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A.K. Fazlul Huq's 'Rise to Power' in Bengal Politics

Bengal and the Bengalis at the very beginning of the twentieth century, were in the forefront not only in the field of introducing new philosophy, applying new methodology and generating new political ideas and consciousness among the masses but also they were playing the prominent role in launching the anti- British movements, mainly under the banner of the Indian National Congress and Bengal at that time, was thought-out to be the 'nerve centre of Indian nationalism'. Not only that, Bengal along with Punjab and Maharashtra had also become great centres of 'militant nationalism' or 'revolutionary terrorism'. The first half of the twentieth century was considered to be much eventful in the history of Bengal as well as India with regard to the socio-economic and political changes that had occurred, influenced and completely changed the socio-political scenario of this country. The 1905 was the milestone which indicated a major turning point and momentous event not only in the history and politics of undivided Bengal but also of India. The first partition of Bengal in 1905 and its annulment in 1911, had transformed Bengal into an epicenter of Indian politics. The foundation of the All – India Muslim League (as a result of the Simla deputation of 1 October 1906 to the Viceroy Lord Minto II under the leadership of Aga Khan) in the Dacca Educational Conference on 30 December 1906 under the leadership of Nawab Salimullah of Dacca (presently Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh) to safeguard the political rights and interests of the Muslims, to preach loyalty to the British and to further the cause of inter-communal amity was, of course, another fundamental political change which brought a section of Muslim community of Bengal to a position of active politics not only at the provincial level but also at the national level. The Presidency of Bengal (which included in 1866, apart from Bengal proper, the whole of Bihar, Orissa and Assam) had an area of 1,89,000 square miles and a population (in 1901) of 78.50 million¹ and the British administrators had the opinion that it was almost impossible for them to govern such a vast province. Naturally different suggestions and proposals were frequently given for easing the

burden on its Lieutenant – Governor. But there were important political considerations as rightly pointed out by Prof. Sumit Sarkar in his classical work entitled *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903 – 1908*, which were by no means secondary. It was Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, who had submitted a report to Curzon, the then Viceroy on 28 March 1903 in which he for the first time proposed to separate Chittagong Division, Dacca and Mymensingh from Bengal which were “a hot bed of the purely Bengal movement.....” and needed “strong personal government”. In his note Fraser pointed out: “I believe that Dacca and Mymensingh would give far less trouble if they were under Assam. I also believe that East Bengal would not be so painfully prominent a factor in Bengal administration if this transfer were made”.² Herbert Hope Risley, the then Home Secretary, put similar kind of arguments in two notes of 7 February 1904 and 6 December 1904: “Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in different ways..... One of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule”.³ Administrative convenience was the pretext but the political objective of the colonial administration was to disrupt the nationalist opposition led by the Hindu middle classes and to weaken this ‘politically articulate’ race and also the Congress which was manipulated from Calcutta by its ‘best wirepullers and ... frothy orators’. The political motive was clearly stated by Curzon on 17 February 1904: “The Bengalis, who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out, and a Bengali Babu will be installed in Government House, Calcutta, of course bitterly resent any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realization of this dream. If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the eastern flank of India, a force already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future”.⁴ So the antidote to Bengali *bhadralok* from capturing power was to encourage the development of other communities and in this case, it was the Muslims who gained the attention and won the confidence of the colonial rulers. This imperialist strategy and design to build up a wall of division between the Hindus and the Muslims was also mentioned by Curzon in his speech at Dacca on 18 February 1904: partition scheme “would invest the Muhammadans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman viceroys and

kings.....”⁵ and thus the card of ‘divide and rule’ was delicately and deliberately applied by him and his colleagues.

The new province would consist of Chittagong, Dacca and Rajshahi (excluding Darjeeling) Divisions, Hill Tippera, Malda and Assam and would cover an area of 1, 06,540 square miles with a population of 31 million comprising of 18 million Muslims and 12 million Hindus. It was to be called ‘Eastern Bengal and Assam’ with its capital at Dacca and subsidiary headquarters at Chittagong. The truncated province of Bengal was to comprise Calcutta and eleven districts of West Bengal, the district of Darjeeling, as also the whole Bihar and Orissa (including Sambalpur and the five Oriya-speaking areas) and would be left with an area of 1, 41,580 square miles and a population of 54 million, of which 42 million would be Hindus and 9 million Muslims.⁶ Curzon prepared the final draft regarding the partition of Bengal and sent it to England on 2 February 1905. On 9 June Broderick, the Secretary of States, gave his approval and the Government of India promulgated their final decision in a Resolution dated 19 July 1905 and the partition of Bengal officially came into effect on 16 October 1905.

The majority of the Muslims, a section of the Muslim Press (the *Muslim Chronicle*, the *Mohammedan Literary Society* etc), the traditional and reformist groups (like the Faraizi, Wahabi and Taiyumi), supported the partition of Bengal and hoped that the new province would provide them an incentive to ‘unite into a compact body and form an association to voice their own views and aspirations relating to social and political matters’ which gave birth to the Mohammedan Provincial Union on 16 October 1905 with Salimullah as its patron and then ultimately the Muslim League in Dacca on 30 December 1906 (which was in favour of the partition). But there was a group of liberal Muslims (who were the supporters of the Indian National Congress), came forward to render their support to the anti-partition agitation. The prominent members among this section of the Muslims were Khwaza Atiqullah, Abdur Rasul, Khan Bahadur Muhammad Yusuf, Mujibur Rahman, A.H. Ghuznavi, Ismail Hossain Shiraji, Muhammad Gholam Hossain, Maulvi Liaqat Hussain, Syed Hafizur Rahman Chowdhury of Bogra, Abul Kasem of Burdwan etc. who inspired the Muslims to join the anti-partition agitation.

As huge number of people of Bengal were not ready to accept the partition, its official announcement set off a mighty upsurge which brought the people and the political leaders of different shades of opinion together to raise their voice against this decision. Leaders like Surendra Nath Banerjea (who was one of the front-rank leaders of the anti-partition agitation and as nicknamed ‘Surrender Not’) along with journalists like Krishna Kumar Mitra, editor of the *Sanjivani* (13 July 1905) urged the people of Bengal to boycott British goods and to take a solemn vow to use *Swadeshi* (indigenous) goods. S.N. Banerjea made an appeal to the people of Bengal ‘to abstain from the purchase of British manufacturers so long as Partition Resolution is not withdrawn, as a protest against the indifference of the British public in regard to Indian affairs and the consequent disregard of Indian public opinion by the present Government’.⁷ In a meeting held at Calcutta Town Hall on 7 August 1905 (hailed as the birthday of Indian nationalism), a formal boycott resolution was passed, which marked the beginning of the *Swadeshi* movement. The day of partition was observed as a day of mourning and *arandhan* (non-cooking) in almost all the houses of Bengal. A *hartal* was called in Calcutta and Surendra Nath Banerjea and Ananda Mohan Bose addressed to a huge gathering of seventy thousand people. On the suggestion of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore (who composed the famous song *Banglar Mati, Banglar Jal* at that point of time), the day was further observed as the *Rakhi Bandhan Day* as a symbol of unity and brotherhood among different religious communities. At the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1906, Surendra Nath Banerjea stated: “So long as the partition is not reversed or modified, the Bengali speaking community will never be satisfied..... and that, no matter what concessions may be granted in other directions, they will not conciliate our people or allay their prevailing excitement”.⁸ He along with Bepin Chandra Pal, Aswini Kumar Dutta, Aurobindo Ghosh, Ramendrasundar Trivedi and the like sought to make the anti-partition movement as broad based as possible and soon the *Boycott* and *Swadeshi* movements (inspite of their limitations), got large scale mass support (particularly among the Hindus) all over Bengal which ultimately unnerved the British authority. Not only that, these movements posed a great danger to Manchester cotton textile industry. So the new Viceroy Lord Hardinge II (November 1910 – April 1916) in a secret despatch recommended certain changes in the administration of India which resulted in the announcement of the annulment of the partition of Bengal. It was annulled on 12 December 1911 by King George V at his Coronation

Darbar in Delhi. The date chosen for the formal ending of the partition and reunification of Bengal was 1 April 1912 and Lord Carmichael was selected as the first Governor of reunified Bengal. There were other administrative decisions. The most important of which was the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi – a measure which ‘marked the end of Bengali dominance in national politics of India’.⁹

The Hindus welcomed the Government’s decision and they were naturally happy at the annulment of the partition of Bengal. But it was a severe shock to the Muslims of Eastern Bengal and Assam who thought that the partition would enhance the economic and educational progress of their region. Following the annulment of the partition of Bengal, the Eastern Bengal and Assam Muslim League (EBAML, formed in July 1908) and the Calcutta based West Bengal Muslim League (WBML, formed on 21 January 1909) were amalgamated into the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) as the provincial branch of the All India Muslim League (AIML) on 2 March 1912 with Nawab Salimullah as president and Nawab Ali Chaudhury and Zahid Suhrawardy as secretaries. Nawab Salimullah, the elected president of the BPML, called on a meeting of the Muslim leaders of Bengal at Dacca on 30 December 1911. Resolutions were passed at the meeting expressing deep sense of regret and disappointment at the annulment of the partition in utter disregard of the Muslim feelings and interests. He in his Presidential address at the Muslim League session held at Calcutta on 3 March 1912, considered the annulment as a ‘ready concession to an utterly seditious agitation led by the Muslims who remained loyal to the British Government for a long time’. But he appreciated the Government’s decision of setting up a University at Dacca and persuaded for special facilities for the Muslims in education and government services. In the concluding part of his address, Nawab Salimullah announced his decision to retire from active politics on the ground of his ill-health and he ultimately died in 1914.

