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Conclusion

By a long standing tradition, any research work is designed to have a concluding section where the researcher makes a humble attempt to put together all his or her findings and observations on the basis of the discussions in the earlier chapters, to tie up those facts to give a concrete shape which ultimately leads to a successful completion of the research undertaken and in this case, the present work is not an exceptional one.

From the overall discussions (containing in six chapters), it can be said without any doubt that Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq was a very fascinating, charismatic, popular and at the same time enigmatic and controversial character in the first half of the twentieth century Bengal. He was an independent *talukdar* and a successful lawyer cum politician from Eastern Bengal who wavered between the Muslim League, the Indian National Congress and his own-made the Krishak Praja Party (KPP). He was out and out anti-British throughout his political career and always stood for and fought for Bengal and the Bengalis. Above all, he was not an outsider in Bengal politics but a solid *bhumiputra* (son of the soil) who was proud to be a Bengali as well as a Muslim. It was he who was hailed by the common people of Bengal as the ‘friend’ of the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), adored as *Sher-e-Bangla* or the ‘Tiger of Bengal’ and was often been called ‘a giant of the sub-continent’,¹ ‘a wizard politician’² and an ‘eagle-eyed statesman’.³ But on the other hand, he was ‘a man of contradictions’ and one of the most controversial Chief Ministers (then called the Premiers) of undivided Bengal. He was accused of ‘the most uncertain quantity in Muslim politics, completely devoid of principle and trusted by nobody’⁴ and was attacked by *Quaid-i-Azam* Muhammad Ali Jinnah (who expelled Fazlul Huq from the Muslim League on the charge of ‘gross misconduct’ amounting to ‘treachery’), as a ‘treacherous person doing in calculable harm to the Muslims of Bengal’.⁵ During his life time, Fazlul Huq was to go through several ups and downs and to face the political enemies who were not only in the opposition camp but also

within his own camp. Throughout his political career, he did not stick to any single political party and he changed his political camp from time to time as he always wanted to remain at the 'centre' of 'power' and not in the 'periphery' which heavily damaged his image and prestige and the critics labelled him as an 'opportunist'. In the 1930s, Fazlul Huq and his Krishak Praja Party (KPP) obtained unbelievable popularity. He won the confidence of the oppressed and exploited *krishaks* and *prajas* which helped him to 'rise to power' and to be the Premier of Bengal. But he did not confine himself within the boundaries of Bengal and often drifted from provincial to national politics and vice-versa. It led him to make reconciliation of the twin identities of region and religion in which religion took the upper hand and which prompted him to move the Pakistan Resolution in 1940. The Bengali Hindus and Muslims who were delighted to see Fazlul Huq in the chair of the Premier of Bengal in 1937, ultimately lost their faith in him and his KPP (which became clearly evident in the election results of 1946 wherein the Party got only 04 seats out of 250 Bengal Assembly seats) and within a short span, the *Sher-e-Bangla* completely lost his dominance and popularity and prior to the second partition of Bengal, he became almost irrelevant not only in Bengal politics but also in national politics.

The career, activities and political journey of Fazlul Huq from 1905 to 1947 (the period under study) can be broadly divided into five phases – the first phase: from 1905-1913; the second phase: from 1913 to 1929; the third phase: from 1929 to 1937; the fourth phase: from 1937 to 1943 and the last but not least the fifth phase: from 1943 to 1947. In the first phase, Fazlul Huq (who was highly educated in Mathematics and Law), in order to uplift the Muslims from the socio-economic backwardness, to 'obtain their due share of state patronage'⁶ and for their overall progress, he supported the partition of Bengal (1905). He was also closely associated with the foundation of the All-India Muslim League (1906), a communal political association and in Dacca he was asked to help in formulating the League's constitution. At that point of time, he came into close contact with Nawab Salimullah of Dacca and his communal politics. Expressing his resentment at the annulment of Bengal's partition (in 1911) and the rejection of his appeal to be recruited for a higher Government service under the British Raj, Fazlul Huq actively joined politics in 1912 and soon ascended the political ladder. When all other Muslim leaders did not have any courage and confidence to fight in the by-election of the Dacca Division seat in

the Bengal Legislative Council as it was a Hindu-majority constituency, he came forward to contest the election in 1913 and with the support of Aswini Kumar Dutt, he got himself elected by defeating Roy Bahadur Kumar Mahendra Nath Mitra.⁷ Since then, Fazlul Huq almost uninterruptedly associated with the Bengal Legislature till 1947, except for two years (1934-1936) when he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Being elected, he participated in the debates in the Bengal Legislative Council and delivered firing speeches giving emphasis on the spread of education particularly among the Muslims, the establishment of a Mohammedan College at Dacca and also a first grade college of Arts for the Muslims in Calcutta and the teaching of Arabic and Persian in Government – aided schools. He also spoke for the adequate representation of the Muslims in the various branches of the public services. On different occasions, his orations in the Bengal Legislative Council, captivated the hearts of the audience and earned huge reputation for him. Huq's growing popularity and his personality helped him to become the Secretary of the BPML and the Joint Secretary of the AIML in 1913 (in that year Jinnah, a young barrister who was previously actively involved in Congress politics, joined the League) and he was in these posts upto 1916. Thereafter, he became the President of the AIML and continued in that post upto 1921.

In the second phase (1913-1929), Fazlul Huq came out of his narrow, communal outlook and stood for the Hindu-Muslim unity and cooperation. He appealed to rise above petty selfish considerations and he was instrumental in drafting the historic Lucknow Pact which was signed in between the Congress and the League in December 1916. By this Pact, the Congress accepted separate Muslim electorates and weightage for the Muslims in the five Hindu-majority provinces; in exchange the Muslim League agreed to give weightage for the Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab and for the Hindus in Bengal where they were in a minority. Although as a leading Muslim of Bengal Fazlul Huq had much to lose in conceding the Hindus better representation in the Legislature, he did not hesitate to approve it. It was probably because he wanted to get an all-India stage which led him to speak in Lucknow from all-India perspective and as an Indian rather than as a Muslim or a Bengali and for the transfer of power by constitutional and legitimate means. The Lucknow Pact which marked the beginning of Hindu-Muslim collaboration in Bengal, was Huq's a stepping stone to all-India politics. As he became a much known face in the Indian political canvas,

the Congress leaders also wanted to bring Fazlul Huq into their team which was fulfilled in 1917 when he joined the Congress and became its Joint Secretary and a year later (1918-1919), he served this organization as General Secretary. When the Rowlatt Bill was introduced to the Central Legislature on 6 February 1919, Fazlul Huq along with Surendra Nath Banerjea, C.R. Das and other prominent leaders of Bengal, protested against the Bill as it (if given into effect), would throttle fundamental rights of the Indians and cause political death of the freedom fighters. He urged the people and the political leaders, irrespective of their political ideologies, to discard their differences and join together to fight against the arbitrary action of the British Government.⁸ The Rowlatt Satyagraha movement and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre failed to prevent the British from passing the Government of India Act, 1919, which avoided the term self-government. During the course of the Khilafat Movement, the League, Congress and the Khilafat Committee at their joint Nagpur sessions in November 1920, adopted Gandhiji's boycott programme which infuriated Fazlul Huq, Jinnah and others. The chief issues which led Fazlul Huq to oppose Gandhiji's boycott programme were the question of education of Muslim youths and participation in the Council elections.

He was deadly against of Gandhiji's call for boycotting the schools and colleges which, according to him, would hamper the education of Muslim boys and girls.⁹ Not only that; he along with Abul Kashem, Abdul Karim, Azizul Haque, Tazimuddin and the like, wanted to participate in the Council elections. As the Huq-Kashem faction within the BPML contested in the December 1920-January 1921 Council elections, both Fazlul Huq and Abul Kashem were formally expelled from the party.¹⁰ The difference of opinion and the conflicting interests also led him to resign from the Congress. After the formation of the Congress-Khilafat-Swarajya Party (on 31 December 1922) under the initiative of C.R. Das, Fazlul Huq joined the party and participated in the Council election which was held in November 1923. In this election, he and his party got outstanding victory. Being elected the leader of the single largest party, C.R. Das formed the Swarajya Council Party and within a few days, he played a very significant role in concluding the Bengal Pact in December 1923 which was the high watermark of Hindu-Muslim collaboration in Bengal politics. But as C.R. Das refused to form the ministry, Fazlul Huq along with eight Muslim followers left the Swarajya Party, joined the 'Ministerial Party' (there was no

such party, but the people who extended support towards the British in order to become ministers were sarcastically called as the ‘Ministerial Party), and accepted the office of the Minister of Education in January 1924. Though his tenure was short-lived, he came forward to allocate funds for deserving Muslim students, to lay the foundation of the Islamia College in Calcutta (which was established in 1926, later named as Central Calcutta College and thereafter came to be known as Maulana Azad College), and also to help an Indian B.M. Sen, as Principal of the Presidency College.¹¹ Within six months, the ministers, including Fazlul Huq, lost the confidence of the Council and were compelled to resign. The defeated Swarajists like Mujibur Rahman, H.S. Suhrawardy, Akram Khan and Fazlul Huq launched another organization called United Muslim Council Party in May 1926 which within a few days, also suffered from a split as the deserters (from Huq) founded the Independent Muslim Party. Thereafter, Fazlul Huq decided to test his luck in another front which was reflected in his opposition to the passing of the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill (in August 1928) as it was pro-zamindar measure.

