wheel with him. It would be an act of service to God. A worker, he said, who travelled from village to village teaching the people how to clean their ponds effectively and teaching them other arts and crafts so as to enrich the life of the villages, should be able to make the villagers long for his company rather than shun him."¹

III

A study of Gandhiji's presence in Bengal during those fateful days of partition and independence brings us to a study of another personality, Suhrawardy, and the relationship that developed between the two during these days. The context was communal riots and the communal situation of Bengal. We have so far been studying Mahatma Gandhi's endeavour to come to terms with communalism as manifested in the Noakhali-Tippera villages. With the entry of Suhrawardy a new dynamic was unleashed resulting in some new manifestations of Bengal's fractured societal moments and ramifications of independence for different people.

Described by many as acting like one man boundary force, Gandhi revisited Bengal in August 1947 in order to proceed to Noakhali where he wanted to be on the eve of the independence. However, the communal situation in Calcutta worsened and there were regular violence with attacks on

1. Speech at Kazir Bazar, 4 Jan. 1947, CW, Vol. LXXXVI, p.311-312.

Muslim bustees. In anticipation of the impending independence and partition, the attacks on Muslims increased in the city with regular counter-acts.

Given this situation, it was natural that there should be apprehension of wide scale communal violence once the Boundary Commission award was declared.¹

Calcutta had been witnessing troubles since August 16, 1946 and Gandhi had travelled the troubled spots in his earlier visit to Calcutta in May.² But situation became very grave with the news of the Punjab riots and with the sight of independence. At this juncture Gandhi was approached by a deputation of Calcutta Muslim led by ex-mayor of Calcutta Mr. S.M. Usman who requested Gandhi to postpone his Noakhali visit and stay back in Calcutta to protect the Muslims of the

1. "There is every possibility of trouble from Muslim elements in Calcutta or (sic) as is fairly generally expected, if boundary commission allocates Calcutta to west Bengal. There is also an unfortunate proximity of dates about that time. August 18 is Id festival....I am watching developments closely and have already in agreement with Dr. P.C. Ghosh, chief minister of west Bengal, urged Army Commander to let me have for oriticae percod in August 3 Additiones Indian Army Ballalions of full strength to replace equivacent three British Battalions at present assisting civil power in Calcutta who will be withdrawn Aug. 14." Sir Fredrick Burrows (Governor, Bengal) to Rear Admiral viscount Mountbatten of Burma, 18 Jul. in TOP, Vol. - VII pp. 224-5. Similarly 'Record of interview between Rear-Admiral viscount Mountbatten of Burma and Lt. Gen. Tuger (G.O.C. in C., Eastern Command) and Major General Ranking (G.O.C. Bengal & Assam Dist) also on the same apprehension - 'Leutenant-General Tuger gave his opinion that there was a possibility of larger disturbances in and around Calcutta than ever before. Even after the withdrawal of the British Brigade on 14th August, there would be a command reserve of two Indian brigades," ibid., Vol, XII, pp. 422-3.

2. Bose, N.K., op.cit., pp.193-206.

city. "We Muslims have as much claim upon you as the Hindus", said the ex-Mayor," for you yourself have said you are as much of Musalmans as of Hindus."¹ Gandhiji, on the other hand was concerned about the situation in Noakhali, which as the reports sent to him by the volunteers staying there indicated, was quite alarming.² This could have much wider repercussions than an isolated instance of communal rioting. However, after a short visit to the trouble spots Gandhi was convinced that even the situation in Calcutta was no less bad. But then he had to put a condition for the postponement of his visit to Noakhali and staying back in Calcutta. "I am willing," he said, "but then you have to guarantee the peace of Noakhali. If I do not go to Noakhali before 15 August on the strength of your arguments and things get worse there, my life will become forfeit. You will have to face a fast unto death on my part."³ Mr. Usman took the responsibility upon himself on behalf of the Muslim League.⁴

At this particular juncture Gandhi's encounter with Suhrawardy brought a new dynamic to the entire episode. Suhrawardy came to meet Gandhiji on 11 August with Mr. Usman at about 9.45 pm and had a two hour conversation with Gandhi.

1. CW vol., LXXXIX, p. 21.

2. If one goes by the reports news items published in a local Hindu daily, the period seems to be one of total anarchy and lawlessness. Desherbani, Noakhali, April 1947.

3. Bose N.K., op.cit. One of Suhrawardy's latest biographer Shaista Ikramullah is wrong in saying that it was Suhrawarady who insisted Gandhiji not to go to Noakhali. - Ikramullah, Begum Shaista, Shahid Husseyn Suhrawardy, OUP, Karachi, 1991, pp. 65-6.

4. Bose N.K., op.cit., p.222.

Gandhi after saying that he had been overpowered by Usman saheb's request told Suhrawardy that he would remain in Calcutta if the latter, Suhrawardy, prepared to live under one roof." This is my second offer to you. We shall have to work as long as every Hindu and Musalman in Calcutta does not safely return to the place where he was before. We shall continue in our effort till our last breath."¹ He further said that he did not want him to come to a decision immediately. He (Suhrawardy) should go back home and consult his daughter. "For the implication of what I mean," said Gandhi, "is that the old Suhrawardy will have to die and accept the garb of a mendicant."² Suhrawardy accepted the offer the next day. This was the dawn of an entirely new relationship which till now has been ignored by historians of the period for whom Suhrawardy has been either an eulogistically painted hero³ or the much maligned monster of the great Calcutta riots.