The partition of Bengal and its annulment strained the relations between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. Nirad C. Choudhuri in his book entitled *The Autobiography of an unknown Indian* categorically gave an account of the deep hatred of the Hindus towards the Muslims after the partition. He observed that “it left a permanent legacy of estrangement between the two communities and that a cold dislike for the Muslims settled down in our hearts, putting an end to all real intimacy

and friendship”.¹⁰ This manifested itself in the streets, schools and market places but above all, it formed an abiding place in the minds of the people. The young educated and professional Muslims who saw the failure of the loyalist approach of their aristocratic elders who were then in the forefront of Muslim politics, understood the fact that they must follow a bold and effective policy of political agitation, if they wanted to improve the lot of their own. Great Britain’s support to Italy’s invasion of Tripoli in 1911, the Balkan War (in October 1912) against the Ottoman Empire and the Russian aggression in Persia embittered the feelings of the Muslims in India. They were also disappointed by the vacillating policy of the British Government regarding the proposed Muslim University of Aligarh. On the other hand, the educated Muslims of Bengal (who lost their faith on both the ‘orthodox’ and ‘loyalist’ Muslim leaders), discarded their submissive attitude towards the British Government and stood for a separate identity of the Bengali Muslims. They also wanted to cooperate with the Congress in the struggle for self-government. Muhsin-ul-Mulk, an aristocratic leader, also saw the danger of this new trend in Muslim politics of Bengal. He wrote: “By this decision (annulment of partition) the government displayed improper indifference to the Muslims and the result is that some educated Muslims have begun to say that it is not in Muslim interest to keep aloof from the Hindus. They suggested that we should say good bye to the Muslim League and join the Indian National Congress”.¹¹ Around this time, A.K. Fazlul Huq, a young politician of ‘a new kind’, with indomitable courage, charismatic personality and independent spirit emerged in Bengal and began to represent the ideas, hopes and aspirations of the younger generation of the Muslim community of Bengal. The Balkan war and the Cawnpore Mosque incident (in which a serious riot broke out in August 1913 following the rumours that portion of a mosque was being demolished there by the municipality to make way for a new road which prompted Fazlul Huq to make a personal visit to the site) brought Mr. Huq and a group of lawyers and journalist politicians into the forefront of Bengal Muslim politics.

Abul Kashem Fazlul Huq, popularly known as *Sher-e-Bengla* or *Hak Saheb*, was born on 26 October 1873, at his maternal uncle’s house at Saturia (contrarily at his ancestral house at Chakhar, a village 14 miles away from Barisal town), a developed and prosperous village in the district of Bakerganj (presently in Bangladesh). He was born in an affluent, educated and cultured family and he was

the only son of Muhammad Wazid (who was a reputed civil and criminal lawyer of the Barisal Bar) and Saidunnissa Khatun. Fazlul Huq started his preliminary studies in Arabic and Persian at home and also got admitted at a local *Madrassah*. He received his early education from Himayat Hussain Chowdhury and Maulana Kashgar – the two eminent and sincere teachers of their time. Later he took admission to Barisal Zilla School and from there he passed the Entrance Examination in 1890 in First Division. Fazlul Huq then moved to Calcutta and took admission in the Presidency College under Dacca Division where from he passed the F.A. Examination in 1892 and B.A. Examination with First Class having triple Honours in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics from the same college in 1894. Some of his classmates were Bhupendra Nath Mitra, Brajalal Mitra, Charuchandra Ghosh, Dwarikanath Mitra, Manmatha Mukherjee and Prabhas Chandra Mitra – all outstanding Presidencians of that time. He was the first Muslim student who did his post-graduation in Mathematics from the University of Calcutta and was awarded First Class in 1896. His formal education was completed with a BL degree in 1897 from the University Law College, Calcutta and significantly he was the second Muslim in the Indian subcontinent to obtain a Law degree.¹² After the completion of his studies, Fazlul Huq chose legal practice as his profession and got himself enrolled as an Advocate in the Calcutta High Court in 1900. Not only that, he started his legal practice as an apprentice under Sir Asutosh Mookerjee. But the death of his father (in 1901), compelled him to move towards Barisal, his hometown where he started his practice. While living in Barisal, Fazlul Huq came into contact with a number of poor, illiterate, backward and down-trodden people especially the Muslim peasants and tenants whose innocence, backwardness, unemployment and economic degradation brought a great change in his life and he began to take interest in different socio-economic and political problems of the time. In Barisal he also met with Aswini Kumar Dutt in 1901 and was elected as a Commissioner in the Barisal Municipal election and also won the election in the Barisal Zilla Board. The success in these elections was a turning point in his life and thereafter Fazlul Huq never looked back and marked his footprints in the political canvas of Bengal and also in the literary field (he himself edited a Bengali weekly, *Balak* and jointly edited a Bengali monthly, *Bharat Suhrid* (1900-'03) to promote communal harmony among the masses). Apart from his legal practice, Fazlul Huq served as a part-time lecturer (in Mathematics) of Raj Chandra College (in Barisal) in between 1903 and 1904.

Like many Muslims, Fazlul Huq was a strong supporter of the partition of Bengal (1905) on the ground that it would be ‘a much-needed opportunity for the Muslims to obtain their due share of state patronage’.¹³ At the same time, he extended his support to Nawab Salimullah in establishing the Mohammedan Provincial Union in 1905 and the Nawab invited Fazlul Huq, the promising young advocate to join the anti-*Swadeshi* movement for the greater interest of the Muslim community to which the latter duly responded. His mastery of several languages made him a popular figure in the political arena of Bengal and Fazlul Huq, inspite of his *Ashraf* (who were descendants of foreigners and converts from the higher caste Hindus) background, became successful in captivating the hearts of the people of rural Bengal who mostly belonged to *Ajlaf* or *Atrap* (lower class Mohammedans and converts from the lower caste Hindus) community and tried to maintain a close touch with them, to feel for them, to fight for them – all these ultimately helped him to emerge as a successful politician¹⁴. Not only that, Nawab Salimullah also sent Fazlul Huq as his special representative to the Muslim leaders of India in connection with his grand scheme of establishing completely a Muslim political organization on an all-India basis. With this objective Nawab Salimullah requested Mohsin-ul-Mulk to convene the All India Mohammedan Educational Conference at Dacca on 30 December 1906 in which Fazlul Huq played a very crucial role and became successful in proving his efficiency and organizational capacity. The Conference resolved to launch the ‘All-India Muslim League’ and the organizing capacity of Mr. Huq resulted in his appointment one of the General Secretaries of the Drafting Committee of the All-India Muslim League and finally he was elected as its joint secretary. Thus it can be said without any doubt that Fazlul Huq became one of the founder members of the All-India Muslim League¹⁵. He then decided to dedicate his life for the cause of the Muslims but very soon he changed his mind to fulfill his father’s wish and his wife’s (he married Kurshid Talat Begum, the daughter of Nawab Muhammad Khan Bhadur and granddaughter of Nawab Abdul Latif, C.I.E.) dream. As their wish, Fazlul Huq wanted to join in the government service and his name was recommended by Nawab Salimullah to be appointed Deputy Magistrate which he did in 1906. Later on, he was transferred to Jamalpur where he had to face a communal riot which he very effectively and tactfully handled, suppressed and restored peace in the locality. Thereafter, he was transferred to Madaripur where he was offered the post of Assistant Registrar of Rural Cooperative Societies in the new province of Eastern

Bengal and Assam¹⁶ which he accepted in 1908 and continued it upto 1912. But to his utter surprise, Fazlul Huq was not promoted to the post of Registrar of the Cooperative Societies. Disappointed and disgruntled Huq then decided to resign from the post and thereafter he joined the Calcutta High Court as a junior to Asutosh Mookerjee (later Sir Asutosh Mookerjee) and got himself established in legal profession. But politics was beckoning him and he finally decided to enter into active politics which he initiated under the guidance of Sir Khwaja Salimullah and Nawab Ali Chowdhury.