In the third phase (1929-1937), Fazlul Huq ‘de-classed’ himself, sincerely and spiritedly took up the cause of the peasants, spoke with them in their own language, mixed with them, stood by them and raised his voice against the oppressive landlords. Immediately after the 1929 Council elections, Fazlul Huq wanted to form a non-communal organization which came into reality when the United Council Party, better known as the Bengal Praja Party or the Council Praja Party was founded by him for safeguarding ‘the interests of tenants and labouring classes of the province’.¹² Thereafter, he wanted to launch an exclusively ‘peasant-oriented political organisation’ which was founded at the end of 1929 and named as the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity (All Bengal Tenants’ Association). Soon the Samity became very popular particularly among the peasantry for its slogan – ‘Land to the tillers’ and it had its strongest support-base in the rural areas of eastern Bengal. In 1935, a power struggle occurred within the members of the Praja Samity and the young radical group who mostly belonged to East Bengal, elected Fazlul Huq as President of the Samity. But within a few days, they raised the demand to include in the Samity the ‘real’ *krishaks* (peasants) and to re-name the Samity as Krishak Praja Party (Peasants’ and Tenants’ Party) ‘with the hope of wooing the rural votes whose number had then greatly increased’. Hence Fazlul Huq along with his large East Bengal supporters, left

the parent body, established the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) in July 1936 and was elected the party's President. The main demand of the KPP was the abolition of the Zamindari system without compensation. Fazlul Huq claimed that 'by the grace of God' he would abolish zamindari 'within the shortest possible time' and also stated that 'the peasantry of Bengal were dearest to his heart'¹³ and for their cause, he would always fight against the zamindars and capitalists. Not only that, he promised everyone to provide *dal-bhat* (rice and pulses) which became a very significant slogan of the KPP in the election campaign and attracted the imagination of a large number of newly enfranchised rural people who cast their votes in the elections of 1937.

In the fourth phase (1937-1943), Fazlul Huq contested the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937 from two Mohammedan Constituencies – Patuakhali (rural) and Pirozepur North (rural) and won overwhelming victory against the League candidates – Khwaja Nazimuddin and Lehaz-ud-din Ahmed respectively. His KPP also achieved considerable success (absolutely in rural constituencies) in this Assembly Elections and won 36 seats. As in a House of 250, the leading political parties failed to secure absolute majority (the magic figure was 126), the foundation of a coalition ministry became the best possibility. In this matter, the Congress had an edge as it secured 52 seats and emerged as the single largest party. But theoretically the formation of a Congress led coalition ministry in Bengal was not possible as the Central Board of the Congress had 'ruled out a ministerial role by Congressmen in provinces where they were not a majority'.¹⁴ The formation of a League-KPP coalition ministry was not feasible at that point of time as both of the party leaders – Nazimuddin and Fazlul Huq fought against each other in the elections of 1937 and had bitter and strained relationship. So the formation of a KPP-Congress coalition ministry seemed more likely and Fazlul Huq and the elected members of the KPP were very keen to join hands with the Congress in that direction. Discussions took place between the BPCC and the KPP leaders for a coalition government headed by Fazlul Huq. But the 'marriage' did not take place as Sarat Chandra Bose, a prominent member of the Bengal Congress, insisted on the release of pro-Congress prisoners and freedom fighters who were arrested by the outgoing government. Mr. Huq thought that it would not be possible for him to accept this demand as he was sure that the British Governor would not give his consent for the release of the political prisoners. Jinnah wanted to capitalize this golden opportunity to establish his control over Bengal and

likely instructed the BPML to offer Fazlul Huq the leadership of a League – KPP ministry. Fazlul Huq who wanted to be the Premier, accepted the offer and accordingly formed a 11- member Praja-League Coalition Ministry and he was sworn in as the first Premier (under the Government of India Act, 1935) of Bengal on 1 April 1937. In order to give stability to his ministry, he gave equal number of ministerial posts (3) to both the League and his own KPP. Not only that, in order to win the confidence of the Hindus, he included 5 Hindus in his ministry. But surprisingly, the Coalition Ministry which was comprised of 6 zamindars, 1 capitalist and 3 lawyer-cum-politicians, did not have any proper representation from the *praja* community and was labelled as ‘subservient to British Imperialism and Bengal Landlordism’. As the zamindari elements were very prominent within the Cabinet, the abolition of the zamindari system which was the main issue of the KPP’s election *Manifesto*, became a ‘far reality’, a ‘social utopia’ and Fazlul Huq was bound to put on ice the *dal-bhat* issue unless he would have lost his Premiership. The Congress’s stiff opposition to the Ministry and the desertion of a considerable number of the KPP radicals (on the issue of ministerial salaries), forced Fazlul Huq to lean more and more on the League and join it on 15 October 1937 at Lucknow where he was greeted with the popular title *Sher-e-Bangla*. He not only signed the League pledge at Lucknow but also he announced that he would advise his colleagues in the Coalition Ministry to join the League and make it a stronger political organization which ultimately enabled Jinnah to achieve his target i.e. to establish his hold over Bengal as well as to enhance the organizational strength of his party in Bengal. Not only that, at Lucknow, Huq came out with a communal outlook, asked the Muslims to keep safe distance from the ‘selfish, deceptive and hypocritical Congressmen and unite under the banner of Islam. He warned: “If Muslims were ill-treated in Congress-governed provinces, the Bengal Ministry would retaliate”¹⁵ Immediately after the Lucknow session, he became the President of the Muslim League branch in Bengal and gave his full-hearted effort to popularize the League’s propaganda not only in Bengal but also in other parts of India and imprinted his footprints at the all-India level. Huq’s political dualism (simultaneously being the President of the KPP and the League) created ‘a good deal of confusion’ among the supporters of the KPP. That’s why the KPP (which raised the peasants’ issues in the party organ called the *Krishak* under the editorship of Abul Mansur Ahmed), failed to capitalize the tenure of Huq’s Premiership as a catalyst force to increase its organizational strength in Bengal. The

KPP suffered from a split as the party's left wing and its Hindu members drifted towards the Congress and Shamsuddin Ahmed, Tamizuddin Khan along with 16 KPP members, formed the Independent Praja Party in March 1938. Fazlul Huq got another blow when Mr. Nausher Ali who was erstwhile the Minister-in-Charge of Local Self-Government and a strong critic of Mr. Huq for joining the Muslim League, tendered his resignation on 22 June 1938 and joined the Opposition. As a result, Fazlul Huq became the only KPP representative (who at the same time was a stakeholder of the League) in the Cabinet which virtually turned into a Muslim League Ministry. Immediately after Nausher Ali's resignation, Fazlul Huq was able to prove his ministerial strength with the support of the European Group (consisting of 25 members) when a no-confidence motion was brought by the Opposition in August 1938. Though he was successful in proving the majority in the House, Fazlul Huq felt the necessity of bringing back the support of his ex-KPP colleagues. He started negotiations with both Shamsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin Khan which became fruitful as both of them decided to join the Cabinet on 17 November 1938. But this understanding did not last long as Shamsuddin Ahmed resigned from the Ministry because of non-fulfillment of his demands. Fazlul Huq got another tremendous blow in the Assembly on 19 December 1939 when his Finance Minister Nalini Ranjan Sarkar refused to vote for the 'War Resolution' (which declared 'complete sympathy with the British Government for taking up arms against Nazi Germany' and assured the Government of India 'full Co-operation in the successful prosecution of this war') and resigned from the Ministry. All these resulted in Huq's complete dependence on the European Group and the League which virtually brought him under the control and vigilance of the *Quaid-i-Azam* Jinnah who propagated 'two-nation' theory in his presidential address at Lahore in March 1940 and asked Mr. Huq to move the resolution at Lahore for the separation of India's Muslim majority areas which came to be known as the 'Pakistan Resolution'. At Lahore Huq strongly advocated the cause of the Muslims in India and came out with his Muslim identity: "We assumed power on behalf of Muslims and other people in Bengal in 1937. We have been given an opportunity by the Almighty to serve our people after a couple of centuries and we are not going to barter away the power and the opportunity to an imaginary and unknown central authority..... I am a Muslim first and Bengalee afterwards.... It was in Bengal in the year 1906 that the flag of the Muslim League was unfurled and it is now my privilege as the leader of Bengal to move the resolution for the homeland of

the Muslims from the self-same platform of the Muslim League".¹⁶ Apart from this, in the Lahore session the constitution of the AIML was amended by which the Working Committee was empowered to 'control, direct and regulate all the activities of the various provincial Leagues' and the Working Committee was entrusted with full authority 'to suspend, dissolve or disaffiliate any Provincial League'. Having been strengthened by this amendment, Jinnah imposed a ban in June 1940 on the participation of the Muslim League members in the 'War Committees' which caused profound disappointment not only to Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy but also to Jinnah's loyal Nazimuddin. Fazlul Huq and Sikander Hyat Khan, the two Premiers of Bengal and Punjab respectively, wrote a joint letter to Jinnah requesting that 'the ban on war committees and civic guards be removed from the Muslim Leaguers' in their respective provinces. Not only that, having been nourishing the idea of a national all – Party Government with himself as its supreme head, Fazlul Huq decided to support the war effort.¹⁷ He was very eager to form a Coalition Ministry with the Bengal Congress (especially with the 'Bose group') and wanted to have a Congress representation in his Cabinet. As Huq was not in a position to carry his plans into effect, he sought the permission from the League Supremo which he failed to get. Another issue on which controversy and disagreement arose between Fazlul Huq and Jinnah was the observance of the 'Pakistan Day' on 23 March 1941. As there had been communal riots 'of a serious nature' in Khulna and Dacca, Huq being the President of the BPML, instructed the district and sub-divisional League Committees to postpone the 'Pakistan Day' celebration throughout Bengal. Jinnah totally rejected this decision of Mr. Huq and directed the members of the BPML (including the Calcutta District League), not to 'stop holding Pakistan Day' unless the meetings were banned by the Government of Bengal. Instantaneously the Calcutta District Muslim League which was under the control of the 'Calcutta trio' (as the Bengal Governor Herbert called Hasan Ispahani, Abdur Rahman Siddiqui and Khwaja Nooruddin) who were also known as 'the Jinnah group', strictly adhered to the decision of Jinnah and the observance of 'Pakistan Day' took place in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. Fazlul Huq became very much disappointed with this stand of the AIML and the Calcutta District Muslim League and few days later he met with Lord Linlithgow, the then Viceroy, at Simla in the middle of May 1941 urging him to form national cabinets both at the Centre and the Provinces. The Calcutta District Muslim League strongly reacted against this venture of the Chief Minister and