Suhrawardy and his relationship with Mahatma Gandhi during this late phase requires a proper study in the context of the politics of violence and distrust that reigned Bengal during these years.

Gandhi met Suhrawardy first during a conference in

1. Ibid., p. 224.

2. CW, Vol., LXXXIX, p. 28.

3. His latest Biographer has tried to paint him as a person misunderstood and maligned but who in reality was a true champion of the Muslims & their cause. The biography, though full of inaccuracies both factual and logical, gives an impression as to how people close to him saw him. Ikramullah, Begum Shaista, op.cit.

Faridpur during the days of C.R.Das.¹ The strong attraction that Suhrawardy had felt towards Gandhi in 1918 might have waned over the years during which Suhrawardy emerged as the leader of the Muslim League in Bengal. This coming together in the month of August of the year 1947 revived, it seems, the old attraction. But now it was the realisation of Gandhi's potential and the question of Muslim minorities in India which brought Suhrawardy close to Gandhi and at times he became Gandhi's messenger of peace.

Gandhi had come to Bengal during the Noakhali happenings and again in May 1947 when he stayed some days in Calcutta. It was during this time that Suhrawardy had come to Gandhiji to plead the case of an independent sovereign Bengal. Gandhiji's response was that "A new Bengal could not be born in utter disregard of the past. When the past was so full of wrongs, how could people believe in the sincerity of the new proposal unless the past wrongs were set right?"²

Suhrawardy had given an eloquent defence of his government during the first meeting but in his second meeting with Gandhiji, "He confessed that the chief obstacle was that -----

1. Gandhi's letter to Suhrawardy on 24. Dec. 1946 bears this out."my Dear shaheed.

I remind you of our pleasant meeting in Faridpur when Deshbandhu C.R.Das was still in his physical case. If I remember rightly, you were the only one sitting in front of me spinning assiduously, you were unable to pull an even and fine thread. And then if I remember rightly I applied to you some distant adjective of affection, you corrected me by saying that you felt as son to me. I would like to think still that you are the same shaheed and to feel proud that my son has become the chief minister of Bengal I wish you had Bengal on the brain rather than Bihar." CW, vol. LXXXVI, pp. 260-61.

2. Bose. N.K., op.cit., p.198.

no Hindu would listen to him today; he found it hard to prove the utter sincerity of his proposal."¹

Upon this confession, Gandhiji made his offer that he was ready to act as his secretary "live under the same roof with him and see to it that the Hindus at least gave him a patient hearing. Was he prepared to accept the offer?"²

Suhrawardy was perplexed at the offer and had thought it a 'mad offer'.³ He accepted the same invitation when offered second time by Gandhi on the eve of the partition and independence. However, time and the context had changed quite drastically. Did it make Gandhi's offer less consequential? To me it did not; rather it went on to provide the ingredient of a sound counter-communal stratagem at a high *symbolical level* as well as at the level of *societal construction of communal perception*.

Once Suhrawardy had accepted to live under the same roof and live as Gandhi lived a place was selected which was of much symbolic value. It was in Beliaghata, where in the afternoon of 13 August Gandhiji arrived. 'He was accompanied by Mr. S.M. Usman, the ex-Mayor and secretary of the Calcutta District Muslim League, Mr. A.P. Chaudhury, political secretary to the Chief Minister, Manu Gandhi and Abha Gandhi.'⁴ By the time the entourage which also included Nirmal Kumar Bose reached the Hydari Mansion - the

1. BOSE. N.K., *op.cit.*, p. 200

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. Tendulkar, Mahatma, Vol. II, p. 227.

house where they stayed in Beliaghata - a number of demonstrators had gathered there who were protesting against the fact that Gandhiji had come to stay in Beliaghata rather than going to Ultadanga and Kankurgachi where Hindus were getting killed by Muslims. People also shouted at Suhrawardy and accused him of complicity in the communal riots so far. Gandhi "felt glad that the demonstrators had not merely courage to oppose him openly, but also to charge Suhrawardy to his face with all that they had to say against him. Such courage was good; it was indeed a contrast to what he had witnessed in the district of Noakhali."¹

Despite such pronouncements, Gandhi was quite conscious of the fact that he was taking a big risk by staying with Suhrawardy.² But then the rationale it seems, was that since no Hindu in Bengal trusted Suhrawardy and it was trust which was most important to the restoration of communal harmony.