The opportunity came in 1913 when election was held to elect a member to the Bengal Legislative Council from the Dacca Division Constituency. Fazlul Huq agreed to contest the election at the request of Aswini Kumar Dutt, a prominent leader of the *Swadeshi* age. In the election, he fought against Roy Bahadur Kumar Mahendra Nath Mitra in that empty seat. At that time there was no system of adult suffrage. Those who had the ability to pay taxes and cesses, were given the right to vote. The partition of Bengal and its annulment embittered the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims and it continued for a long time. No other Muslim candidate excepting Fazlul Huq agreed to contest in the election from that constituency which had a majority of Hindu population.¹⁷ He took the challenge and captivated the hearts of his Hindu voters as he became successful in gaining the support of Aswini Kumar Dutt who had deep respect towards Fazlul Huq's father Kazi Muhammad Wazid (1843-1901). So he did not have to face much problem to proceed in that critical communal environment¹⁸ and get large scale support from his Hindu voters. The voters of the Dacca Division Constituency were highly convinced by his extraordinary eloquence and sincerity. He declared in his election campaign that he would try his best to improve the condition of the Bengalis and fight for their betterment, prosperity and happiness. He also highlighted the cause of self-respect, age-old traditions and rich cultural heritage of the Bengalis. All these helped him a lot to convince his voters and Fazlul Huq ultimately became successful in defeating the strong Hindu candidate and got elected to the Bengal Legislative Council. Since then he had been associated with the Bengal Legislature till the partition of India (1947), except for two years (1934-36) when he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. In 1913 Fazlul Huq was not only elected to the Bengal Legislative Council, he also became the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim

League and Joint Secretary of the All India Muslim League and continued in these posts till 1916. He then served as the President of the All India Muslim League from 1916 to 1921. In the meantime, he also became the Joint Secretary of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1917 and served this organization as its General Secretary in 1918-1919. All these paved the way for the emergence of Fazlul Huq in the political arena of Bengal vis-à-vis India.

He distinguished himself as a man of independent spirit and made his impression and reputation by his strong advocacy of the Muslim interests and his severe criticism of the British Government's injustices to them. His mode of thinking, his way of expression, his ideas and speeches were totally different from the loyalist approach of his elderly Muslim leaders. His first and most influential speech in the Budget session of the Council won the hearts of millions of Muslims in India as he said: "It seems to me that officials make fundamental mistake with regard to the claims of the Mohammadans on the Govt. whether it would be the question of state patronage, grant of political right, or privileges or expenditure from provincial revenue for promoting Mohammadan education, or other matters of special interest to the community..... If the officials will not meet the demand in full, there is certain to be discontentment in the community, whether the discontent would be worth the consideration of the government is a different question".¹⁹ In his speech Fazlul Huq argued that the Muslims should be given special educational facilities as a compensation for the annulment of the partition of Bengal. He categorically stated: "I would only remind the officials that they are in honour bound to render adequate compensation to the Muhammadan community for all the grievous wrong inflicted on them by the unceremonious annulment of the partition".²⁰ He highly condemned the government for delaying the establishment of the proposed Dacca University and the Muhammadan College at Dacca. He observed: "We have had enough of resolutions, these well-meaning promises and unredeemed pledges which did no more good to the Muhammadan community than did the settled fact of partition".²¹ He also drew the attention of the Government by saying: "Not only is the Muhammadan College at Dacca a stern necessity and an act of bare justice to our community, but I maintain that the time has come for the establishment of a first grade college of Arts for the Mohammadans in Calcutta that there is an urgent need for increased hostel accommodation for Mohammadan students is universally accepted..... The

provision for teaching of Arabic and Persian in government aided schools is hopelessly inadequate”.²² Regarding inadequate representation of the Muslims in the Government services, Huq further pointed out: “.....it is also necessary that our community should be adequately represented in the various branches of the public service, for otherwise, our voice in the councils of Govt. would be very ineffectual and ineffective. It is, therefore, inevitable that we should fight for a proper share of public appointments for the young men of our community; it is also very necessary that we should press our claims strongly”.²³ He at the same time, earned reputation and popularity amongst a section of the Muslim intellectuals for his advocacy for Indianisation of Public Services which he placed before the Royal Commission of Public Services (1913). In his presidential address at the first session of the Bengal Presidency League (after the annulment of the partition of Bengal), held at Dacca on 13 April 1914, Fazlul Huq uttered: “I can assure the officials that the Muslim community of Bengal can well survive the effects of even the most unsympathetic administrative measures, and they will also survive the injustice done to them by the annulment of the partition. If now I refer to the annulment I do so simply to emphasise the fact that even lapse of time can not reconcile us to a measure which has been so utterly repugnant to the sense of self-respect of our community”.²⁴

The entry of Fazlul Huq in Bengal politics ushered in a new phase in the political life of the Muslims of this region. He advocated the hope, desires and aspirations of the educated middle class and the cause of the down-trodden peasantry and the tenants. Primarily a leader of the Muslim community and a strong pleader of their causes, he also realized the fact that the future of the Muslims of Bengal would lay in an alliance with the Hindus against the common enemy, i.e. the British. He thought that a political understanding with the Hindus ensuring adequate safeguards in the constitution for the Muslims would strengthen the freedom movement and force the British to concede power. It would then be shared by both the communities according to the agreed scheme.²⁵ Also a section of the Muslim youths including Huq, who had been earlier hostile to the Indian National Congress,²⁶ began to come closer towards the Congress at the initiative of Jinnah and Mohammad Ali who wanted to establish a colonial self-government in India in close cooperation with the Congress.²⁷ In Bengal, Fazlul Huq made an appeal to the Hindus to forgive the Muslims and

behave like brothers. He said: "Our quarrel is not with Hindus..... but with officials. We wish to settle our account with them".²⁸ Being a member of the All India Muslim League and the Secretary of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League, Fazlul Huq also joined the All-India National Congress and presided over the conference of the Bengal Provincial Congress held at Midnapore in 1914.²⁹ This new political strategy of Fazlul Huq and his associates created a favourable atmosphere for a political understanding, collaboration and alliance between the Muslims and Hindus which came to a reality by the Lucknow Pact of 1916. In order to win the confidence of the Muslims for the acceptance of the Lucknow Pact, he proclaimed: "Hindus and Muslims should stand united and use every constitutional and legitimate means to effect the transfer of power India, has, I believe, turned a corner..... The Promised Land is within sight".³⁰

By the Lucknow Pact, the Indian National Congress accepted the separate electorates with reservation of seats. Provincial autonomy was the basis of the scheme. Provincial Legislatures were to be enlarged and four-fifths ($\frac{4}{5}$ th) of their members were to be elected. The Muslims gained weightage in the Central Legislature and in the Legislatures of provinces where they were in minority. The Hindus were given weightage in Bengal and the Punjab. To give the benefit of weightage to the Muslim minority provinces, Fazlul Huq and other delegates from Bengal accepted 40% of the Council seats for the Muslims of Bengal (previously it was 11.3%) and sacrificed 14% seats in the province where they formed 54% of the total population. The Muslims of the Punjab agreed to 50% representation, sacrificing only 5% of their seats in the Punjab Legislature. In return, the Muslims of minority provinces got weightage: Bombay with 20% Muslim population 33% seats, U.P. with 14% Muslim population 30% seats, Bihar & Orissa with 13% Muslim population 29% seats; Madras with 7% Muslim population 15% seats, and C.P. with 4% Muslim population 15% seats.³¹ But according to Prof. J. H. Broomfield, the figure was slightly different which is reflected in the Table given below:

Table I.1: Distribution of Seats in the Provincial Legislature for the Muslims by the Lucknow Pact (1916)

1	2	3	4
Provinces	Muslim % of population	% of total Legislative Seats for Muslims	% of (3) of (2)
Bengal	52.6	40.0	76
Bihar & Orissa	10.5	25.0	238
Bombay	20.4	33.3	163
C.P	4.3	15.0	349
Madras	6.5	15.0	231
Punjab	54.8	50.0	91
U.P	14.0	50.0	214

Source: J. H. Broomfield, 'The Forgotten Majority: The Bengal Muslims And September 1918' in D.A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, p. 222.

But a section of the Muslim leaders (Loyalists) of Bengal severely criticized Fazlul Huq and his associates for selling out their community to the Hindus and also for allowing the Muslim majority of the province to be reduced into a minority in the Provincial Legislature and it was reflected in the annual session of the Provincial Muslim League, held at Barisal on 8 April 1917. A few members of the B.P.M.L. (Bengal Presidency Muslim League) including its President Nawab Ali Chowdhury who refused to accept the Lucknow Pact, left the organization and became the President of the Central National Mohammedan Association (C.N.M.A.), a platform for 'effective protection of Muslim interest'. Nawab Ali Chowdhury firmly believed that "Hitherto the whole history of India.....is a history of a continued antagonism of the two communities", hence no question of collaboration with the Hindus. Some Muslim leaders of Bengal formed a new political organization called Indian Moslem Association (I.M.A.). According to J.H. Broomfield, "The Lucknow Pact thus led to a crisis in Muslim politics in Bengal".³² In this situation, Fazlul Huq and other supporters of the Lucknow Pact suggested modification demanding 50% seats for Muslims in the Bengal Legislative Council.³³ The C.N.M.A. and the B.P.M.L. made strong demands and deputation to Montagu and Chelmsford and also to the Bengal Government for 50% seats to the Muslims in the Provincial Legislature.³⁴ But in

reality, the Muslims were given 35% representation (39 seats out of 113 elected seats) in the Bengal Legislative Council by the Government of India Act, 1919. The Hindus were given 46 seats, the zamindars-5, Calcutta University-1, European Community-5, European Traders-11, Anglo-Indians-2 and Indian Traders were given 4 seats.^{34a} The distribution of seats under the 1919 Act is clearly reflected in the Table given below:

Table I.2: The Distribution of Elected Seats in the Bengal Legislative Council under the 1919 Act

Different Categories	Seats
Muhammadan Urban	06
Muhammadan Rural	33
Non- Muhammadan Urban	11
Non- Muhammadan Rural	35
Calcutta University	01
Landholders	05
Europeans	05
European Trade and Commerce	11
Indian Trade and Commerce	04
Anglo-Indians	02
Total elected members	113
Nominated and Ex-Officio	26 (22+4)

Source: Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, pp. 53-54.