considered his proposal 'as detrimental to Muslim solidarity and an infringement on the authority of the All-India Muslim League'.¹⁸ Jinnah became very much infuriated with Fazlul Huq and wanted to take a very strong action against him. The 'opportunity' came on 21 July 1941, the day on which the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow announced the formation of a National Defence Council consisting of thirty members including three Muslim Premiers – Sikander Hyat Khan (Punjab), Fazlul Huq (Bengal) and Mohammad Saadullah (Assam). All the three Premiers immediately accepted the Viceroy's offer which completely went against the party line. Criticizing this act of Mr. Huq as 'highly objectionable', Jinnah, the League Supremo, ruled that as a League member Fazlul Huq should have sought the party's approval before giving his consent to the Viceroy. Jinnah was seriously thinking of taking disciplinary action against all the League Premiers unless they decided to quit the Council. While the Premiers of Punjab and Assam succumbed to Jinnah directives, Fazlul Huq was in search of collecting support from his colleagues, the Viceroy and the Governor and finally stuck to his decision in order to represent the province in the national Defence Council. Huq's explanation did not satisfy Jinnah who convened a meeting of the League's Working Committee on 25 August 1941 in which Fazlul Huq was asked to resign from the Defence Council within ten days. Criticizing this decision of the Working Committee and the President of the League as 'unfair and unconstitutional', Huq tendered his resignation from membership of the Working Committee and the Council of the AIML on 8 September 1941 'as mark of protest against arbitrary use of powers vested in President'.¹⁹ Not only that, in order to 'avoid greater evil of domestic feud' and his realization of the fact that after the resignation of the Premiers of Punjab and Assam, he would not be able to serve any 'useful purpose' for his community, prompted Mr. Huq also to resign from the National Defence Council. Thereafter, he got another blow from his Cabinet member Suhrawardy who took the initiative to convene a meeting of the Working Committee of the B.P.M.L. (without the consent of Fazlul Huq) in which in Huq's absence, a resolution was passed amounting to a vote of no-confidence in Mr. Huq. Being shocked, frustrated and humiliated, Fazlul Huq wrote a letter to the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 27 September 1941 asking for employment in Indian Foreign Service to represent the Indian Government in Arabia. But his appeal was not approved by the Viceroy. Helpless Mr. Huq then wrote a letter to Liaquat Ali Khan, the Secretary of the AIML on 14 November 1941 in which he expressed 'a half-apology' for his

attack on Jinnah. Two days later in its meeting, the Working Committee of the AIML treated the matter as closed. Although for the time being a truce had been concluded between these two camps, both Fazlul Huq and Jinnah were still not happy and closely monitored each other's activities. While Jinnah accused Fazlul Huq of acting like an 'independent satrap' in Bengal, the latter (i.e. Mr. Huq) was unwilling to work together with his Cabinet colleagues who had been disloyal to him. At the end of November 1941, there were rumours that Fazlul Huq was going to form a new party by dissolving the coalition party and for that purpose he met at the home of J.C. Gupta, the Congress M.L.A., with Sarat Chandra Bose, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and some other M.L.A.s, Hindu and Muslim. Although Huq strongly denied such an initiative, his supporters left the ministerial coalition party and formed the Progressive Assembly Party which was turned into the Progressive Coalition Party (on 28 November 1941) with Fazlul Huq as its Leader and Sarat Chandra Bose as its Deputy Leader. In order to carry forward 'a life and death struggle', the League Ministers (namely, Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy, Habibullah and Tamizuddin) tendered their resignation on 1 December 1941. They expected that Sir John Herbert, the Bengal Governor, would immediately ask Nazimuddin (who was also his favourite) to form a new ministry headed by Nazimuddin which, however, proved wrong.

Fazlul Huq on the other hand, did not waste any time in finding out 'new friends' for forming another coalition ministry led by him. It persuaded him to assume publicly the leadership of the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party on 3 December 1941 which claimed to have a strength of 119 members and commanded a majority in the Assembly. Both the groups of the Congress i.e., the Bose group (who joined the coalition) and the 'Official Congress' (having 25 members under the leadership of Kiran Sankar Roy) extended their support towards the formation of a new coalition ministry under Fazlul Huq. In order to form a stable government, he sought the assistance of Syama Prasad Mookerjee (whom Mr. Huq earlier considered as 'one of the most communally-minded men in Bengal')²⁰ and other Hindu leaders who quickly responded to his call as they wanted to get relief from the League ministry. The Hindu leaders decided not only to join the Progressive Coalition Party but also to the new Cabinet. On 4 December 1941 Fazlul Huq was elected the President and Leader of the Progressive Coalition Party and he was anxiously waiting for the call on behalf of the Governor of Bengal. The League ministers on the other

hand, accused Mr. Huq of taking initiative for the formation of an alternative ministry and condemned him for betraying the Muslim League. They also requested Jinnah to intervene in this matter and to expel Fazlul Huq from the party which prompted the League Supremo to seek written explanation from Mr. Huq within 10 December. But Mr. Huq's reply did not at all satisfy Jinnah who finally expelled him (on 10 December 1941) from the League on charge of 'gross misconduct' amounting to 'treachery' and finally cleared the path for his 'favourite' candidate, Nazimuddin (who also happened to be the Governor's choice), to be in the chair of the Premier. Although Nazimuddin was the 'favourite' candidate of both Jinnah and the Bengal Governor J.A. Herbert, he was not in a position to get the support of the Official Congress, a section of the followers of the Nawab of Dacca and a good number of Scheduled Caste M.L.A.s. The arrest of Sarat Chandra Bose (who was supposed to be the Deputy Premier of Bengal) by the British Raj under Defence of India Rules on 11 December 1941, removed the 'threat' to the British and the dilemma in the thought – process of the Bengal Governor Herbert who finally asked Fazlul Huq on the same day to form his second coalition ministry.

He immediately responded to the Governor's call and headed a new Ministry (from 12 December 1941) consisting of 9 Ministers (among those 5 including the Premier were Muslims and 4 were Hindus). While the Official Congress remained outside the Progressive Coalition Ministry, the Bose group and Syama Prasad Mookerjee (who was given the portfolio of the Finance Department) joined the ministry. This prompted the Leaguers to criticize Mr. Huq and his new ministry which was sarcastically called by them as the 'Syama-Huq Ministry'. The League Supremo had a general belief that this understanding among the diverse political groups, and interests could not last long and the new Coalition Ministry would automatically fall. According to Jinnah, its removal would be 'as simple as falling off a log'.²¹ But it was not as simple as he thought and against his thinking, Fazlul Huq's second Coalition Ministry survived for 15 months (December 1941- March 1943). Though the inclusion of Syama Prasad Mookerjee into his new Cabinet surprised almost everyone of Bengal, Fazlul Huq gave assurance to the people that 'he would be the best defender of Hindu interests and Mookerjee would protect Muslim interests'.²² This was not only a mere incidental remark and both Huq and Mookerjee made sincere efforts to put it into reality. Fazlul Huq tried to get back the support of the

Hindus by renouncing the Lahore Resolution of 1940 and assured them that ‘the Pakistan scheme could not be applied to Bengal’.²³ Syama Prasad on the other hand, tried to create some job opportunities for the Muslims in various departments of the government and also at the Calcutta University²⁴ – which altogether helped to pacify communal tension in Bengal for the time being. But the new Ministry had to confront with three major events; the climax of the Second World War (particularly with Japan), the Quit India Movement under the leadership of Gandhiji and the initial phase of the Great Bengal Famine. In the Second World War, the British were highly involved and the Quit India Movement was led against them by the Congress. Both these events ‘stiffened the Raj’ and put Fazlul Huq into a dilemma. He was neither in a position to defend the Quit India Movement (which would ensure the support of a section of the Congress but would embitter the relationship between Huq and His Excellency, the Bengal Governor J.A. Herbert and would invite the dismissal of his Cabinet) nor he could whole-heartedly support the repressive policy of the Raj (as the Governor pressurized him to pursue drastic steps against the 1942 ‘rebels’). When Huq’s new Ministry was busy in confronting all these problems, it was severely criticized by the League for a very low percentage of recruitment (less than 5 per cent) of the Bengal Muslims in the A.R.P. services. Meanwhile, the Ministry got another tremendous blow when Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a very important member of Huq’s new Cabinet, tendered his resignation to Sir John Herbert, the then Governor of Bengal on 16 November 1942 as he could not perform his ministerial work due to the hostile and unsympathetic attitude and interference on behalf of the Governor and his coterie officials.

Fazlul Huq’s Progressive Coalition Ministry suffered from another crisis, the rice shortage which was accentuated by a disastrous cyclone and by the Japanese occupation of Burma from where rice was imported in different parts of Bengal. All these paved the way for the outbreak of the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 (which also terribly hit the next ministry). By the end of the year 1942 and in the beginning of 1943, the people of Bengal were going through an acute non-availability of rice and the consequent price rise. In order to get rid of the situation, Herbert, the Bengal Governor, appointed a British official as the ‘Rice Controlling Officer’ without making any kind of discussion or consultation with the Bengal Premier who personally wanted to have an experienced Indian in that post. As a result the

relationship between the Governor and the Bengal Premier became very stiff and strained and the latter blamed the former for this catastrophe and criticized the Governor for making interference in ministerial works. Although Raj's rice policy was largely responsible for the failure of Huq's Ministry in tackling the situation, Herbert (also supported by the European Group), was very much determined to oust Fazlul Huq and his Coalition Ministry from power and to install a League – led Ministry in Bengal. In order to save his premiership and the Ministry, Fazlul Huq then decided to patch up his differences with Jinnah, sought the League support and wrote a letter to the League Supremo wherein he requested Jinnah to lift the ban on him so that he could easily take entry into the League fold which ultimately did not materialize. The BPML leaders demanded that the Huq Ministry lost the support of the Bengal Muslims and as the majority of the voters of both the communities (i.e. Hindus and Muslims) did not have any faith in Mr. Huq and his leadership, he had no other option but to resign as the Premier which ultimately came into a reality on 28 March 1943 when J.A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, compelled him to tender his resignation.