This had its desired effects. On the eve of independence, i.e., 14 August, a strange fever of fraternisation gripped the Calcuttans and the same Hindus and Muslims who had strictly avoided each other's company ever since the Direct Action Day riot, came out on the streets

1. Bose, N.K., op.cit., p. 227.

2. In a letter to Vallabhai Patel written on 13 August 1947 from Calcutta, he says. "I am stuck here and now I am going to take a big risk. Suhrawardy and I are going to stay together in a turbulent area from today. Let us see what happens. Keep a watch." CW, vol. LXXXIX, p. 30 In another letter to Satis Chandra Dasgupta written from Beliaghata on 13th he writes "Shaheed Saheb will be with me. Let me see what happens. I have taken many risks, perhaps this is the greatest of all. Who knows what will happen. We have to live as God wills and be content." CW, vol. LXXXIX, p. 40.

and overflowed the streets with fraternising scenes . This, to one eye witness who travelled with Gandhi to have a glimpse of these scenes, reminded of what he had read in Eric Maria Ramarque's "All Quiet On The Western Front, when, on the Christmas eve, the common French and German soldiers came out of their trenches and forgot, even if it were for a brief moment, that they were to regard each other as enemies."¹

Gandhiji himself wrote in a piece in Harijan entitled 'Miracle or Accident', that the "joy of fraternisation was leaping up from hour to hour."²

However, Gandhi was not very jubilant on this show of goodwill. "I am not lifted off my feet by these demonstrations of joy,"³ was his response to the events. Why? Because, he said, he "could not be satisfied until Hindus and Muslim felt safe in one another's company and returned to their own homes to live as before. Without that change of heart, there was likelihood of future deterioration in spite of the present enthusiasm."⁴ His anticipation proved correct because very soon Calcutta saw the recrudescence of communal violence. This finally forced Gandhi to enter upon a fast for the 'return of sanity among the people of Calcutta.' This was again a symbolic act because he thought his duty was to "go to every citizen of Calcutta and argue with him until he was

1. BOSE, N.K., op.cit., pp. 228-9.

2. 'Miracle or Accident' in Harijan, 24. Aug., 1947 as cited in CW, vol. LXXXIX, pp. 48-49.

3. Bose, N.K., op.cit., p. 230.

4. BOSE, N.K., op.cit., p. 229.

convinced that any attack upon the Muslim community as such was wrong. Since it was not possible, he decided upon the other alternative of a fast. This could touch people's heart."¹

His fast was broken only when the leaders of different communities and parties took upon themselves the responsibility to see that no communal attack would take place. On 6th September, 1947, addressing an immensely crowded meeting at Calcutta, Gandhi said that he broke the fast on the "strength of the pressure of friends drawn from all communities in Calcutta and outside, he threw the burden on them of preservation of peace at the cost of their lives. What he wanted was not the peace imposed by the Government forces but by themselves."²

The fast continued for three days and when the it was broken, necessary assurance came from important citizens that they were prepared to lay down their lives if necessary for the restoration of peace in Calcutta.

While all this was happening, one person though, shorn of his powers, was gradually coming to terms with his conscience and sense of responsibility. It was Shaheed Suhrawardy. Even during Gandhi's fast he was beside him

1. In his statement released to the press he said: "From the very first day of peace, that is Aug. 14th last, I have been saying that the peace might only be a temporary lull. There was no miracle. Will the foreboding prove true and will Calcutta again lapse into the law of the jungle. Let us hope not, let us pray to the almighty that He will touch our hearts and ward off the recurrence of insanity."

Quoted in ibid., p. 239.

2. Ibid., pp. 246-47.

and Gandhi insisted that Suhrawardy should give his words that there had been no attack on the Muslims. Suhrawardy quite unlike his salvo at Gandhii some months ago,¹ later admired Gandhi for his role in the Calcutta riot of 1947². He narrates in his memoirs his experience during the August days with Gandhi. 'There were mixed gathering of men and women, Hindu and Muslim, who attended in hundreds of thousands in complete friendship and mutual understanding. The atmosphere was completely metamorphosed; instead of bitterness and hatred and murder and rapine, communal harmony was established, although not without some attacks on my person in the begining, which fortunately for me, failed to find their target.³

Thus it is quite clear that Gandhi's peace efforts at Calcutta brought him closer to Suhrawardy who had accepted Gandhi's invitation to come and work for communal harmony.

The question remains as to why did Suhrawardy suddenly join Gandhi and communal harmony mission knowing full well that it would cost him very dear as far as his political future in Pakistan was concerned : Was it because, as Suhrawardy's biographer says, "Calcutta Muslims were in the middle of another nightmare and they asked Suhrawardy to stay

1. Suhrawardy met Gandhi on 11, May 1947 at Sodpur where during the course of conversation he retorted to Gandhi's saying that he was responsible for every life lost in Bengal by saying that "it was Gandhiji who was responsible for it because the latter had denied justice to the Musalmans. Bose N.K., op.cit., pp. 198-199.

2. Talukdar M.H.R., ed., Memoirs of H.S. Suhrawardy , UP, Dhaka, 1987 pp. 107-9.

3. Ibid.

with them. Suhrawardy could not refuse them during the most perilous period after they had stood solidly by him in all his movements for over a quarter of a century.¹

There is some truth in this but what I think made Suhrawardy accept Gandhi's invitation was the fact that the former was the Chief Minister of the Province till 13 August and knew very well the explosive situation that existed in Calcutta. A sense of moral responsibility must have disturbed him; and as Gandhi's letters constantly reminded him of his past role, Suhrawardy might have really become conscious of the fact that he bore some responsibility for the communalisation and its outcome in the Bengalee society especially if the Hindus (with whom August 16, 1946 was still a living testimony of League's & Suhrawardy's irresponsibility) took reprisals.