In the meantime, the Home Rule Movement for attaining self-government in India was launched under the leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant. In Bengal, C.R. Das, Fazlul Huq, Bipin Chandra Pal and the like joined the movement. Also around this time, a very significant change occurred in international relations which had a great impact in national politics. On the onset of the First World War, Great Britain supported the claims of the Balkan States against Turkey which created great repercussions in India and the Pan-Islamic Muslim leaders like Hakim Ajmal Khan, Abul Kalam Azad and the Ali Brothers (namely Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali) became very much anxious about the future of the Ottoman Empire.³⁵ Fazlul Huq strongly condemned and criticized the imperialist design of the European powers on Turkey and the British Government's indifference towards the sentiment of the Indian

Muslims. This was fairly reflected in his Presidential address at the Delhi session of the Muslim League held on 30 December 1918.³⁶ In his Presidential address, he also upheld a tragic picture of India's poverty, backwardness and economic dislocation. He was deeply influenced by R.C. Dutt's ideas and took information and data from his books and tried to understand and analyze India's economic condition and the root cause of its backwardness and hindrance. He came to the conclusion that the prime cause of India's poverty was the British rule which was clearly reflected in his Presidential address: "I believe we are now in a position to offer a complete answer to Lord George Hamilton, on the basis of the test laid down by him. We have seen that India is now chronically famine stricken and that these famines are really due to the abject poverty of the Indian people. We have also seen that this poverty has been directly due to the fact that under British Rule sources of national wealth in India have been gradually narrowed and that unjust charges on the Indian people have drained away all available wealth in the country. India therefore has materially retrograded in material prosperity under British Rule, in consequence of the policy hitherto pursued by our British Rulers..... In dealing with the present economic condition of the country, I have not said anything new, nor have I been able to put forward any novel arguments in support of the proposition that the present system of Indian Administration has been productive of the most baneful results. It has been said of the ancient Roman Empire that it sucked the orange off its provinces dry and left only the rind to its subjects. The Economic History of India shows that a similar process has unfortunately been going on in this country under British Rule and our Rulers have not only sucked the Indian orange juiceless, but the chances are that if they are not pulled up in time, even the rind will not be left over for the Indian people".³⁷

In his opinion, India could achieve her independence with the establishment of a full responsible government in the country. But Fazlul Huq did not agree with the view that the attainment of full-fledged independence and the establishment of a responsible government would actually ensure the domination of the Hindus over the Muslims and they would feel insecure with the transfer of power from the British to the Hindus. He thought that the Hindus were not traditional enemies of the Muslims. The people of these two communities had become fanatic and communal because of lack of education, economic backwardness and other factors. So he realized the need of proper education which would enable them to become liberal, progressive, tolerant

and sympathetic in their outlook and then they would trust each other and no longer be engaged in bloody communal and fratricidal wars. In his Presidential address at the session of the All-India Muslim League held in December 1918, Fazlul Huq said: “On the question of Hindu-Muslim relations I consider it as a gross libel on both communities to say that the Hindu is the natural enemy of the Mussalman. Those who hinge their case on the unfortunate incidents like the Arrah riots and similar disturbances at once betray the weakness of their arguments. These disturbances are due to the fanaticism and ill conceived religious fervour of these sections of the two communities who, from want of education and other causes, have not learnt to be tolerant of the feelings and sentiments of others. We must look to a liberal spread of education and to all that education brings in train, to effect that broadening of view and to inspire our people with that spirit of mutual toleration and forbearance which alone can put an effective quietus to such disturbance. No one has ever heard of a riot between educated Hindus and educated Mussalmans, sectional differences between the lower orders must always exist and riots between different sections of one and the same community are also not unknown, these are amongst the numerous ill incidental to human life, which only give opportunities for leaders of men to discharge one of the highest duties to society by bringing their erring brethren to the paths of reason. As regards the oppressions of Hindu landlords, money-lenders, lawyers and others, I do not think that the Mahomedan representatives of these sections of society are less merciful to their respective victims; the relation between a landlord and his tenant, between a money-lender and his debtor, between a lawyer and his client are merely personal and individual and are seldom affected by communal consideration. I know of instances of actual oppressions by Mahomedan landlords and money-lenders of Mahomedan tenants and debtors which can hardly be surpassed by any authentic records of oppressions, by any members of non-Moslem communities. These oppressions, again, can only be effectively minimized, for they can not be completely wiped out of society, by the spread of education amongst the masses, which will give them the necessary resisting power”.³⁸

In his Presidential address, Fazlul Huq not only put emphasis on the spread of liberal education but also gave due importance to Hindu-Muslim relations and unity. He rightly understood that the Hindus and Muslims should go, live and work together for their own needs. He urged his Muslim brothers and sisters that they should keep

harmony and friendship with other communities otherwise they would become weak and remain very much detached from the mainstream of the national movement. He said: "We can not render any real services to our country unless we are prepared to rise above petty selfish considerations and if need be to sacrifice self at the glorious altar of duty. All the different communities must learn to outvie one another coming forward to serve the motherland, and it will be glorious day for our community if in this race for the honours of unselfish patriotism Islam can win her way to the forefront of the noble band of Indian patriots".³⁹ Arguing for self government and Hindu-Muslim cooperation, Fazlul Huq uttered: "We should strive for that complete freedom which is the goal of our ambitions". He gave notice to the vanity and pride of the British rulers and advised them to take lesson from history, saying, "Empires have risen and fallen on the soil of India, leaving no trace behind, and even so will one day be the fate of the British Indian Empire". He also condemned the repressive Indian Press Act (1917), Arms Act and Defence of India Act and accordingly the Muslim League passed resolutions demanding the repeal of these Acts, advocating the right of self determination, and appealing to the government to respect the integrity of Turkey and sentiment of the Muslims.⁴⁰

The ruthless and unsympathetic attitude of the British rulers to the emotions and sentiments of the Muslims on the question of Turkey's integrity brought the India National Congress and the Muslim League in the same platform. Meanwhile, the Viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford had appointed a Committee (the Sedition or Rowlatt Committee) under the presidentship of Sydney Rowlatt to investigate the nature and extent of revolutionary activities and to suggest legislation, if necessary, to deal effectively with them. The Rowlatt Committee, which submitted its Report in April 1918, recommended special legislation, both punitive and preventive in nature. Fazlul Huq in a public meeting held at the College Square (Calcutta) on 2 February 1919, expressed his opinion that the Rowlatt Act, if given into effect to, would, suppress the fundamental rights of the Indians and pave the way for political death of the freedom fighters. So he made an appeal to all the people and political leaders to keep aside their differences and spontaneously fight against this repressive Act. As soon as the British Government introduced the two Bills on 6 February 1919, Gandhiji decided to launch a Satyagraha on 6 April 1919. The anti-Rowlatt Act agitation became severe in Punjab and the British authorities mobilized large number

of armed forces to crush the agitation. General Michael O'Dwyer ordered his troops to fire on a meeting held at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar on 13 April 1919, which massacred several hundreds of men, women and children. The Congress set up an Enquiry Committee with Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Fazlul Huq and Tyabji. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place at a time when the Indian Muslims were boldly agitated over the pan-Islamic *Khilafat* issue which originated as a result of Turkey's participation in the First World War on behalf of Germany (as an ally) against Great Britain. The Sultan of Turkey, ruler of the vast Ottoman Empire, was the Caliph or *Khalifa* of the Islamic world. As Turkey was defeated in the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was dismembered and the Sultan of Turkey was deprived of all real authorities. The Muslims of India strongly condemned this act of Britain and started a countrywide movement to exert pressure on Britain to change its policy towards Turkey. This movement came to be known as the Khilafat Movement which was launched in September 1919 and got its strength and momentum as soon as Gandhiji extended his support towards it. He was elected as the President of the All India Khilafat Conference met in Delhi on 24 November 1919. It resolved to boycott victory celebrations, English goods and adopt non-cooperation with the government if their demands about the *Khilafat* were not accepted. The Amritsar session of the Indian National Congress, held in December 1919, gave a great fillip to the *Khilafat* agitation and Gandhiji felt that the movement provided an opportunity to unite the Hindus and Muslims that might not come again for a hundred years.