Thus during this phase, Fazlul Huq headed two successive coalition ministries which inspite of their limitations, tried to perform several beneficial works for the people of Bengal, made significant contribution to the improvement of the condition of the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajaks* (tenants) and the labourers, introduced reforms in the field of education and created more job opportunities especially for the educated Muslims. At first, Fazlul Huq gave priority to the needs of the common people and attempted to fulfill many of his promises (which he gave during his election campaigns and reflected in the Election *Manifesto* of the KPP) given to the peasants and tenants of Bengal by passing a number of Bills in the Assembly for the betterment of their living conditions. Among these, the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act (1938), the Public Demands Recovery (Amendment) Act (1938), the Cooperative Societies Act (1939), the Agricultural Debtors' (Amendment) Act (1940), the Bengal (Moneylenders) Act X of 1940, the Bengal Famine Insurance Fund act (1938) were most important. Although all these Acts gave certain relief to the poor agriculturists, Mr. Huq failed to abolish the Zamindari system (which was the chief target of Mr. Huq and his KPP and also contained in its Election *Manifesto*) as he failed to get the support of his coalition partners (i.e. the Leaguers) and other vested landed interests.

The most remarkable achievement of the Praja-League Coalition Ministry was the establishment of 'Debt Settlement Boards' (both Ordinary and Special) in all the districts of Bengal which by the end of December 1938 settled claims amounting to Rs.3,73,01,448 (both by Ordinary and Special Boards). The total amount which was ultimately awarded by both the Boards on these claims was Rs.1,82,01,939.²⁵ During this time, Bengal also faced the chronic problem of unemployment. In order to fight against this problem and to create more job opportunities for the poor, the Praja-League Coalition Ministry passed the Bengal Poor and Unemployment Bill (1937). The Ministry was also aware of the unemployment problem of the educated Muslim youths. Considering their cases, it was able to pass (amidst of criticisms), the Bill for Reservation of Posts in Government Offices for the Muslims (1938) which reserved 60 per cent of all Government appointment for the Muslims. In 1939 the Ministry decided that in the case of direct recruitments, the reservation of posts for the Muslims would be 50 per cent. Not only that, in 1938 Fazlul Huq Ministry amended the Police Recruitment Rules (Rule 833 of Police Regulation) so that 'while enlisting Bengali constables the Superintendent of Police must see that not less than fifty per cent of the recruits are Muhammedans'.²⁶ Syed Muazzamuddin Hossain, the leader of the Muslim League went further and demanded that 'the interests of Bengali Muslims would be better served if the Muslims from outside Bengal are brought, even from outside India...'²⁷ which was supported by the then Premier who conveyed in the Council: "We try to recruit the best men, if the standard which we have set up is not attained by any candidate in Bengal".²⁸ All these policies of the Bengal Government opened greater avenues of employment for the educated Muslim youths. Subsequently the Coalition Ministry tried to modify the service and recruitment rules and reframed and prepared the Bengal Services Recruitment Rules or Communal Ratio Rules (1939) and a special officer, i.e. Communal Ratio Officer, was appointed to the Home (Appointment) Department to pursue the decision of the Government according to the communal ratio. The Praja-League Coalition Ministry's bias towards one section of the populace (reserving 50 per cent Government posts for the Muslims by sacrificing 'efficiency' and 'quality'), completely disheartened the Hindus and they felt that the 'service to the community' policy followed by the Huq Ministry, was engulfing differences between these two communities and bringing a dangerous dimension in the body politic of Bengal.²⁹ The rift between these two communities even extended when the Government passed the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment)

Act in 1939 which decided to hold the general election of the Calcutta Corporation on the basis of separate electorate for the Muslims (and the Anglo-Indians) and reserved 22 out of 84 elective seats for the Mohammedans. Side by side, the Huq Ministry made an honest attempt to provide benefits for the working class (including child labours) and to give the agricultural labourers adequate protection against the oppression of the moneylenders and accordingly passed the Bengal Workman's Protection Act (1940), the Child Labour Act (1938), the Bengal Shops and Establishment Act (1940) etc. Not only that, the Praja-League Coalition Ministry also gave priority and relief to women workforce (particularly those who were pregnant) and was very much determined to prevent the hatred dowry system. Accordingly, it passed the Maternity Benefit Act (1939) and introduced the Bengal Marriage Dowry Prevention Bill (1940).

The Praja-League Coalition Ministry made remarkable contribution in the field of education. In a 14-point election *Manifesto* of the KPP, Fazlul Huq gave priority to the introduction of compulsory and free primary education in Bengal. When he became the Premier of Bengal in 1937, Fazlul Huq kept the portfolio of Education with himself. Although he failed to fulfill his election pledge (because of paucity of funds), he decided to put into effect the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act of 1930 and proposed to impose 'cess' on both the cultivators and the landlords which created mixed reactions (it was welcomed by the Muslims and Scheduled Castes but it was not supported by the Hindu elites). He put emphasis on the full-fledged expansion of education among the Muslim of Bengal and believed that it was only through education that the Muslims would regain their lost position among the advancing communities of India. Fazlul Huq strongly advocated for English education and understood the necessity of the establishment of educational institutions in different places and at different levels. Therefore, he enhanced the budgetary allocation for 'Education' and took initiatives for the foundation of different Schools, Madrasahs, Makhtabs, Colleges and Universities in different parts of Bengal to spread the light of education particularly among the Muslims and women. Under his auspices, Wajid Memorial Girls' School, the Lady Brabourne College (at Park Circus), Eden Girls College (at Dacca), Fazlul Huq College (at Chakhar) Harganga College (at Munsiganj), Adina Fazlul Huq College, Tezgaun Agricultural Institute (at Dacca) and so on and so forth were established. Huq also founded the Eden Hostel at

Dacca for the students of the Eden School and persuaded the Government to take over the management of the Rokeya Sakhwat Memorial Girls' School when the institution was going through a severe financial crisis. All these activities and initiatives of Fazlul Huq were very praiseworthy. But as an Education Minister, he was often criticized for alleged communal fervour in his policy and favouring and giving 'special treatment' to the people of his own community. The Huq Ministry also introduced the Secondary Education Bill in the Assembly in 1940 with an intention of delinking Secondary Education from the purview of the University of Calcutta which generated very heated controversy. The Government's proposal for the establishment of a Secondary Education Board (as recommended by the Sadler Commission) was not acceptable to the Hindu members of the Bengal Legislature except the Hindu Ministers. The Hindus were afraid of the Muslim control over the Calcutta University and on education as a whole as there was scope for the government control and thereby establishment of Muslim control through the Board. As there were dissensions, the Bill in a new form, was reintroduced in the House in 1942. It was referred to a Select Committee for its consideration but ultimately, the Bill was not passed. It is to be mentioned here that the Second Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq practically did not produce any important social legislation and in 1942 only four Bills, viz., the Bengal Public Demands Recovery (Amendment) Bill, the Bengal Agricultural Debtors (Amendment) Bill, the Bengal Non-Agricultural Tenancy (Temporary Provisions) Extending Bill and the Bengal Criminal Law (Industrial Areas) Amendment Bill, were passed. The people of Bengal had high expectations from Fazlul Huq and his two successive coalition ministries but many of their demands and expectations remained unfulfilled as Huq's Second Coalition Ministry, suffered even more than the first from an 'existential crisis' and did not have ample scope and time to initiate socio-economic reforms and put into effect the peoples' basic demands and expectations.

In the fifth and last phase (1943-1947), Fazlul Huq, the ex-Premier, sat on the Opposition Bench, raised his voice against the Bengal government and kept a very keen watch on the political happenings and developments in Bengal. The last five years witnessed so many interesting political developments as well as many dramatic and tragic events which totally changed the course of political history of Bengal vis-à-vis India. The Nazimuddin Ministry was sworn in Bengal on 24 April 1943 which

immediately after its installation faced the onslaught of the Great Bengal Famine. Fazlul Huq, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and other honourable members sitting on the Opposition Bench, severely criticized the Government for its failure in tackling the havoc food crisis in Bengal and accused the Nazimuddin Ministry and mainly Suhrawardy, the Minister of Civil Supplies, for the gradual deterioration of the situation leading to appalling famine conditions in Bengal. The Muslim League Ministry led by Khwaja Nazimuddin completely denied its responsibility and put the blame absolutely on the 'Syama-Huq' Ministry. Nazimuddin also brought allegations against the Central Government that it had failed to persuade the autonomous Indian provinces to part with their surplus foodstuffs for Bengal. He put emphasis on going out of the control of the Centre which would enable Bengal to have more effective control over transport and also its economic resources to combat any catastrophe such as the famine. Thus Nazimuddin stood in favour of the establishment of 'independent sovereign states' in the areas where the Muslims constituted majority. Both T.G. Rutherford, the acting Governor of Bengal and Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy, were not at all satisfied with the activities of Nazimuddin Ministry and questioned its ability 'to get down to things' over the Famine. In January 1944, the Viceroy urged His Majesty's Government to dismiss the Nazimuddin Ministry which was rejected by Churchill and Amery as they did not want to weaken the League which, according to them, prevented the advancement of the 'seditious' Congress. Although the Ministry was able to survive for the time being, it got a tremendous setback in the Budget session which took place in March 1945. The Opposition led by Fazlul Huq, severely criticized the budget demand placed by Muazzamuddin Hossain, Minister for Agriculture and requested the Speaker to put the whole motion to the House. Under the influence of Fazlul Huq, 21 existing members of the Treasury Benches crossed the floor and joined the Opposition Benches on 28 March 1945³⁰ which threatened the stability of the Nazimuddin Ministry. When the members of the Opposition camp got excited, Dharendra Nath Datta, the Deputy Leader of the Official Congress, opposing the Agricultural Budget, brought the cut motion in the House. The Opposition Bench led by Fazlul Huq, altogether demanded for voting on the cut motion and the Speaker Nausher Ali also decided to put it into vote. As the European members of the House (who were the supporters of the Nazimuddin Ministry), remained absent at the time of voting in the House, the Treasury Bench had to face a defeat in the hands of the Opposition (by 106 to 97 votes). Next day (i.e. 29 March 1945) after the defeat of the