Suhawardy's own rationale was that he wanted to protect the Muslims of India from communal onslaught after the partition. He writes in his memoirs the he felt "that if the Muslims of Calcutta and environs were massacred or driven away there would be reperussions in East Bengal and that the Hindus there would be similarly treated. There were about four times as many Hindus in East Bengal as Muslimes in West Bengal....The result could be that the Muslims of Bihar, Assam and the united provines certainly and elsewhere probably

1. Ahsan, Raghib, Jibon noy, Itihash (life not, history). Ittefaq : Suhrawardy Edition, ed. by Tafazzal Hossain (Manik Mia), March 1964. (Dhaka) p. 17 as quoted in Talukdar. M.H.R., op.cit., pp. 32-3.

would be slaughtered or driven out to make room for the refugees. There would be a terrible hoco-caust all over the country."¹ Thus he had taken upon himself to induce Gandhi to work for communal harmony in Calcutta.²

A close perusal however brings out some more facts of the entire episode. The failure of his greater / united and Sovereign Bengal scheme and his recent hobnobbing with the Hindu leaders had made him a *persona non grata* in the ranks of Bengal Muslim League leadership which paid allegiance to the All India Muslim League leadership. In addition, the Partition and the subsequent loss of Calcutta meant that he was to lose his political base also. Problems compounded with the central leadership of All India Muslim League which, while keeping him busy in the partition negotiations, elected Khwaja Nazimuddin as the leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party despite Jinnal's assurance that there would be no election for the parliamentary leadership of East Bengal.³ But Liaqut Ali Khan, who, as Suhrawardy's biographer says, disliked Suhrawardy and was jealous of him, suddenly announced an election, not in the Punjab but in Bengal only, throwing in his support behind Kawaza Nazimuddin.⁴

This is however not to suggest that Suhrawardy was forced to work with Gandhi only because he was left

1. Talukdar. M.H.R., op.cit., p. 107.

2. Ibid., p.108.

3. Ahmed. K., Socio Political History of Bengal and the Birth of Bangladesh, Pioneer Printing press, Dhaka, 1978 p. 35.

4. Talukdar, op.cit., p. 32.

with no political base.¹ This substantiates my earlier contention that the internal fissures of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League was a force which resulted in radicalising the communal overtones of the party. This had culminated earlier in the Great Calcutta carnage of 1946. With the assumption of leadership Nazimuddin Government went thoroughly communal in the East Bengal while, on the other hand, situational realities or some other force forced Suhrawardy to act as a person helping Gandhi to extinguish the flames of communal riots. To me the change was not sudden. Suhrawardy, despite his communal rhetoric, it seems, had always aspired to become the leader of the province and here his communal stance and the broader political ambition clashed.

However, the partition snatched from him his political leadership, political base and he was even barred from entering East Bengal. These were factors which led him to become Gandhi's ambassador of peace rather than Jinnah's roving ambassador - "personal representative to acquaint the Governments all over the world with the *raison d'etre* of Pakistan."²

The pressure of the local representatives of the All India Muslims League were factors which acted throughout the years to push Muslim leadership of the province to an

1. Jinnah offered him the job of Roving Ambassador of Pakistan

2. Talukdar. M.H.R., op.cit., p. 32.

extreme communal position. This was again proved when Nazimuddin Govt adopted an extreme communal stance and even prevented Suhrawardy from entering East Pakistan (East Bengal).

IV

Gandhi's Noakhali (as well as Bengal) experiment opens new vistas of enquiry into the way the Mahatma's mind worked. One may be tempted to ask as to why did he take the Noakhali visit and worked there so intensely. Why did he take up this as a challenge and as a mission from which he did not want to return as a failure ?¹

His Noakhali experiment was not simply the test of his technique of non-violence. He was, as it appears from his speeches at prayer meetings there, constantly trying to read the writings on the wall. He had it seems sensed that Pakistan was coming and mass-frenzy too. He made Noakhali his field to launch the last and final attack on the idea of

1. It is here in Noakhali where he experimented quite heroically with his sexual life. This suggested, as Bhikhu Parekh in his study on Gandhi, Gandhi's strong desire to quench the violence and brutality raging in the noakhali villages. For Gandhi, as parikh says, 'personal purity and political success hanged together....,the former generated the energy and power he desperately needed to succeed in his momentous political struggle. The more intractable his political problems became, the greater was the moral struggle in his personal life. It was hardly surprising that his finest political experiment of successfully controlling violence in Noakhali should have been conducted alongside his heroic sexual experiment.' Parekh and suggests that 'his sexual yajna was a way of mobilising the capital of his spiritual Shakti and making it yield vitally necessary political dividends.'

Parekh Bhikhu, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform : An analysis of Gandhi's Political Discusse, Sage Publication , New Delhi, 1989, pp. 195-97.