The Khilafat Committee in its meeting at Bombay on 28 May 1920 adopted Gandhiji's resolution of Non-Cooperation Movement. The Congress, the Muslim League and the Khilafat Committee held special sessions in Calcutta in September 1920 and adopted the resolution of Non-Cooperation in their meeting. The Muslim League session under the presidentship of Dr. M.A. Ansari also accepted the objective of *Swaraj*. The Khilafat Committee meeting also adopted programmes of boycott of Courts and educational institutions. Gandhiji, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Muhammad Ali and the Ali Brothers were the prominent leaders of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements which were combined into a common struggle of the Hindus and Muslims against the British. But later Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Fazlul Huq and Sir Muhammad Shafi did not agree with the Non-Cooperation Programme and Jinnah and Fazlul Huq opposed the non-cooperation resolution on boycott of Councils

and educational institutions at the Nagpur Session of the Congress (December 1920) without any success. Fazlul Huq supported the Non-Cooperation so far as the boycott of British goods and titles were concerned, but he did not agree with the idea of boycotting schools and colleges by students which would go against the interests of the Muslims because if the Muslim boys and girls would boycott educational institutions, they would not have any future and they would become more backward, poor and illiterate and they would suffer an incalculable loss. In a letter to Sarat Chandra Bose dated 22 February 1921, Fazlul Huq dissociated himself from the Congress programme of Non-Cooperation⁴¹ and he along with Jinnah left the Congress.⁴² Meanwhile, going against the League's stand Mr. Huq, Abul Kashem, Abdul Karim, Azizul Haque, Tazimuddin Ahmad and other prominent leaders of the BPML, decided to contest the Council election which was held in December 1920-January 1921. Fazlul Huq was elected to the Council but he was formally expelled from the League in 1921. Very soon, the *Khilafat* question also lost its relevance as the people of Turkey rose up under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal Pasha in November 1922 who abolished the institution of the Caliph and there set up a secular republican government. Though there were differences of opinion and temporary alienation between the Indian National Congress and Muslim League leaders on the issue of Non-Cooperation programme, the spirit of co-operation and mutual understanding between the Hindus and Muslims was continued and strengthened in Bengal when liberal minded politician Chitta Ranjan Das entered into an agreement and understanding with Fazlul Huq and H.S. Suhrawardy. This agreement came to be known as the 'Bengal Pact' (December 1923).

After the suspension of the Non-Cooperation movement by the Congress Working Committee on 12 February 1922 as a result of the Chauri Chaura incident (held on 5 February 1922), the Congress was left without any political programme. The Party was also going through an ideological crisis and ultimately it suffered a split at Gaya and it was divided into two groups – the 'No-Changers (Rajaji, Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Ansari, K.R. Ayenger etc.) and the 'Pro-Changers' (C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sardar Vithalbhai Patel and the like). C. R. Das, the most respected Hindu leader of Bengal and his younger political associates, such as J.M. Sen Gupta, Subhas Chandra Bose and others strongly advocated for the entry into the Legislatures and decided to

contest the elections in November 1923 organized under the Government of India Act, 1919, and thus gained entry into the Legislature. C.R. Das also got support of Motilal Nehru in this respect. But due to the great influence of Gandhiji on the All-India Congress and Bengal Provincial Congress, C.R. Das failed to carry through his proposal at the Gaya session of the Congress, held in December 1922 although he was at that time the President of both All-India Congress and Bengal Provincial Congress. With Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das formed the Congress-Khilafat-Swarajya Party, commonly known as the Swarajya Party on 31 December 1922 of which C.R. Das was elected as the President and Motilal Nehru as one of its Secretaries. On that day, C.R. Das informed the All-India Congress Committee of his action and tendered his resignation from the Congress Presidency. Soon the Swarajists acquired majority in the Bengal Provincial Congress and C.R. Das resumed its Presidency with Subhas Chandra Bose as its Secretary.⁴³

C.R. Das understood the reality that the obstructionist policy of the Swarajya Party would not become successful unless he got the moral support of the Muslim members who formed a substantial group in the Bengal Legislative Council. He held discussions with Fazlul Huq (who also joined the Swarajya Party), H.S. Suhrawardy and other Muslim leaders of Bengal finally came into an agreement with them which was known as the 'Bengal Pact' - the high watermark of Hindu-Muslim collaboration in Bengal politics. The Pact resolved that: ".....in order to establish the real foundation of self government in this province, it is necessary to bring about a pact between the Hindus and Mohammadans of Bengal dealing with the rights of each community when the foundation of self government is secured. Representation in the Bengal Legislative Council was to be on the population basis and through separate electorates. In local bodies, the majority community in each district was to have 60 per cent seats and the minority community 40 per cent. Fifty-five per cent of government posts were to be reserved for the Muslims, and until that percentage was reached the community might support upto 80 per cent of all recruits. The Mohammadans satisfying the least test should be preferred until the above percentage was attained; and after that according to the proportion of 55 and 45, the former to the Mohammadans, and the latter to the non-Mohammadans, subject to this that for the intervening years a small percentage of posts, say 20 per cent, should go to the Hindus. No resolution affecting the religion of any community was to be passed by

the Legislative Council without the consent of three-quarters of the elected representatives of that community. There was to be no music in procession before mosques, and cow-slaughter was not to be interfered with".⁴⁴ As a result of the Bengal Pact, the Muslim became hopeful that they, along with the Swarajists, would compel the British government to fulfill their demands.

In the Bengal Legislative Council election held in November 1923, the Swarajya Party got a resounding victory capturing 75% Hindu seats (36 seats out of 47) and 50% Muslim seats (21 seats out of a total of 39 seats). The Swarajists also won 45 out of 106 elective seats in the Central Legislative Assembly, besides securing the support of independents led by Jinnah and the liberals. C.R. Das became the leader of the largest single Party with 46 members, out of 139 in the Provincial Legislature⁴⁵ and formed the Swarajya Council Party with himself as President and J.M. Sen Gupta and Abdur Rashid Khan as its joint Secretaries. As the Swarajya Party opposed the Dyarchy system introduced by the Government of India Act 1919, C.R. Das refused the offer of Lord Lytton II, the then Governor of Bengal to form the ministry.⁴⁶ Fazlul Huq had different opinion on the issue of accepting ministerial office. He left the Swarajya Party with his eight (8) Muslim followers and accepted the office of the Minister of Education in January 1924. As Education Minister, he exerted pressure on the government to allocate funds to set up the Islamia College in Calcutta and also for the Madrasahs. It was because of his endeavour, a large number of primary schools were established and the total number of Muslim students rose from 880374 to 1139949 (the increase was 29.4%) at the primary level. However, their percentage declined at the secondary level between 1921-22 and 1926-27. On the other hand, their number in the Colleges and Universities increased from 2175 to 3419 between 1921-22 and 1926-27 and in professional colleges, the number of Muslim students rose from 440 to 886, for which credit must be given to the Dacca University (with its Muslim Hall) and the Calcutta Islamia College.⁴⁷ But Fazlul Huq and other ministers like Surendranath Mallick and A.K. Ghaznavi had faced a lot of problems in their offices because of the Swarajists opposition in the Legislature. The Ministers including Sir Abdur Rahim, a member of the Governor's Executive Council, tried their best to prove their majority in the Legislature, but did not succeed. Being defeated (68-66 votes) on the salaries demand of ministers in August, Fazlul Huq and his followers had to resign from the ministry⁴⁸ which was a great moral

victory of the Swarajya Party. Meanwhile, the Swarajya Party won the election of the Calcutta Corporation (held in March 1924) by capturing three-quarter of seats. Of the fifteen (15) Muslim seats, it secured ten (10). C.R. Das was elected as the Mayor of the Calcutta Corporation and H.S. Suhrawardy was nominated as the Deputy Mayor. Subhash Chandra Bose was appointed the Chief Executive Officer while Abdur Rashid Khan became the Deputy Executive Officer and Akram Khan an Alderman. On the basis of the Bengal Pact, the Muslims were given jobs in the Calcutta Corporation and 25 Muslims were appointed in that office.⁴⁹

There was no unanimity about the Bengal Pact among the Hindus and the leading Hindu journals severely criticized the Bengal Pact as an 'electioneering device', 'an offer of bribe....to his Mohammedan supporters', and 'a monstrous understanding' with the Muslims and accused that 'C.R. Das has sold Bengal to the Muslim community'.⁵⁰ Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Malaviya of the Hindu Mahasabha organized several protest meetings in Calcutta against the Bengal Pact. Gandhiji also believed that "a Pact not possible at this stage". At the Cocanada session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1923, the Congress leaders refused to recognize any separate provincial agreement on the communal question. The non-Swarajist Muslim leaders took this opportunity to destroy the faith of pro-Swarajist Muslim leaders in the Bengal Pact. Musharraf Hussain, a leading zamindar and member of the Legislative Council, moved a resolution in Bengal Legislature in March 1924 for the immediate implementation of the provisions of the Bengal Pact. The Pro-Swarajist Muslim leaders did not like the connection between the terrorists and some Swarajists. So C.R. Das faced great difficulty to keep the Swarajists together. He showed the strength of the Party on 23 March 1925, when the demand for salaries of the newly appointed ministers, Nawab Ali Choudhuri and Manmathanath Roy Choudhuri was raised in the Legislature. The Swarajists rejected the salary demand with the support of Independent Nationalists and Fazlul Huq and his followers by a majority of only six votes.⁵¹ But the death of C.R. Das on 16 June 1925 gave a deep blow to the Bengal Pact and weakened the Swarajists. It was a major setback to them and the death of C.R. Das was followed by a bitter succession war, in which J.M. Sen Gupta ousted Birendranath Sasmal in 1927 but was challenged and ousted by Subhas Chandra Bose. Subhas Chandra Bose introduced some radical programmes in the Swarajya Party which were not supported and accepted by the

Muslim Swarajists and they ultimately severed themselves from the Swarajya Party.⁵² The Swarajists finally walked out of the Legislature in 1930 and by that time, their sun had set.