Nazimuddin Ministry, Speaker Nausher Ali gave his ruling on the adjournment of the Assembly as he thought that the House could not function any longer unless a new ministry was to be formed.³¹ Not only the members of the Treasury Bench but also the Bengal Governor were not at all happy with this decision of the Speaker. Two days later (on 31 March 1945), R.G. Casey, the then Governor of Bengal, issued a Proclamation under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 taking the reins of administration of the province in his hands. The Labour Party which came into power in Britain after the elections (held in July 1945) accepted the recommendation of a Governor's Conference (which took place in Delhi on 1-2 August 1945) that elections to the Provincial and Central Legislatures should be held in the coming winter. Likely, Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy, announced on 21 August 1945 that the elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures would take place as early as possible. In pursuance of this decision, the Bengal Assembly was dissolved in September 1945 and accordingly fresh elections to the Bengal Assembly took place in March 1946. Meanwhile, Fazlul Huq read the pulses of the Muslim population of Bengal (the bulk of whom rallied behind Jinnah, the League and its demand for 'Pakistan') and wanted to rejoin the League and to patch-up his differences with Jinnah. On that note, Fazlul Huq wrote a letter for Mr. Jinnah to remove the ban he had put on him.³² But Jinnah did not feel the necessity of bringing back Mr. Huq into the League as the party alone won all Muslim seats in the by-elections held in Bengal (despite Huq's alliance with Sarat Chandra Bose and Syama Prasad Mookerjee) and the League Supremo was confident enough that his party alone would be able to secure absolute majority in the Bengal Assembly (consisting of 250 members) elections and would easily be in a position to form the Ministry. The 72-year old campaigner got frustrated and wanted to take *sannyas* (retirement) from active politics and Mr. Huq expressed his desire to R.G. Casey, the then Governor of Bengal that 'he might be sent to represent H.M.G. in some capacity in Saudi Arabia' which also did not materialize. Thus he had no other option but to return to the political arena and to pose a serious challenge to the League. Huq assumed the chairmanship of the Congress sponsored Bengal Muslim Parliamentary Board (which was the common platform of various anti-League Muslim organizations) and decided to compete with the League with his 'weak' KPP (as it suffered from splits and lost its support-base) in the forthcoming Bengal Assembly elections. But the political scenario was not the same as that of 1937 and in 1946 Fazlul Huq had to face a much tougher political

contest in Bengal with a much stronger Muslim League which already gathered tremendous support by raising the slogan of 'Pakistan'.

Getting overwhelming victory in the elections to the Central Assembly (in which the Muslim League won all six Muslim seats in Bengal), the League wholeheartedly tried to exploit the Muslim sentiment by demanding 'Pakistan' and plunged into the 1946 Assembly Elections which were held under the system of separate electorates (like that of 1937) with limited franchise (in 1945, the total number of voters in Bengal was 8,496,992 which was 14.17% of the population).³³ The Congress, the largest and most active political organization at that time in India, issued a 12-point *Manifesto* by the end of October 1945 and the party was very keen to fight the elections of 1946 mainly on the issues of Independence and the immediate transfer of power to the Indians. But the party was not confident enough for getting the support of the Muslims (who largely inclined towards the Muslim League because of its campaign for 'Pakistan') in the Muslim constituencies. The Congress thus felt the necessity of getting the support of Scheduled Castes who at that time numbered not less than 76 lakhs.³⁴ Muslim League on the other hand, declared to fight the General Election of 1946 on two issues: "Pakistan and the representative character of the League in regard to the Muslim community".³⁵ Jinnah, the League Supremo, who came to Bengal in the mid of February 1946, made an appeal to all the party workers and supporters to 'work whole-heartedly for only one objective – Pakistan'³⁶ which ultimately became a 'battle cry' for the League, an anti-thesis to *Akhand Hindustan*.³⁷ 'To present a united front against the Muslim League during the elections and to create a new political alternative for the Muslim masses in the province',³⁸ different Muslim organizations like the KPP, the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, Muslim Majlis, Momin Conference, Anjuman Watan etc. formed the Nationalist Muslim Parliamentary Board. But at that time, the KPP was almost turned into a shadow of its 1937-phase because it lost its popularity and strength as many of its important leaders like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Abdulla-el-Baqui, Shamsuddin Ahmed (Secretary of the KPP), Hasan Ali, Nurul Islam Chowdhury, Giasuddin Ahmed and the like left the KPP and joined the League. Apart from these, there were many other political parties and organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha, the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.), the Radical Democratic Party (RDP of M.N. Roy), the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Kshatriya Samity - many of which suffered from man-power and election

fund and were not able to give their candidates in many constituencies. It is to be mentioned here that the CPI and RDP for the first time, decided to contest in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1946 and also gave their candidates in some of the Muslim Constituencies but the election ultimately turned into ‘a pitched battle with the Congress’.³⁹

In the Bengal Assembly Elections which were held in March 1946, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) achieved overwhelming victory and emerged as the single largest party by capturing 114 seats in a House of 250 members. Its campaign for ‘Pakistan’ gave it heavy dividends and the BPML obtained 83.64% of the total votes polled in the Muslim Constituencies. The seats won by other parties/groups were as follows: Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) – 86; European Group – 25; Independent (Hindu) – 6; KPP – 4; Anglo – Indian – 4; Communist Party – 3; Independent (Muslim) – 2; Indian Christian – 2; Hindu Mahasabha – 1; Emarat Party – 1; Kshatriya Samity – 1 and Scheduled Caste Federation – 1.⁴⁰ The BPCC was also able to increase its strength to 86 seats as against the 52 seats in 1937. But the election verdict completely went against the KPP and it was a major setback for the party which was in power from 1937 to 1943. The KPP bagged only 4 seats (as against 36 in 1937) and Fazlul Huq who was the mouthpiece of the party, was only able to retain his popularity and was elected from two constituencies – Barisal-South and Bagherhat (Khulna). The KPP’s support-base was drastically came – down as the party secured only 5.39% (as against 31.51% in 1937) of total votes polled in the Muslim Constituencies⁴¹ and the KPP almost turned into a ‘signboard’ in the political canvas of Bengal. The Communist Party, contesting for the first time in this election, bagged 3 seats. The Hindu Mahasabha (which earlier won 2 seats in 1937) bagged only 1 seat in 1946 and its leader Syama Prasad Mookerjee was returned from the Calcutta University Constituency. The parties which failed to open their account were the Radical Democratic Party, Muslim Parliamentary Board, Nationalist Muslims and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind.

Immediately after the declaration of the election results, H.S. Suhrawardy was unanimously elected as the Leader of the League Parliamentary Party. Sir Frederick Burrows (who succeeded Mr. R.G. Casey on 19 February 1946 as the Governor of Bengal), decided to give him the first chance to form the Government and prove the

majority in the House. Suhrawardy decided to capitalize this opportunity and tried to collect support from the existing M.L.A.s and different political parties. Having failed to form a Coalition Ministry with Congress, he managed to get the support of seven other M.L.A.s and finally was able to count on a voting strength of about 126 (excluding the Speaker) in a House of 250. It was expected that the European Group, numbering 25, following their earlier practice, would extend its support to the Government.⁴² Having convinced, the Governor of Bengal, finally invited Suhrawardy to form the Ministry which was ultimately formed on 24 April 1946. The new Ministry consisted of 8 Ministers (7 from the Muslim League and 1 from the Scheduled Castes). Mr. Jogendra Nath Mondal (Scheduled Castes) was the only Hindu representative in this Cabinet and for the first time, a Ministry was formed in Bengal that did not include any members belonging to the Dacca Nawab family. Also there was no representative from the 'Khwaja group' in this Cabinet. Later Suhrawardy changed his attitude towards the 'Khwaja group' and one of its important members, Khan Bahadur Nurul Amin, was elected the Speaker. There was rumour that Fazlul Huq was in the race of Speakership which was totally rejected by Mr. Huq. Later Suhrawardy expanded the Cabinet (on 21 November 1946) and four new Ministers (one from the 'Khwaja group', one belonged to the Caste Hindu and two belonged to the Scheduled Castes) were included into his Cabinet. Mr. Jogendra Nath Mondal who was in charge of Judicial, Works and Buildings Departments was dismissed and Mr. Nagendra Narayan Roy and Mr. Dwarkanath Barori were appointed to share his responsibilities.⁴³

Meanwhile, the Cabinet Mission consisting of Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A.V. Alexander arrived in India on 24 March 1946 to frame a constitution, to set up a constitution making body and to form an Executive Council with the support of the main Indian parties. This gave Jinnah a golden opportunity to put forward his demand for partition and express in clear terms, his view on Pakistan. Quickly he convened a Convention of the newly elected Muslim League Legislators of the Central and Provincial Legislatures in Delhi on 7- 9 April 1946. At the open session of the Convention (held on 9 April), Suhrawardy was asked to move the official resolution which stated: "That the Muslim nation will never submit to any constitution for a united India and will never participate in any single constitution – making machinery set up for the purpose.... That the Zones comprising Bengal and

Assam in the North-East and the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West of India, namely Pakistan Zones, where the Muslims are in a dominant majority, be constituted into a sovereign independent state..... That two separate constitution-making bodies be set up by peoples of Pakistan and Hindustan for the purpose of framing their respective constitutions”.⁴⁴ This resolution (moved by Suhrawardy) marked a sharp departure from the Lahore Resolution of 1940 (introduced by Fazlul Huq) which envisaged two independent Muslim states in two Zones (North-East and North-West) of India and changed the word “States” into “State” which proved the fact that the establishment of ‘a sovereign independent state (i.e. Pakistan) instead of two independent Muslim states in two Zones of India, was voiced by the elected representatives of the Muslim League. Only a few months later (on 16 August 1946), the *Dawn*, the mouthpiece of the AIML, published a map of Pakistan in which Bengal and Assam were shown as its parts. The ‘Khwaja group’ which earlier stood for an independent Eastern Pakistan in the light of the Lahore Resolution, later changed their stand and in order to show their loyalty towards Jinnah, accepted his idea of a single Pakistan state. On the other hand, Suhrawardy who moved the resolution at the convention in Delhi in April 1946, changed his view within a year and he along with Sarat Chandra Bose and Abul Hashim, came forward to initiate a movement for a ‘united and greater Bengal’.