Pakistan and the ideological basis of it-the Two Nation Theory. This is why he became a party to the idea of Independet/ United Bengal.¹ Though his role was that of a non-Partisan and leaders of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha both used to come to him for his support and opposition to this plan, yet he still looked for a point of cooperation by clinging to which he could assault the basis of Pakistan. It seems that while unable to prevent partition, Gandhi thought that he could at least undo the ideological basis of the partition which would facilitate a reunion in future. That is why he had urged, it seems, the people to hoist both Pakistan and Indian flags.

Was Gandhi successful or the worsened situation in Noakhali proved his failure ? In Bhatialpul, the Muslims of the village took a pledge in presence of Gandhi that they would protect their Hindu neghbours. This was an isolated instance but the spirit was coming up in the Noakhali-Tipperera villages. Among the Hindus, the Spirit of fearlessness could be seen especially among the women who at Gandhi's directions even formed the All women's Court in Karatkhil to try a ruffian.²

Moreover Gandhi's presence in Calcutta during those fateful pre-partition days proved to be quite consequential in the sense that Calcutta and in fact Bengal was strangely peaceful. The scene of fraterna lisation were quite contrary

1. See Bose N.K. op.cit., pp. 195-204.

2. Pyarelal, op.cit., p. 90.

to the fratricidal scenes of the Punjab during the same time. There might be other reasons as well. But Gandhi's presence and its effects cannot be ignored or underplayed. This most important of his experiment suggested some of the crucial moments of an ideological counteroffensive against communalism and communal violence.

At that particular historical conjuncture it might have been just "an isolated personal effort"¹ but in retrospect it was really the "Mahatma's Finest Hour"² notwithstanding his loneliness.

1. Sarkar, Sumit, Modern India, Macmillan, Delhi, 1984, p.438.
2. Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The study, though it moved along some ruptured lines and seemed to have lost linkages at various places, has, I hope, succeeded in locating some common themes within their proper historical context.

Communalism is an ideology and like all ideologies is a social product. Bengal during 1945-47, as this study brings out, witnessed struggles by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League (which represented two faces of the same ideology), to capture 'space' within the respective communities whose interest they claimed to have been championing. The period saw this struggle being carried out with full intensity and experienced rapid penetration of their ideology. Along with the rapidity of its penetration, communalism was also radicalised. This was manifested during the violent communal riots of Calcutta, Dacca, and Noakhali-Tippera.

Violence in the form of communal riots itself was not the cause of communalism but was rather its product. However, 'violence' was certainly a *reflective index* of the communalisation of the Bengali society. Therefore, escalated violence and its aggressive insensitivity demonstrated during the Noakhali-Tippera riots indicated the intensity and deep penetration of communalism.

Radicalisation of communalism in Bengal was facilitated by the propaganda that was launched. Language and symbols of propaganda were aimed at penetrating the communities with

slogans like 'unity of the community', 'community in danger of being exterminated', etc. They were all meant to construct an image of an 'evil other'.

The elections of 1945-46 proved to be a major channel for launching this propaganda campaign in a vigorous way. Thus, by 1946, we have a society which was always ready to erupt into orgies of communal violence. Election results showed two contrary developments. While the Muslim League representing the Muslim face of communalism had succeeded in establishing its hegemony over the Bengali Muslims, the Hindu Mahasabha failed as a political party to capture the imagination of the Hindus. It was however resurrected from its low ebb by the extreme form of Muslim communalism as demonstrated by the Noakhali-Tippera riots.

This shows that there was a positional difference between the Muslim League which had already reached the extreme phase and the Hindu Mahasabha which was still in its liberal communal phase. However, Muslim League's communalism helped Hindu Mahasabha transcend the liberal phase and go over to the extreme form. This became possible only on the eve of the partition, but by that time other forms of political articulation began operating which prevented the Mahasabha from establishing its ideological hegemony over the Hindus.

The most important point which comes out of this study is that communal riots are the result of the communalisation of a society. They are symptoms rather than the disease.

Hence, proper arena of historical analysis should be communalism and the social forces which help it become a socially produced ideology and later on enable it to hegemonise the society. Riots are also events. However, they are created by a series of events intimately related with each other. The Calcutta riot was preceded by a series of events, i.e., election, victory celebration, etc., which went on radicalising communalism as well as prepared the society for an impending attack and counter-attack. But once a communal riot takes place, it brings a series of events in its train, i.e., Calcutta riot created and spread rumours and finally Noakhali-Teppera riots. Thus, communal riots along with propaganda, etc. strengthen communal ideology and smoothen its penetration of society, eventually enabling it to become the hegemonic ideology.

Riots are events, and at some points of time, events create their own logic. Bengal during 1945-47 brings this out quite forcefully. The chain reaction of communal riots in Bengal brought forward a situation which, if we use a Gramscian description used in some other context, can be a befitting description. He said, "Events are the real dialectics of history. They transcend, all arguments, all personal judgements, all vague and irresponsible wishes....Events present themselves as a universal fatality....Men as individuals and *en masse* find themselves as a universal fatality."¹

1. Gramsci, Antonio, Selection from Political Writings, ed. by Quintine Hoare, p. 15.

This was true for Bengal of 1945-47. Continued communal riots created, on the one hand, a sense of inevitability of continued communal violence, and, on the other hand, a crisis. In such a situation, as witnessed during 1947, the role of political parties becomes quite important.