Meanwhile the other political parties in Bengal were struggling and there was total chaos, confusion, distrust and disorder in Bengal politics. The Congress suffered a split with the emergence of the Swarajya Party (which also lost its momentum after the death of C.R. Das). The Bengal Provincial Muslim League was then practically defunct and dead. But the different political parties had to reorganize themselves and prepare election strategy and mobilize the masses as the elections were scheduled to be held in 1926. As a result, on March 29, 1926 Abdur Rahim formed an anti-Hindu, pro-government party called the Bengal Muslim Party.⁵³ On the other hand, twenty-eight prominent Muslim leaders of Bengal like Fazlul Huq, Mujibur Rahman, H.S. Suhrawardy, Ashrafuddin Choudhury, Abdur Rashid Khan, Akram Khan etc. met on 27 May 1926 with an intention of launching a new political party of their own, called the United Muslim Council Party.⁵⁴ Within a few months (in October 1926), Suhrawardy, Mujibur Rahman and others defected from Fazlul Huq's, announced the formation of a new body named the Independent Muslim Party to safeguard the Muslim rights and interests. In the elections of 1926, the Swarajists lost their hold over the Muslim voters of Bengal on account of their intra-party rivalry and won only one seat out of the 39 seats reserved for the Muslims which indicated the fact that the Muslim voters cast their votes not in favour of the Swarajist candidates and it helped a lot to the non-Swarajists to capture those seats. The prominent elected candidates were Sarat Chandra Bose, Subhas Chandra Bose, J.M. Sen Gupta, N.R. Sarkar, Nausher Ali, B.C. Roy, K.S. Roy, Nazimuddin, Hossain Suhrawardy etc.⁵⁵ As in the elections of 1926, not a single party was able to get an absolute majority in the Bengal Legislative Council, there was no other alternative but to form a coalition ministry. This prompted A.K. Ghuznavi, the leader of the Muslim Legislative Association to come into an understanding with Byomkesh Chakraborty, the leader of the Bengal Congress and ultimately they became successful in forming a coalition ministry. The Muslim Press and the Muslim intellectuals were not at all happy with this coalition ministry and the political leaders like Fazlul Huq severely criticized the ministry. Not only that, Huq mobilized the students and organized protest meetings demanding the resignation of the coalition ministry.⁵⁶ On 25 August 1927 the Swarajist leader Dr.

B.C. Roy placed a no confidence motion against Byomkesh Chakraborty and A .K. Ghuznavi for their inefficiency, political opportunism and mal- administration. Ultimately the no confidence motions against A.K. Ghuznavi (who got 62 votes and 66 votes went against him) and B. Chakraborty (who received 57 votes in his favour and 68 votes were cast against him) were passed and both the ministers were compelled to resign.⁵⁷ So the coalition ministry lasted for only seven months and the people who assembled outside the Town Hall, expressed their joy and happiness and celebrated the occasion.⁵⁸ Soon thereafter, Khan Bahadur Musharaff Hossain formed another coalition ministry in alliance with P.C. Mitter which lasted for only nine months.⁵⁹ In December 1929 Kumar S.S. Roy joined hands with Khan Bahadur G.M. Faruqui to form a coalition ministry but it was, too short-lived as Kumar S.S. Roy tendered his resignation within a few days.⁶⁰ Then the Muslim leaders understood the fact that ‘dyarchy’, in the face of the Swarajists’ opposition, was completely unworkable in Bengal.

On the other hand, the All-India Muslim League leaders met at Delhi on March 20, 1927 to draft some proposals which are known as the Delhi proposals. They proposed the introduction of joint electorates with certain conditions, such as retention of statutory Muslim majorities in Bengal and Punjab Legislatures, separation of Sind from Bombay, reforms in North-West Frontier Province, one-third Muslim representation in the Central Legislature and assignment of seats in the Provincial Legislatures to each community on the basis of population. The League faced a split on the question of joint electorates and Mian Muhammad Shafi and some other Muslim leaders remained strict to the demand of separate electorates for the Muslims. Meanwhile, in November 1927 the British Government decided to appoint a Statutory Commission (consisting of only White members) under the Chairmanship of Sir John Simon to consider the question of granting further constitutional reforms for India. The Indian National Congress at its Madras session held in December 1927, decided to boycott the Simon Commission “at every stage, everywhere and in every form” as it had predicted that the Commission would not satisfy its demands. On the other hand, M.A. Jinnah, who emerged as a promising leader of the All-India Muslim League in 1924, also criticized the composition of the Commission and urged the League members to boycott the Simon Commission and give up their demand for separate electorates in the greater interest of the country. The All-India Muslim

League Conference held in December 1927, endorsed Jinnah's views. But a faction of the League members led by Mian Muhammad Shafi, refused to go with Jinnah's wishes and decided to cooperate with the Simon Commission convincing it to grant separate electorates for the Muslims.⁶¹ On this question, Fazlul Huq did not support Jinnah's opinion and went in favour of Mian Muhammad Shafi simply on the ground of separate electorates for the Muslims. At that time the Bengal Muslim leaders were divided into three categories over the question of electorate. First, those who were in favour of separate electorates at all costs and they included, among others, Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, A. K. Ghuznavi and Sir Abdur Rahim. Second, those who were the exponents of joint electorates and they included the nationalist Muslim leaders like Abdul Karim, Mujibur Rahman and Akram Khan (who controlled the BPML). The third group consisted of Fazlul Huq and others who believed that only through separate electorates adequate and effective representation could be secured for the backward Muslim community.

In Bengal, the Muslim leaders organized several meetings at district levels urging the Muslim Councilors to defeat the Government motion for the appointment of a Council Sub-Committee to assist the Simon Commission. But when the motion was put to vote in the Council on 9 July 1928, surprisingly it was found that 32 Council members including Fazlul Huq, voted in favour of the motion. Fazlul Huq had to defend his action arguing that had he not done so, the Muslim interests would have been endangered by the mischievous activities of the Hindu Mahasabha⁶² (which was founded in 1915⁶³ at the Haridwar Kumbh Mela). By defending his action, Huq stated: ".....we stand for equal rights. We are against (Hindu) domination".⁶⁴

On the other hand, a complete *hartal* (strike) was observed in Bombay and other cities on 3 February 1928, the day the Simon Commission landed in Bombay and under the patronage of the Indian National Congress, it was greeted with the slogans like "Go Back Simon". When the Congress gave a call to boycott the Simon Commission, Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, gave a challenge to the Indian political leaders to frame a Constitution to which all parties would agree. The Indian leaders took the challenge and convened the All-Parties' Conference in Delhi in February 1928 in which the decision was taken to appoint a committee under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to draft the proposed Constitution. The Nehru

Report was published in August 1928 and recommended Dominion Status with parliamentary government for India, provincial autonomy with residuary powers at the Centre, separation of Sind, provincial status to North-West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P.), joint electorates with adult suffrage and reservation of seats in the Legislature for religious minorities for a period of ten years.⁶⁵ The Calcutta session of the Congress held in December 1928, approved the Nehru Report and gave an ultimatum on the British Government to accept the Nehru Report on or before 31 December 1929. Similarly, in his address at the Calcutta session of the AIML held in December 1928, Abdul Karim, the Vice President of the BPML, described the Nehru Report as ‘a good basis for final deliberation and an effective presentation of (Hindu-Muslim)joint demand’.⁶⁶ Mujibur Rahaman’s *The Musalman* and Akram Khan’s *Muhammadi* started campaigning in favour of the Report which made it clear that Muslims in East Bengal had nothing to fear from joint electorates.⁶⁷ So the BPML (unlike the AIML) continued pleading for joint electorates in Bengal and opposed to communal representation. But the Report was criticized by Ali Brothers, M.A. Jinnah and Fazlul Huq. Mr. Huq totally rejected the Report as his amendment motion for accepting separate electorates was turned down by the Council. On the question of female franchise, he was in favour of keeping the names of the females on the voters’ list,⁶⁸ no matter whether they cast their votes or not at that time and realized the fact that the Muslim women being more backward than the Hindu women, would have to engage themselves in observing ‘Purdah’ and “would be reluctant to go to the polling booths”.⁶⁹ In the meantime, Jinnah outmanoeuvred by the Shafi group, demanded separate electorates and reservation of one-third of the seats in the Central Legislature. But the All-Parties Convention held in Calcutta in December 1928, refused to acknowledge the communal award which ultimately aggravated the communal tension. Jinnah, ‘the sole spokesman’ of the Muslim League, therefore convened a Muslim League Council meeting in January 1929 and formulated a list of demands which came to be known as the ‘Fourteen Points’. They included: (i) separate electorates for the Muslims; (ii) federation; (iii) provincial autonomy with residuary powers in the provinces; (iv) adequate representation in services; (v) full religious liberty etc.⁷⁰ The main aim of Jinnah’s ‘Fourteen Points’ was to make a profitable bargain with the Congress or to reject the Nehru Report. Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, was not satisfied with the Report as it demanded Dominion Status for India instead of complete independence.⁷¹ As the Government