On 16 May 1946, the Cabinet Mission announced its draft plan which rejected the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan and proposed the formation of a Federal Union consisting of British Indian Provinces and Indian States and also an Interim Government. The Hindus and Muslims of Bengal who were against the dismemberment of their province, felt relieved which was also reflected in the opinion of Frederick Burrows, the then Governor of Bengal (placed before the Cabinet Mission and Lord Wavell on 24 May 1946): “They [the Muslim League Ministers of Bengal] all wanted to stay in office and were not very keen Pakistanis. Both Hindus and Muslims were relieved that Bengal would not be partitioned”.⁴⁵ There were mixed reactions from the Congress and the Muslim League towards the Plans of the Cabinet Mission. The Congress welcomed the Plan as it rejected the Pakistan proposal on the basis of an undivided India but opposed to the grouping of provinces as it would deprive the autonomy of the provinces and hammer the interests of the residents particularly the Sikhs. The Muslim League, on the other hand, was not at all

happy with the rejection of the Pakistan scheme but welcomed the Grouping Scheme. Finally the AIML accepted the Cabinet Mission's Plan on 6 June 1946 as it thought that the seeds of Pakistan were inherent in the Plan by virtue of the compulsory grouping of six Muslim provinces in Section 'B' and 'C'. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) after a much heated debate, accepted the Plan on 25 June 1946. But within a few days, complications arose which prompted Jinnah to convene a meeting of the League Council at Bombay on 27-29 July 1946 where two important resolutions were passed. By the first it decided to withdraw its acceptance of the long-term plans of the Cabinet Mission. By the second resolution (passed on 29 July 1946), the League Council gave a clarion call on the 'Muslim Nation' to go in for 'Direct Action' to achieve Pakistan.⁴⁶ Next day (i.e. 30 July 1946), the Working Committee of the AIML took a resolution by which all the branches of the League across the country were directed to hold Friday, 16 August as a 'Direct Action Day'.⁴⁷

The BPML leaders (Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Nazimuddin and the like), came forward to abide by the decision of the AIML and decided to observe complete general *hartal* or strike on that day and made the same appeal to all other political parties. When the AIML was taking preparations for the observance of the 'Direct Action Day' on 16 August, the Viceroy gave an offer to the Congress on 8 August 1946 to form an Interim government (with Jawaharlal Nehru as its Vice-President) at the Centre and the Congress almost instantaneously accepted the offer on 12 August. This decision of the Viceroy did not at all please both the AIML and the BPML leaders and Suhrawardy in an interview with the Associated Press of America, gave warning: "The probable result of putting the Congress in power, bypassing the Muslim League, would be the declaration of complete independence of Bengal and the setting up of a parallel government. We shall see that no revenue is derived from Bengal and will consider ourselves a separate state having no connection with the centre".⁴⁸ The Bengal Premier went further and declared 16 August as a public holiday (under Negotiable Instrument Act) in Bengal but his decision created tremendous repercussions and controversy. Calcutta, which was the city of communal harmony and peace and a big centre of anti-imperialist movements, became the first victim of communal blood-bath as the leaders of both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha added fuel to the fire by delivering their fanatic speeches. S.M. Usman, the Secretary of the Calcutta District League and the then

Mayor of Calcutta, declared *jehad* or holy war against the Hindus and published and circulated inflammatory leaflets and pamphlets (mostly in Urdu) to provoke the Muslims to violence against the Hindus in the name of religion. On the other hand, the Hindu Mahasabha leaders and the Hindu press strongly reacted against the inflammatory speeches and activities of the Leaguers, considered their statements as threats 'to 'Pakistanise' the whole of Bengal forthwith'⁴⁹ and totally went against the observance of *hartal* on 16 August. As a result, Calcutta witnessed a 'reign of terror' for four days (16-19 August 1946) and on those days, the administration totally failed to maintain law and order and to control the hooligans. A massive communal riot broke out in Calcutta leading to havoc massacre (over 4000 people died and 10,000 injured) which came to be known as "the Great Calcutta Killing". But it was not only limited to Calcutta, within a few days, communal disturbances broke out in Noakhali, Tippera and extended upto Bihar, U.P. and other parts of India.

The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress and a section of the press put the blame absolutely on Suhrawardy and his Ministry for the massacre that was taken place in Calcutta. *The Statesman* severely criticized the role of the Bengal Government and its complete failure in the judgement of the situation and its complete inefficiency in the running of administration. Sarat Chandra Bose, the then member of the Congress Working Committee, demanded for the dissolution of the Muslim League Ministry led by Suhrawardy and proposed for the formation of an all-party ministry in Bengal. Amidst these allegations and demands, a twelve-member Congress-dominated Interim Government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in on 2 September 1946 without having any League representative. Meanwhile, some Muslim League members of Bengal felt the necessity of bringing back its erstwhile members and leaders and likely a Muslim League deputation went to the residence of Fazlul Huq on 1 September 1946 and requested him to rejoin the League. This prompted Fazlul Huq to write a letter to Jinnah on 3 September 1946 requesting him to lift the ban imposed on him in December 1941. Jinnah immediately responded to his appeal and lifted the ban. He allowed Fazlul Huq and his followers to join the League once again and conveyed this message to the press on 8 September.⁵⁰ All these developments exerted pressure upon Suhrawardy, the Bengal Premier, who also came out with a new plan and expressed his desire to form a coalition government with the Hindus. In order to get necessary approval for this scheme, he met Jinnah on

5 and 6 September but failed to convince the League Supremo. On his return to Calcutta, Suhrawardy had to face tremendous attacks from the Opposition in the House. On 19 September, Dharendra Nath Dutta, Deputy Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, moved the no-confidence motions against the League Ministry in general and the Chief Minister in particular. After much heated debate (which went for two days), the Speaker put both the motions on the voting. The motion against the Ministry was defeated by 131 to 87 votes and the other against the Chief Minister was defeated by 130 to 85 votes. The European Group (numbering 20), the Communists (3 members) and the Speaker remained neutral whereas 5 members from the European Group, 2 members from the Congress and 1 Nationalist Muslim remained absent at the time of voting.⁵¹ Although Suhrawardy was able to save his Ministry for the time being, few days later he got a tremendous blow from Jinnah who ultimately gave his consent to join the Interim Government and submitted his list of five Muslim League nominees (4 from North India and 1 from Bengal) to the Viceroy on 15 October 1946. Surprisingly, that man from Bengal was not any Muslim League leader like Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin or Fazlul Huq, but he was Jogendra Nath Mondal, the Scheduled Caste leader.⁵² Although this decision of Jinnah infuriated and frustrated the BPML leaders, the League Supremo did not make any change in his decision and the League finally joined the Interim Government on 26 October 1946.

Within seven weeks of the great Calcutta tragedy, another massive communal riot broke out in Noakhali, a Muslim-dominated district of East Bengal where hundreds of Hindus were massacred by the Muslim hooligans. Gandhiji rushed to Noakhali in early November 1946 in order to restore communal peace and harmony. From Noakhali, the riot gradually broke out in Tippera and thereafter in Bihar, U.P., Punjab, Bombay and other parts of India. Meanwhile, in the Bengal Assembly, Fazlul harshly criticized the Suhrawardy Ministry in general and the police forces in particular for their complete failure in tackling the situation in Calcutta. He took up the cause of the Muslims who became the victims of the riots and came forward in support of them. He also went to Bihar to help the victims of the riots. It was during this time, Fazlul Huq was elected the President of the All Bengal Relief and Welfare Society⁵³ and monitored relief activities in the riot-affected areas. He was so critical about the Suhrawardy Ministry (in the fields of administration, civil supplies, education etc.) that he went to Noakhali to meet with Gandhiji to have a talk about the

formation of a coalition government in Bengal. But neither Gandhiji nor the Congress High Command showed any interest in this scheme which not only disheartened Mr. Huq but also made him more critical about Gandhiji. When Gandhiji, along with his followers, started his walking tour on 2 January 1947 to calm down the situation in Noakhali and Tippera, Fazlul Huq criticized Gandhiji at a public meeting held at Comilla on 12 February 1946 for spreading further communal hatred and advised him (Gandhiji) to leave Noakhali as soon as possible. Few days later, Mr. Huq understood his mistake and wanted to 'have a heart to heart talk' with Gandhiji which ultimately took place at Haimchar where both the leaders had a very healthy discussion and resolved their differences.

Meanwhile, the Suhrawardy- Hashim Group and the Khwaja Group within the BPML went into a tussle when Maulana Akram Khan tendered his resignation from the presidentship of the BPML in early November 1946. Abul Hashim, the existing Secretary of the BPML, declared himself as a willing candidate for the party presidentship whereas the Khwaja Group projected Fazlul Huq for that post. Mr. Huq who was willing to be the President of the BPML, requested Abul Hashim to withdraw his candidature in his favour but Hashim refused to do so. As both the candidates did not belong to his camp, Jinnah interfered in this matter and gave necessary instructions to Suhrawardy who convened a meeting of the League Parliamentary Party on 8 February 1947 wherein a resolution was adopted urging the League Council to request Maulana Akram Khan to withdraw his resignation and continue the presidentship of the BPML. Accordingly, Maulana Akram Khan withdrew his resignation on 12 February which was a major setback for Fazlul Huq (though he gave the clarification that he was not in that race). Side by side, the British Government took certain important decisions in the month of February. On 20 February 1947, the British Government made two very important official announcements – firstly, it decided to appoint Lord Louis Mountbatten as the new Viceroy of India (who assumed the office on 24 March 1947) instead of Lord Wavell and secondly, the British Prime Minister, Attlee announced in the Parliament that it was the 'definite intention' of His Majesty's Government (HMG) 'to take necessary steps to effect the transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948'. Jawaharlal Nehru hailed the announcement of the date for the transfer of power and on the very next day of the official announcement (i.e. 21

February), he met with Lord Wavell and told him about 'the possible partition of the Punjab and Bengal, if agreement was not reached'. Many Hindus in Bengal and Sikhs in Punjab who were alarmed at the prospect of compulsory grouping which might lead them in Pakistan, relentlessly launched campaign for the partition of their provinces. The All-India Hindu Mahasabha (which stood for and fought for an *Akhand Hindustan*), under the enthusiastic leadership of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, initiated a movement for the dismemberment of Bengal in order to establish a separate Hindu-majority West Bengal Province (including Calcutta). The Congress Working Committee (CWC) in its meeting (held from 6 to 8 March 1947) raised the demand for the partition of Punjab into a predominantly Muslim part and a predominantly non-Muslim part. Similarly the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) in its meeting, took a resolution on 4 April 1947 in favour of the partition of the province and the formation of a new state of West Bengal within the Indian union.⁵⁴ Not only the Hindu Mahasabha and the BPCC were thinking in the same line but also the leading Hindu non-Bengali business tycoons (like Birla, Goenka, Jalan) of Bengal and some leading newspapers (like *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Hindusthan Standard* etc.) were in favour of a separate West Bengal province.