All the three political parties studied here found it hard to adjust themselves to the changed situation. They were also entrapped within the crisis and found themselves in a situation of 'a universal fatality'². Congress' acceptance of the partition and subsequently division of Bengal (and also of the Punjab), Muslim League's reluctance to seek the partition of Bengal and Hindu Mahasabha's demand for partition of the province were all signs of their striving to adjust themselves to the new situations.

Gandhi's attempt was a hard fought battle against 'this sense of fatality' which in turn had produced the sense of inevitability of partition. Here lies the importance of his intervention. He tried hard to breach the ideological wall which created the situation. And it seems that he succeeded

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2. What Gramsci said in some other social context seems valid to an extent even in this situation. He said: "parties come into existence, and constitute themselves as organisations, in order to influence the situation at moment which are historically vital for their class; but they are not always capable of adapting themselves to new tasks and to new epochs, nor of evolving *pari passu* with the overall relation of forces (and hence relative position of their class) in the country in question, or in the international field." Gramsci, Antonio, Selecections from Prison Notebooks, ed. and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International Publishers, New York 1989, p. 211.

in bringing at least a glimmer of hope. But then it became obvious that the thoroughly communalised society had already created enough barriers against such a counter-penetration.

The recent scholarship, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, in order to come out of the conventional study of communalism and in order to restore meaning to the actions of the rioting crowd, has tended to view communalism and communal rioting as nothing but a way of looking at them and to impose categories borrowed from the western-modern intellectual tradition.

In the present study the riot victims and party officials were left to 'do most of the talking' while official records and statements were kept at their minimum. This is also an effort to give a meaning to the subject involved in the episodes of communal rioting, though at a receiving end, rather than to those who participated actively as rioters.

Attempts to draw analogy with events in other countries bring Fascism into the discussion. Fascism, like communalism, is also an ideology and, as studies have shown, its ideological prerequisites and methods it applies in its efforts to establish hegemony are similar to that of the communal ideology.

Fascist ideology is born of a political tradition that considered the individual a function of the group life. "This view of man as an integral part of an organic whole is the

basis of Fascism's political philosophy"³. The propaganda of the Muslim League during the election of 1946 always invoked the so-called ideals of the Muslim community. Its political creed was also based on creating a 'solid monolithic community of the Muslims' which could fight the League's political battle. On the other hand, Muslims, who did not subscribe to its creed were ostracised in the name of the community. Similarly, Hindu Mahasabha's campaign was for a 'Hindu Rashtra' or community.

Other parallel ingredients were also present in the Bengal situation which make communalism strongly resemble Fascist ideology and methods.⁴ These included the paramilitary forces, such as, the Muslim National Guards and the

3. Sternhell, Zeev, 'Fascist Ideology' in Walter Laqueur ed. Fascism, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, pp. 344-5.

4. Creation of Muslim National Guards, their active participation in the Noakhali riots and in the preparation of Calcutta riots, etc., on the one hand, and Hindu Mahasabha's efforts to create Hindustan National Guard ostensibly for defensive purposes, show parallel developments with Fascist practices. For example, what Linz says about Fascism was to an extent true about Bengal situation also. He says: "The discovery of the paramilitary political organisation ready to use violence against its opponents, rather than electioneering or conspiring, was a tragic innovation that made even minor fascist parties a significant factor in the crisis in many European democracies." Linz, Juan J., 'Comparative study of Fascism', in Walter Laqueur ed. op.cit., p. 15.

Hindustan National Guard; and propaganda on a massive scale with rhetoric which catered to emotional rather than rational aspects of politics.

Analogies, to be historically valid, should be drawn from historically congruent categories and here I think communalism, as this empirical study suggests, resembles Fascism more than the post medieval European riots or medieval Indian land wars.

Similarly communalism exists not simply in epistemology or intellectual domains of a society. It is an ideology and hence socially produced.⁵ It will not be out of place here to quote Callinicos, who says: "Ideology is a concrete attribute of human individuals....Explaining why an individual holds ideological beliefs is a matter of analysing social processes, not of *diagnosing intellectual error or individual pathology.*"⁶ Thus, an examination through the blinkers of intellectual terminology which is in vogue may give us freshness and new lines of argument but they will not equip us to analyse or understand social processes behind

5. Giddens, Anthony, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971, p. 209.

6. Callinicos, Alex, Making History, Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory, Polity Press, London, 1987, p. 139.

ideas which are "social products, which cannot be understood by the philosopher who stands outside history."⁷ And probably that was why I wanted to enter into history to make a preliminary study of the political processes and conditions affecting those processes.