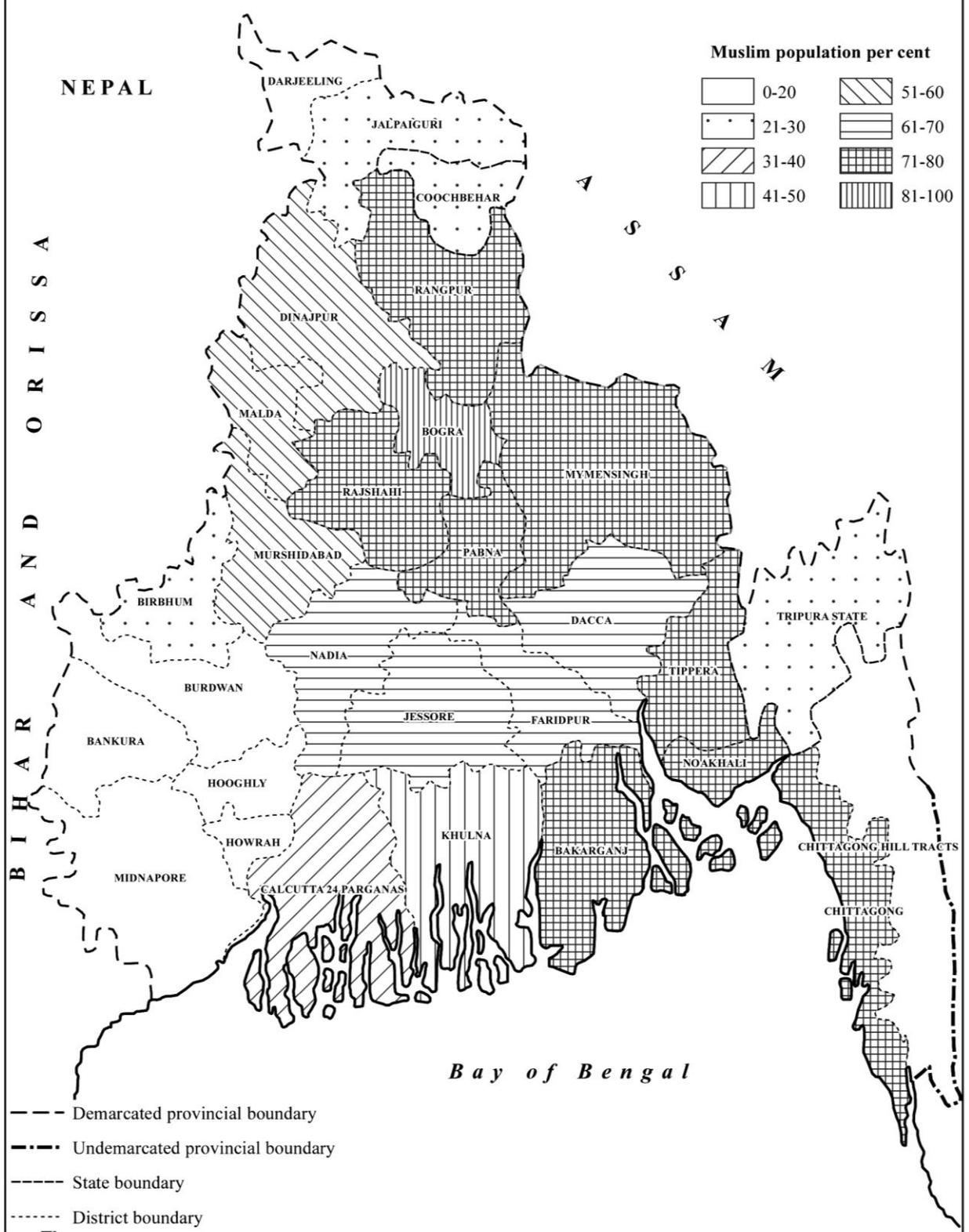
did not accept the Nehru Report, the Congress passed the *Poorna Swaraj* (complete independence) Resolution at its Lahore session (31 December 1929).

On the other hand, as a result of the collapse of the two successive coalition ministries in Bengal (there were six ministries in between 1927 and 1936 and each one was headed by a Muslim Premier), the Governor guided by constitutional obligation and morality, dissolved the Bengal Legislative Council in May 1929⁷² and conducted fresh elections in the first week of June 1929. But the election results were not at all satisfactory to any political party (only the Congress increased its strength to some extent). Finally when the results came to light, it was found that out of the total strength of 39 seats reserved for the Muslims, the Bengal Muslim League and the Independent Muslim Party of Fazlul Huq each secured 11 seats,⁷³ while the remaining 17 seats were captured by the Muslim Legislative Association of A.K. Ghuznavi.⁷⁴ As the Simon Commission's recommendations were rejected by all political parties, the British Government therefore proposed for a Round Table Conference of Indian leaders to discuss and settle the constitutional problems. The First Round Table Conference was held in London from 12 November 1930 to 19 January 1931. It was attended by 57 delegates from British India, 16 from Native States and 15 representatives of the British Government. Sir Muhammad Shafi, the Aga Khan, M.A. Jinnah, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Fazlul Huq and others represented the Muslims of India. In the First Round Table Conference, Fazlul Huq gave a firing speech arguing for separate electorates and provincial autonomy.⁷⁵ As there was no settlement and agreement over the communal issues, the Conference came to nothing. So the Second Round Table Conference was held in London in September 1931. Although the INC did not participate in the First Round Table Conference, this time it was attended by Gandhiji as the sole representative of the Congress. This Round Table Conference also came into a deadlock on the question of communal representation. As a result on 16 August 1932, the British Prime Minister Ramsay Mac Donald announced his 'Communal Award' fixing the number of seats for each community in the Legislature on the basis of separate electorates. According to this Award, the Muslim, Sikh and European voters would elect their candidates by voting in separate communal electorates. In Bengal, the Muslims were given 48.4% of the seats (as against their population strength of nearly 55%) and Hindus were allotted 39.2% of the seats (as against they constituted 43% of the population) and Europeans were given 10%.⁷⁶ The Award increased Muslim representation from 39 seats (in an

Assembly of 139 members under the Act of 1919) to 121 seats (including 2 seats for Muslim women and 2 for Universities) in an Assembly of 250 members under the Government of India Act, 1935. As a result of the Communal Award, the composition of the Bengal Legislature was as follows: “Of the 250 seats in the Bengal Legislature 78, of which 30 were reserved for Scheduled Castes, were general with total Hindu population, including Scheduled Castes, 21, 570,407 (Scheduled Castes being 9,124,925); 117 Muslim with total population 27,497,624; 3 Anglo-Indian with total population 27,573; 11 European with total population 20,895; and 2 Indian Christian with total population 1,29,134. Besides, 39 seats were given to representatives of special interests: 5 women (2 general, 2 Muslims, 1 Anglo-Indian), 2 University (Calcutta and Dacca), 5 landholders, 8 Labour and 19 Commerce and Industry (14 European, 4 General and 1 Muslim Commerce)”.⁷⁷ In the editorial of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, it was written: “One must frankly confess, it has not fallen to our lot for a long time to come across such a preposterous document as reached our hand last evening..... in Bengal out of 250 members of the Legislature only 80 were allotted for Hindus”.⁷⁸ Even Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore presiding over a protest meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall said: “ The Hindus have been singled out for reduction in their representation even below their normal population strength by weightage being cast against them”.⁷⁹ Gandhiji also strongly opposed to the idea of a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes (officially described as Scheduled Castes) and declared that he would resist it with his life. As a result the ‘Poona Pact’ was signed between Gandhiji and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Depressed Classes League on 25 September 1932, by which a common electorate of all the Hindus was agreed upon, subject to two conditions: firstly, 148 seats in different Provincial Legislatures were to be reserved for the Depressed Classes in place of 71 as provided in the Communal Award; secondly, 18 per cent of the seats in the Central Legislature were to be reserved for the Depressed Classes.