But the growing support and demand for the partition of Bengal was not a universal demand of all the Bengali Hindus and there was a different voice raised by a section of the Bengali Hindus and Congressites like Akhil Chandra Dutta, Sarat Chandra Bose, Kamini Kumar Dutta etc. Akhil Chandra Dutta, former Vice-President of the Central Legislative Assembly and a veteran Congress leader sent a telegram to Sardar Patel on 27 February 1947 saying that "partition of Bengal is fundamentally wrong on all grounds, political, economic, cultural, linguistic, social. It is outcome of defeatist mentality and is misconceived remedy against communal Government in Bengal".⁵⁵ On 23 March under his initiative, a conference of prominent persons, including some M.L.A.s, was convened in Calcutta which considered the partition scheme as a 'retrograde and reactionary move'. In that Conference, the members reiterated: "The partition of Bengal will create a permanent cleavage between the two communities and perpetuate an evil which is bound to die out even earlier than some people find it difficult to believe" and authorized Sarat Chandra Bose and Akhil Chandra Dutta to form a committee of action against partition.⁵⁶ At the end of April

1947, Sarat Chandra Bose formed the All-Bengal Anti-Pakistan and Anti-Partition Committee with himself as its President and Kamini Kumar Dutta, M.L.C., as its Secretary to raise voice against the scheme of Pakistan and the partition of Bengal. Jogendra Nath Mondal, a prominent Bengali Scheduled Caste leader and ex-Minister of Bengal, supported this anti-partition stand and told at New Delhi on 21 April 1947 that “the division of the province was no solution to the problem. It was not in the interest of Hindus to divide the province and the Scheduled Castes were definitely opposed to partition”.⁵⁷ Similarly, some Muslim politicians of Bengal (like Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim and so on), raised their voice against the partition of Bengal and stood in favour of a united and greater Bengal. On 8 April 1947, in an interview Suhrawardy said: “I have always held the view that Bengal cannot be partitioned. I am in favour of a united and greater Bengal”.⁵⁸ He reiterated his conviction in another press conference in New Delhi on 27 April that the “partition would be suicidal even from the Hindus point of view”.⁵⁹ In giving a reply to the question of one of the reporters on whether he got the approval from the League High Command for his scheme, Suhrawardy said in New Delhi: “I speak for myself. I speak for Bengal. I am visualising an independent, undivided, sovereign Bengal in a divided India”.⁶⁰ Khwaja Nazimuddin, an important member of the League Working Committee, at that point of time, also spoke in favour of an independent sovereign Bengal which would be ‘in the best interest of its people, whether Muslim or non-Muslims...’⁶¹ Fazlul Huq who always stood for Bengal, fought for Bengal and its people, surprisingly remained almost silent (except few of his writings in the *Nabayug*) when there was growing movement for United Independent Bengal. He neither raised his voice (like those of Suhrawardy, Sarat Chandra Bose, Abul Hashim and Kiran Sankar Roy) in favour of United Independent Bengal nor did he issue any public statement in support of the scheme. It is still a matter of debate that why did he take this stance. There was a general opinion that he was seriously ill at that time which prevented him to play a very active role in this movement. But this could not be a sufficient excuse. The political developments for the last few years before partition would show that Fazlul Huq at that time was the most dejected, frustrated, disheartened and humiliated man and he almost lost his will-power to be in the forefront of the movement for United Independent Bengal. The man who was the Premier of Bengal from 1937-1943, who was simultaneously the President of the BPML and his section of the KPP and an important member of the Working

Committee of the AIML, surprisingly in 1947, lost his political dominance and he was almost nowhere apart from being a member of the Bengal Assembly and an ordinary member of the League. As a veteran politician, Fazlul Huq probably would have read the pulses of the League High Command and understood the fact that it would not finally approve the scheme of United Independent Bengal. However, he loved Bengal and its people. Seeing the outbursts of communal violence and holocaust in different parts of Bengal vis-à-vis India, he opposed to the partition and stood in favour of the continuation of the British rule in India in order to keep India united: "Since those who have sown the wind are unable to control the whirlwind, there must be an agitation calling upon HMG to rescind their decision of February 20 and allow India to proceed peacefully on the road of progress".⁶² This statement of Fazlul Huq completely went against his Lahore speech (1940) and the decision of the League Council (29 July 1946).

Jinnah, the League Supremo did not support the move for partitioning Punjab and Bengal not in the line of Suhrawardy, Sarat Chandra Bose or Abul Hashim but he took this stand as it would give the Muslims 'a truncated or mutilated Pakistan'. At New Delhi on 30 April 1947, Jinnah reiterated his demand for the creation of a Muslim National State consisting of six provinces: "The question of division of India as proposed by the Muslim League is based on the fundamental fact that there are two nations – Hindus and Muslims – and the underlying principle is that we want a national home and a national state in our homelands which are predominantly Muslim and comprise the six units of the Punjab, the NWFP, Sind, Baluchistan, Bengal and Assam..... It is a mistake to compare the basic principle of the demand of Pakistan and the demand of cutting up the provinces throughout India into fragmentation".⁶³ Maulana Akram Khan, the President of the BPML, firmly stood behind the Quaid-i-Azam and on 4 May unequivocally said: ".....The Muslims of India constitute a single united nation and we aim at setting up a single united nation and we aim at setting up a single united state which will include all the Muslim majority provinces".⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the Congress and BPML leaders (who stood in favour of United Sovereign Bengal), met in a meeting in the last week of April 1947 and formed a joint committee for drafting the salient features of the Constitution of sovereign Bengal which was speedily completed by 19 May 1947. Next day, Sarat Chandra Bose and Abul Hashim signed the draft Constitution of united Bengal.

Though Jawaharlal Nehru stood against the scheme of 'Sovereign Bengal', he said that the Congress would be ready to support the move for a 'United Bengal' if the province was kept within the Indian Union.⁶⁵ On the same day, the Working Committee of the BPML denounced its any connection with the published Constitution of 'Independent Bengal' and affirmed its support towards the League demand for Pakistan.

Lord Mountbatten, the new Viceroy who went to London on 18 May 1947 (carrying with him the new plan drafted by V.P. Menon) to make discussions with the HMG and the British Cabinet gave him the green signal to go ahead with his plan for the partition of the country. He returned to Delhi on 28 May and five days later (i.e. 2 June 1947), announced his Plan for the transfer of power on the basis partition. In this Plan of Mountbatten, Bengal (or any other Indian province) was not given the choice to remain undivided and stay outside Hindustan or Pakistan. On 3rd June 1947, the High Commands of both the Congress and the Muslim League finally accepted the Plan. Suhrawardy who finally succumbed to the pressure of the League High Command, withdrew his support to a United Bengal independent of Hindustan and Pakistan and extended his support towards the League demand for partition. Sarat Chandra Bose, the chief exponent of United Sovereign Bengal, at last expressed his disappointment on the non-fulfillment of his dream by saying: "... if Bengal is rent in twain, the two provinces of Bengal will be exploited more and more by exploiters, white and brown.... If peace is what we seek, we cannot get it by accepting H.M.G.'s plan. If independence is what we seek, the Plan sounds its death-knell".⁶⁶ But his cry for Bengal and his concern for Bengal went in vain and the partition became more and more visible. Jinnah convened a meeting of the League Council at the Imperial Hotel, Delhi, on 9 June 1947 to persuade the Council members to agree with the Mountbatten's Plan. From Bengal Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Kamruddin Ahmed and other members of the Council, attended the said meeting. In that meeting, Jinnah placed his proposal before the Council members for accepting the partition plan and accordingly a resolution was passed by a majority of votes (only 11 Council members cast their votes against it as counted by Suhrawardy)⁶⁷ only after a debate of two and half hours. The Congress Working Committee, on the other hand, in its meeting held on 14 June, also took the decision (For – 157, Against – 28, Neutral – 32) in favour of 'three partitions' – partition of India, partition of Bengal and partition of Punjab. On

20 June 1947, a joint meeting of the members (other than the Europeans) of the Bengal Legislative Assembly was held to decide whether they would join India or Pakistan. On that day, the voting in the afternoon session (3 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.) took place in the presence of 219 members and the Speaker Mr. Nurul Amin presided over the meeting. In that voting, 90 members voted in favour of joining the existing Constituent Assembly (i.e. to remain in India) and 126 members voted in favour of a new and separate Constituent Assembly (i.e. to join Pakistan).⁶⁸ Fazlul Huq deliberately kept himself away from joining this session of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and remained absent at the time of voting. The three Communist members of the House, namely, Jyoti Basu, Ratanlal Brahmin and Rup Narayan Roy abstained from voting.⁶⁹ In another voting of the members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly representing the Muslim majority districts (East Bengal), 34 members voted in favour of joining the existing Constituent Assembly and 107 members voted in favour of joining a new and separate Constituent Assembly (i.e. Pakistan).⁷⁰ On the other hand, the representatives of the Hindu majority areas (i.e. the Western part), voted for the partition of the province by a majority of 37 votes (by 58 to 21 votes).⁷¹ It should be mentioned here that four Scheduled Caste M.L.A.s voted against partition and stood in favour of joining a new Constituent Assembly.⁷²

Although Fazlul Huq remained absent from this session of the House and declined from voting, ultimately failed to stop or control the course of events that led to the partition. When the partition became inevitable, he probably realized his mistake, created a 'safe distance' from his Lahore Resolution (1940) and came forward to stand against partition and condemned the events that took place in India in recent past which was clearly reflected in his press statement of 26 July 1947: "I am one of the very few Indians who condemn all that has happened in Indian politics during the last two years and I say publicly that I condemn the circumstances which have led to the unfortunate division of the Province".⁷³ He claimed himself to be the last person to 'accentuate communal feeling between Muslims and non-Muslims'. This prompted him to go to his own district Barisal where Fazlul Huq addressed a crowded public meeting at Aswini Kumar Hall on 1 August 1947 and appealed the Hindus not to leave Barisal. He also urged both the Hindus and Muslims not to indulge in fratricidal war and delivered a long speech which was published in the *Hindusthan Standard*. But it was too late. The situation was beyond his control and

the people of Bengal almost divided amongst themselves at that time and they had no other option but to swallow the bitter pill of partition. For the second time, Bengal was partitioned into two halves – East Bengal and West Bengal. East Bengal (where the bulk of the population was Muslims) went to Pakistan (renamed as East Pakistan in 1955) and West Bengal (which had a Hindu-majority population) remained within the boundaries of India. When the fate of the Bengalis was decided and partition of the province became inevitable, Fazlul Huq surprisingly went against his latest stand and argued before the Radcliffe Commission for the cession of disputed districts in favour of Pakistan. Not only that, he also bargained for the inclusion of Calcutta, or of one-half of it, in East Pakistan simply because he simultaneously wanted to live in Calcutta (the city which gave him education, adulation, love and respect) and Pakistan which was only possible if Calcutta was ceded to Pakistan.⁷⁴ But his desire did not come into reality. Thereafter, Fazlul Huq regretfully decided to depart for Pakistan to try his fortune in its future politics. But there were doubts in the minds of the people of Bengal about his destination and they became curious enough to know about his selection of place (i.e. which part of Pakistan would he prefer to move). As he was an “out-and-out Bengali”, he did not select Karachi rather he opted for Dacca⁷⁵ where he started a new journey of his political career and spent the final years of his life.