7. Giddens, Anthony, op.cit., p. 209.

APPENDIX I

LET US GO TO WAR

Quaid-i-Azam Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah on behalf of the All India Muslim League declares that the ensuing general election of the central and provincial legislatures of India will be taken as a plebiscite of the Muslims of India on Pakistan and the working committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in its meeting on 1st August 1945 adopted a resolution to this effect. Major Atlee's Labour government on behalf of the British Imperialism has accepted this challenge.

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In these days the ballot box is the only medium through which the public opinion can be ascertained with the greatest possible accuracy. The Muslim League, therefore, as the organisation of the plain blunt muslims who are not addicted to clever machinations have straightway demanded general election in India and have declared that they would take this elections as a plebiscite on Pakistan and a plebiscite on their claim to represent the whole of muslim India. His Majesty's government have decided to hold elections the next winter. " We are, therefore, in the midst of a war as the general election is going to be the first pitched battle for Pakistan with enemies of Muslim India."

The Bengal Provincial Muslim League is making necessary preliminary preparations for fighting this battle. We have to marshall and mobilise our resources for winning this war. The Bengal Provincial Muslim League represents the thirty five millions of muslims of Bengal and it has now on record over ten lacs of members. In such a democratic organisation as this it is quite natural that there will be difference of opinion among its leaders, workers, members and supporters." I appeal to all in all sincerity and earnestness to bundle up all their differences and to preserve them if necessary in cold storage during the pendency of our common struggle. Our internecine conflict either for power, personal likes and dislikes or for anything for that matter of that at this juncture would be suicidal." The result of the coming general election shall have far reaching consequences and for sometime the destiny of India shall be determined by it.

*** *** ***

In this war of ours in spite of all our differences legitimate or otherwise, ideological or personal, we must unite. As a first step, in order to avoid all possible chances and apprehensions of disruption in our own army the working committee of Bengal provincial Muslim League in its meeting of the 27th August 1945 passed a resolution suspending all elections for

reconstituting the union, the sub-Division the District and the provincial Leagues till the declaration of the result of the elections of the central and provincial legislatures. I am summoning the council of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League among other things to elect members of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League Parliamentary Board. 'It does not require much wisdom to understand that our winning this general election would much depend upon the composition of the parliamentary Board. I, therefore, want the gentlemen of the council of the Bengal Provincial League from now not to allow personal interest to overpower their sense of Patriotism'.

*** **

Pakistan means complete independence. They are fools, dreamers, visionaries or the hypocrites who think that Pakistan can be achieved without the greatest imaginable struggle and sacrifice. It must be known clearly to every soldier of Pakistan that the way to Pakistan is harder than the way to calvary.

Our poets and literators, artists and artisans, youths and students, landlords and peasants, ulema and laymen answer to the clarion call of the great leader of Muslim India, sink all their differences, forget the past, and pull all their resources for the winter struggle, the General Election of the

Legislatures.

The Congress played itself into a useless and unnecessary conflict with Muslim League. Let us gallantly meet the challenge. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad has in his recent statement talked of territorial autonomy and the right to secede from the centre and has kindly promised to place his proposal to the All India Congress Committee. It is very kind of him indeed. But the Muslims of India are unfortunately for the Congress not just as foolish as they would like them to be. They can by the grace of God now see below the surface.

The Pakistan formula is very simple and corresponds with the realities of Indian politics. The basis of Pakistan is real democracy, freedom equity and justice and is opposed to Imperial domination and economic exploitation which is the basis of the favourite, "Akhand Bharat" of the Congress.

Free India was never one country. Free Indians were never one nation. In the past India was Akhand under the domination of the Mauryas and the Mughals and is now Akhand under the domination of Great Britain. Liberated India must necessarily be, as God has made it, a sub-continent having complete independence for every nation inhabiting it. However, much weakness the Congress may have for the capitalist of the Bombay and however much they may desire by way of doing a good turn to them to open

opportunities for exploiting the whole of India under the cover of Akhand Bharat, Muslim India to a man will resist all attempts of the Congress to establish dictatorship in India of any coterie group or organisation. Pakistan means freedom for all, Muslims and Hindus alike.....

While appealing to the Muslims to join the army of the League and to fight its defensive war against the Congress I would warn them not to forget the now quiet and apparently indifferent imperialist of Delhi and London. We must not forget that the achievement of Pakistan lies in the ultimate liquidation of the British imperialism... We shall win Pakistan by the toils and sacrifices of our own people and not through the courtsey and benevolence of the British. Since we have taken our stand upon the solid rock of equity, justice and fair play, since freedom and liberty and not domination and exploitation is the mixture of our struggle, by the grace of God we are going to win, if we are united. So unity, fraternity and liberty shall be the battle cry for our first war for Pakistan.

The hand and the heart of the people as I have seen during my tour in Bengal are perfectly sound and they will not make any mistake unless the leaders at the top in their anxiety to secure leadership create confusion in their mind.

We, therefore, must guard ourselves against this only possible source of disruption. We must never forget for a moment that Pakistan is our end and a Ministry under the Government of India Act of 1935 will be merely incidental. Whoever amongst the leader will exhibit any tendency to secure his position from now in the future assembly either as a Minister or a Prime Minister shall be marked will and Muslim Bengal shall never forgive him.

