

Preface

Bengal, the first Indian province which was conquered and annexed by the British in the second half of the eighteenth century and which was the soil of renaissance and reformation and the ‘nerve-centre’ of militant nationalism, was always in the forefront of India’s struggle for independence and it played a pivotal role in all-India politics and in shaping a new political map of the entire subcontinent. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it not only saw the genesis of different political organizations and several socio-economic and political movements but also produced legendary social reformers and religious thinkers, eminent literati, distinguished academicians and scientists, renowned film-makers, theatre personalities, actors and actresses, illustrious painters, singers, lyricists and musicians, recognized sportsmen and above all, innumerable number of freedom fighters and very prominent and dignified political personalities. In the list of a galaxy of Bengali politicians, Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq (1873-1962) was an exceptional one. Being born in a landed aristocratic family and having an elitist background, he took up the cause of the poor and destitute, the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), mobilized them and led the Praja Movement, formed a political organization called the ‘Krishak Praja Party’ (KPP) to ameliorate their living conditions, demanded for the abolition of the Zamindari system, raised the slogan of *dal-bhat* (rice and pulses) for the common people and stood in favour of Hindu-Muslim unity which altogether helped him a lot to win in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937 and to be the first Premier of Bengal. It should be mentioned here that as a political leader, Fazlul Huq was never defeated in any election in between 1913 and 1954 which was an exceptional record in the history of South Asia. As the head of the Praja-League Coalition Ministry, his remarkable achievement was the formation of the *Rin Salishi* (Debt Settlement) Boards to free the peasants from the exploitation of the usurers. He also advocated for the promotion of education particularly among the Muslims, urged the Muslim girls to come forward to take education and founded so many educational institutions and hostels for them. But Fazlul Huq was enigmatic, inconsistent, volatile and opportunist which prompted him to waver between the Muslim League, the Congress and his own-made Krishak Praja Party. He not only reached the top of the political ladder at the state level but also wanted to imprint his footmarks in national politics which

often drifted him from provincial to national politics and vice-versa. Fazlul Huq who was basically secular and stood in favour of communal peace and harmony, suddenly after being the Premier, he was guided by communal outlook and self-interest, changed his colour and conviction, sacrificed his ideals and principles and earnestly tried to defend and promote the interests of his own community (i.e. the Muslims) in Bengal as well as in India which led him to move the so-called 'Pakistan Resolution' at Lahore in 1940 which ultimately became an unanimous demand of the Indian Muslims led by Jinnah. But his honeymoon with the Muslim League did not last long and he was expelled from the League by the League Supremo, Jinnah. This prompted Fazlul Huq to form the Progressive Coalition Party and its Ministry which also did not last long as it was dismissed by John Herbert, the then Bengal Governor. Thereafter, there was a rapid rise of the Muslim League in Bengal in place of the KPP and it was able to form the Ministry in 1946. The KPP was absolutely turned into a mere signboard and its beloved and popular leader Fazlul Huq, inspite of his personal success in the Assembly Elections of 1946, lost his prominence and acceptance in Bengal politics and was turned into a tragic hero. Though he was a true Bengali and a strong spokesman of Bengal's unity, progress and advancement as a whole, remained completely aloof from the United Independent Bengal movement and finally failed to prevent the partition of the province for the second time in 1947. It is against this backdrop, a humble attempt has been made to make an in-depth study on Fazlul Huq to analyze many facets of his colourful and eventful political career, his emergence in Bengal politics, the underlying mystery of his coming to power in Bengal in 1937 and his running of the two consecutive Coalition Ministries, to explore his ambiguities, dilemma, political opportunism, his vacillating political stances, his compromise and contest with the League and its Supremo Jinnah and his role at the time of final partition. Nevertheless, the present research intends to project Fazlul Huq as a meaningful political force in Bengal vis-a-vis India and tries to make an impartial assessment of his life and political activities between the two partitions (1905-1947).

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