The Communal Award evoked mixed reactions from different corners including the Muslim politicians of Bengal. Although the Muslim community was given preferential treatment by this Award, there was a group of Muslim politicians who wanted more than the Award actually offered. On 17 August 1932, immediately after the announcement of this Award, Fazlul Huq completely denounced it in this

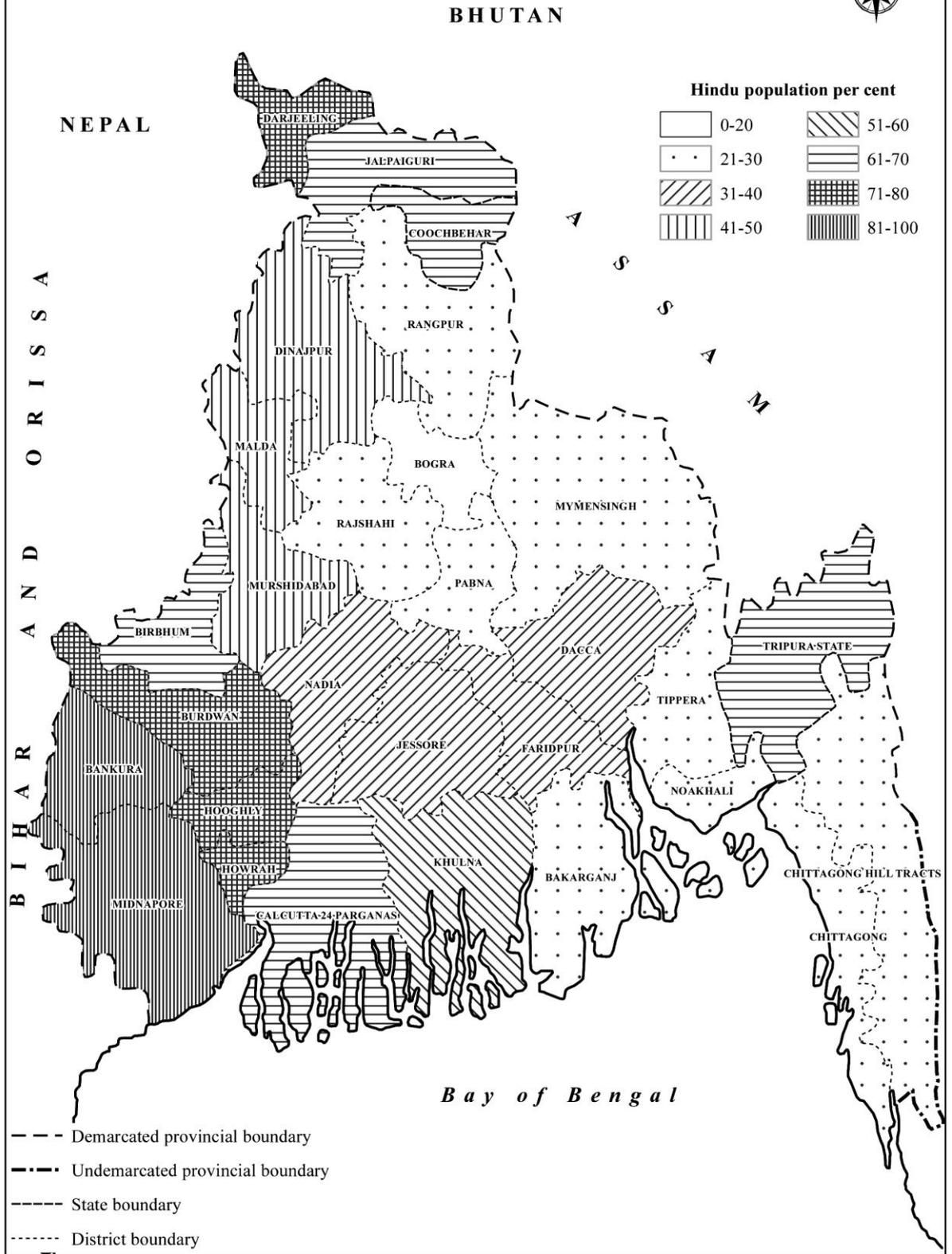
Distribution of Muslim Population by District (Number of Muslims per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)



Map 2: Distribution of Muslim Population by District (Number of Muslims per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)

fashion: “The much- advertised communal award....will....take the breath of the country away....it has not fallen to our lot for a long time to come across such a preposterous document....the worst suspicions of the nationalists have been confirmed by what has transpired....if the new constitution of India embodies this communal settlement....(Macdonald) may rest assured that all that is good and true in the country will refuse to touch it even with a pair of tongs”.⁸⁰ But surprisingly the very next day (i.e. on 18 August 1932), Mr. Huq completely changed his earlier stand and he along with H.S. Suhrawardy, Abul Kasem, Azizul Huque, Tamizuddin Khan and Musharraf Hossain made a joint- petition which confessed: “We have read the Award with mingled feelings. While we appreciate that it is a distinct advance on the present situation it is disappointing to note that the unanswerable claims of the Musalmans of Bengal to majority representation in the provincial legislature have not been recognised. With the Musalmans in the position of a permanent minority in six provinces and of practically political insignificance in the Central Legislature, it was only just and fair that the claims of the Musulmans [*sic*] of Bengal to a majority representation...should not have been ignored. We however appreciate the difficulties of the situation”.⁸¹ On the other hand, A.K. Ghuznavi, a very wealthy zamindar from Tangail who hoped that the Award would give the Muslims a clear statutory majority, was totally disappointed with the Award and compared it with the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911. According to him, the Muslims of Bengal were ‘bitterly reminded of their betrayal in December 1911 by His Majesty’s Government’.⁸² Although the Muslim community of Bengal failed to obtain a statutory majority in the Assembly under the Communal Award, their position was much better than the Lucknow Pact (1916). However, the BPML in a statement urged the Hindus and Muslims to ‘combat reactionary forces’ and put forward its assessment: “.....The Communal Award is thoroughly unsatisfactory and unacceptable and detrimental to the best interests of India and particularly to the Muslims of Bengal, as it is calculated to give a death-blow to the democratic aspirations of the Indians and also put the Muslims of Bengal in a statutory minority”.⁸³ At the same time, there was a group of Muslim politicians who believed that ‘separate electorates and reservation of seats were no longer necessary to safeguard Muslim representation in the Assembly.

Distribution of Hindu Population by District (Number of Hindus per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)



Map 3: Distribution of Hindu Population by District (Number of Hindus per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)

On the contrary, they were confident that Muslims could stand their ground in open contest and that they would, through joint electorates, eventually be able to translate the growing prosperity and numerical preponderance of their community into provincial power...they pressed, instead, for universal manhood suffrage, which would give members of their community many more votes'.⁸⁴ The Hindu leaders on the other hand, strongly reacted against this Award as they apprehended the prospect of 'Muslim rule' in Bengal. The Caste Hindu members of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha launched vigorous campaign against the Communal Award as 'it had threatened their stronghold on Bengal politics by raising Muslim seats in the Assembly'.⁸⁵ The Hindu Mahasabha leaders, who were in the forefront of the protest movement, were N.N. Sircar, B.C. Chatterjee, Bhai Paramananda, Pandit Malaviya, Chintamani, Moonjee and the like. Not only that in 1934, the disgruntled leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha formed the Congress Nationalist Party to fight against the 'Muslim Raj'.⁸⁶ Also the Congress Press in Bengal joined the anti-Award campaign. Even the nationalist Muslims inside and outside the BPML, began to believe in the fact that the Hindus went against the Award not because it retained the system of separate electorates but because it allotted to the Muslim community a number of more seats than earlier. So all these created complexities and vitiated Bengal politics as religious separatism and communal tension rose up in different parts of the province and the parting between the two communities (Hindus and Muslims) was seemingly complete. This led Fazlul Huq to declare in October 1933: 'I am prepared to be hanged if I can not demonstrate to the satisfaction of any judge that the Hindus of Bengal constitute the very personification of communalism based on intense selfishness'.⁸⁷ While the Hindus strongly denounced the Award, the majority of the Muslims gradually felt the urgency to come forward in its defence. Thus the Communal Award of 1932 became a bone of contention between the Hindu and Muslim politicians and deeply rooted separatism and communalism in Bengal politics. Dejected Fazlul Huq then turned his attention to local politics and decided to render his services to the Calcutta Corporation to which he was elected Mayor (with the Congress support) in April 1935. But in late December 1935, a controversy arose over an issue of earmarking 25 per cent of the jobs of the Calcutta Corporation for the Muslims. The Hindu members of the Calcutta Corporation strongly raised protests against this proposal and refused to accept it. This resulted in the resignation of all the 15 Muslim Councilors, including Fazlul Huq, the Mayor.⁸⁸

Mr. Huq was then completely dejected for political polarization, in terms of division between the Hindus and Muslims and thereafter he seriously decided to take up wholeheartedly the cause of the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), to mobilize them, to build up a common political platform for raising their demands and ameliorating their living conditions and finally to capitalize their support for his political gains. He took this challenge and was quite successful in his mission which ultimately opened a new chapter in Bengal politics.

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