The General Election in the beginning of our struggle. Immediately after recording our votes in favour of Pakistan at the polling centres, immediately after winning our plebiscite liquidating the false claim of the Congress to represent the Muslims shall direct our attention towards British imperialism and demand immediate transference of power to the peoples by India on the basis of Pakistan. Our battle is a battle for freedom for all and we hope and trust that every genuine freedom loving man and woman shall be with us.

We are going to fight the Congress but we don't feel quite happy about it as we never liked to consume any part of our energy in fighting the Congress, the Mahasabha or in fact any Indian people or organisation. Our battle is hundred percent defensive. We did not like to fight the Congress. They unjustly and unfairly like the fascist

aggressors have forced war on us.

Therefore, without malice, without vengeance, with complete faith in our ultimate victory, with heart within and God over head LET US GO TO WAR.

Source : 'LET US GO TO WAR' by Abul Hashem, January 1970, published by Society for Pakistan Studies, Dacca, quoted in Sen, Shila, Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-47, Ph.D. Thesis, JNU, 1972, p.409.

APPENDIX-II

COMING ELECTION AND THE HINDUS' DUTIES

The general election to the legislative assemblies of India is impending. Two main issues that will be raised before the countrymen are- national unity of India and complete freedom.

The ideology of the Hindu Mahasabha is very clear. Hindu Mahasabha has clearly announced to the countrymen that it would follow the same policy towards both the Hindus and the Muslims, even if they are in minority in any province in India.

No scientific procedure has been followed in defining the existing provincial boundaries. On the contrary, the self interested imperialists have drawn them in such a way that the people of the country be forced to indulge in suicidal quarrel amongst themselves; so there is non point in mentioning the flaws and injustices in defining the present boundaries. We have to solve the problem of redefining the boundaries on the scientific basis.

Ideally and justifiable the provincial boundaries should be define on the basis of language and culture. Unless this policy is followed dissatisfaction and loss of interests among a large section of the population enhance the administrative complexities perennially and endanger the peace and well being of the country.

Nowadays quite a few, swayed by the bluff of 'self

determination' are being attracted to unrealistic plan. I hope, people will not be deceived by these unrealistic promise. In fact, to strengthen the imperialist role by dividing the country in the name of self determination is the aim of a group of communal and selfish people. Their real intention is to create national disunity and separation. But the majority community of India cannot let their father land, their holy land disintegrate to serve the interests of a group of narrow minded communal opportunists. Those, who want to divide the country and the nation unnecessarily and unjustifiably would be considered as anti national in the eyes of international justice and they should be treated like wise.

The communal award has erected the wall of disunity and separation among the concerned communities. Until this award is repealed and joint electorate be established, no fair election is possible. The really independent wishes and feelings of the people of the country cannot be properly reflected in an election based on separate electorate (communal award). A genuinely democratic election cannot be held without a joint electorate comprising every adult citizen of the country. So, the so-called demands for 'self determination' cannot be proved by a hastily and spuriously held election.

Here, till now communal obstinacy is stronger than reason. The influence of a middle aged fanaticism is more effective than political or economic reasons. So, is it

possible to know the real wishes of people if this situation prevails?

In India there was never any obstruction in celebrating religious rights by different communities. India has always been famous for liberality and tolerance to others faith. So religion is not a problem matter in India.

If the 35 crore people of India unitedly raised their demand despite their different religious believes, then it will be irresistible and no nation in the world, however strong will not dare to dismember India, resisting this. Our neighbouring countries, Russia and China are the glaring examples of it. Now our common people also know will be matter of Russia and China.

There is no doubt that the death toll would have been much higher in the Great Famine of 1943, if assistance had not come from the other provinces or had the central government not intervened into the matter Bengal directly. In Bengal, Muslims are relatively poorer, so it was not impossible for them to become minority from majority due to a higher death toll among them. Those Muslim League slyboots, stupified with the daydream of forming a separate independent state do not even remember the tragic lesson of the Great famine of Bengal.

Moreover, if India disintegrates, the neighbouring countries will be more tempted to attack India. Frequent such examples are there in Indian history. Specially the aggressors will become more daring with the belief that the

different communities of India would not or could not resist them unitedly. There is no hope for India from self interested and unsympathetic community- under these circumstances, it will be cause of great danger to interest the fate of an independent state with such a community.

These apart, Hindus have some more important religious reasons. Hindustan used their father land and their holy land and their devine land. Hindus must see that the unity of their ever worshiped motherland is ^{not} destroyed. Hindus will not hesitate to make sacrifice to preserve the unity and integrity of the holy motherland. For the Hindus India is not only their motherland but also the holy place to worship. Hindus will never tolerate any dismemberment of their motherland till the last. So their aim is clear, duties are clearly defined-United India and complete freedom. In this crusade, the Hindu Mahasabha will never be deprived of Hindus's sympathy.

Vande Mataram

Shri Haridas Mazumdar,
Secretary,
Parliamentary Board,
Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha

Election manifesto issued by Bengal provincial Hindu Mahasabha, S.P.Mukherjee Papers, Sub.file No.74
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