Thus Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq who was popularly known as *Sher-e-Bangla* (Tiger of Bengal) and regarded as *Ganatantrer Atandra Prahari* (Vigilant Watchman of Democracy) and *Daradi Neta* (Sympathetic Leader) of the *krishaks* and *prajas* etc., who dominated Bengal politics for almost three decades and led two successive coalition ministries (1937-1943), turned into a tragic hero in 1947. His emergence in Bengal politics in the first half of the twentieth century was a very significant event and was highly remarkable for various reasons. Before his entry into Bengal politics, the majority of the Muslim leaders (like Nawab Abdul Latif, Syed Ameer Ali, Nawab Salimullah etc.), though they were born in Bengal, hesitated to identify themselves as Bengalis. Many of these leaders, who mostly belonged to aristocratic families, were not Bengali-speaking people and used Urdu in their day-to-day life. They kept ‘safe distance’ from the masses and most of them were very ‘loyal’ to the British. Here Fazlul Huq stands out as an exceptional one. He broke this trend and added a new dimension to Muslim politics in Bengal. By heart he was a true Bengali and he was very proud of his Bengali identity and was very sincere in promoting Bengali

language and culture. As a *bhumiputra* (son of the soil), he always thought for Bengal, dreamt for Bengal, fought for Bengal and tried to put it on a high pedestal. Having an Ashraf origin and being born in a talukdar family with an outstanding academic and professional career, Fazlul Huq (unlike others who were in his own camp or in the Opposition camp), ‘de-classed’ himself and embraced the ‘subalterns’, the *krishaks* and *prajas* of Bengal. In spite of his ‘elitist’ background, he found no problem at all (unlike the other Muslim politicians of Bengal) in mixing up with the poor, illiterate and impoverished people of rural Bengal. He was very down-to-earth and could easily hug a *krishak* (peasant) or a *praja* (tenant) at any place, any time whether on a stage before thousands of people or in his own house. His residence (in Barisal or Calcutta) was always open for the poor and destitute and many people belonging to his home town Barisal or East Bengal even stayed in his Calcutta residence. Like that of Gandhiji, he could easily mix up with the common people, spoke to them in a very simple language (which the commoners could easily understand) and sympathetically listened to their basic needs, demands, complaints and sufferings and compassionately tried his best to solve their problems at an earliest. The common masses of rural Bengal on the other hand, also felt very comfortable to talk to Mr. Huq and considered him as their friend who would fight for their cause. As he was humane, he often generously donated money to the needy students, poor and impoverished people, orphans and widows and also to the shrines for which he was turned into, as pointed out by renowned scholar A.S.M. Abdur Rab, “the benevolent insolvent”. Thus he became a very popular and charismatic leader of the depressed people of Bengal who extended their support spontaneously in his favour (also in favour of the KPP) to achieve unexpected results in the Assembly Elections of 1937.

But it was one side of the coin. The other side of the coin was marked by Mr. Huq’s inconsistency, restlessness, volatility and his lust for power. He was very casual and flexible and was not inclined to any fixed political principle. Throughout his political career, he could never stick to any particular political ideology and frequently changed his political stand, party and colour according to his necessity, to remain in power and to fulfill his own purpose like the political leaders of modern times. He was one of the founder members of the All-India Muslim League, joined the Indian National Congress and the Swarajya Party as an important member and the

last but not the least formed the Krishak Praja Party (K.P.P.). But Mr. Huq's profit-making policies, mode of action and political stances incurred criticisms from various corners which finally paved the way for the splits within the KPP and his expulsion from the League. In politics, quite naturally, the leaders would try their best and make earnest attempt to come to power and to remain in power as long as possible and in that sense, Fazlul Huq was not an exceptional one. But in doing so, on several occasions, he had to bid farewell to his own political principles and ideologies and he had to make compromise even with the Opposition camp or with the opposite political forces or parties which was clearly observed during the tenure of his two successive Coalition Ministries (1937-1943). Fazlul Huq did not have any guilty feeling for his mode of action and considered that his 'changes of policy' were not 'deviations from principle'. He once stated that: "policies were mere means, and could be likened to an umbrella. The end was to save one's body from the sun and the rain". To do this one had to "hold the umbrella in different directions according to necessity".⁷⁶ When the Muslim League (his coalition partner) withdrew its support from the Praja-League Coalition Ministry in December 1941 and Jinnah expelled Fazlul Huq from the League, he held his 'umbrella in different directions' and he was able to secure the support from the rival political parties like the Hindu Mahasabha. He was fond of chair and power and always wanted to be in the limelight and on several occasions he proved it. Whenever he suffered from an 'insecurity feeling', Fazlul Huq felt the urgency of booking a job, a berth for him elsewhere. This prompted him to send his proposals or to express his willingness time to time to the Bengal Governor (like R.G. Casey) or the Viceroy (like Lord Linlithgow) to appoint him to the post of an ambassador in Australia, Canada or in Arabia which ultimately did not materialize. Just few months before the final partition (1947) when Fazlul Huq became fatigue and almost lost his power and prominence and was suffering from an 'existential crisis', he wrote a letter to Jinnah (on 3 September 1946) requesting him to lift the ban (imposed on him in December 1941 by the League Supremo) and expressed his desire to return to the Muslim League (which was ultimately lifted by Jinnah in early September 1946). This also exposed Fazlul Huq's political – bankruptcy, inconsistency and opportunism. It is to be pointed out that as he was 'undependable', 'unpredictable', 'unprincipled', and 'trusted by nobody', Viceroy Wavell did not accept Nehru's offer to induct Fazlul Huq into the central government.⁷⁷ Throughout his political career, he was simultaneously an 'asset' and a 'liability' to any

government or political organization which he belonged. It is to be mentioned here that he was not only an opportunist, 'a robust optimist' (as he called himself) but also he was highly ambitious who wanted to see him on the top. Like others, he was also in search of a safe and secured life. Having an exceptional academic record, Fazlul Huq, like his father, chose law as his profession. He also decided to join in the government services and he was at first appointed Deputy Magistrate (recommended by Nawab Salimullah) and later, in 1908, Assistant Registrar of Rural Cooperative Societies in the new province of East Bengal and Assam. After the annulment of the partition of Bengal, he applied for the post of the Registrar of the All-Bengal Cooperative Societies. Being denied promotion to that post (which was given to an I.C.S.), Fazlul Huq became very much frustrated and disgruntled and decided to test his luck in another field. He left the job and thereafter, following the advice of Nawab Salimullah, decided to join active politics. So it can be said that politics was not his automatic choice or first preference rather he came to this field by default.

Although Fazlul Huq was labelled as *Ganatantrer Atandra Prahari* (Vigilant Watchman of Democracy), *Ganatantrer Agradut* (Pioneer of Democracy) or 'Edmund Burke of Bengal', his role in democracy and in the establishment of universal suffrage was not beyond of criticism. Different examples can be cited here. In 1924 when the Francis Enquiry Committee was judging public opinion on the introduction of 'adult suffrage' in India instead of a 'limited franchise', Fazlul Huq in his interview with the Committee members, spoke against of 'adult suffrage' and gave the explanation that the country was not at all fit for its introduction at that point of time. Before the Committee, he also expressed his belief that it would not be a wise step to give the right of 'adult suffrage' to the illiterate rural masses (which he also put forward later in the Round Table Conference in London). Not only that, in the 14-point election *Manifesto* of the KPP (adopted in July 1936), there was no reference to the introduction of 'universal suffrage' in Bengal. All these reveal the fact that Fazlul Huq did not sincerely or strongly believe in 'universal enfranchisement' (which he thought would be rather mishandled by the poor, illiterate people). Probably he had more faith in Aristotelian model of a 'limited franchise' which stood for the rule of the fittest upon the disqualified people for their all-round development and welfare. On this logic, he supported the Lucknow Pact (1916) and opposed to the Simon Commission's recommendations. He only believed in the 'Welfare' concept (by

competent leadership) and following the path of the Utilitarians, he wanted to do ‘greatest good for the greatest number’.

Although Fazlul Huq believed in communal harmony, Hindu-Muslim unity and peaceful co-existence, he, on several occasions, deviated from all these principles and revealed his communal character and showed his inclination, commitment and responsibility only towards the people of his own community (i.e. the Muslims). He supported the partition of Bengal in 1905 (which he thought would remove the economic backwardness of the Muslims in the new province), played a very significant role in the foundation of the All-India Muslim League (1906), delivered several firing speeches in the Bengal Legislative Council (1913-1916) for the spread of education among the Bengali Muslims, demanded more recruitment of the educated Muslims in government services (which he also tried to implement when he became the first elected Premier of Bengal by reserving 60% posts in government offices for the Muslims) and pleaded for separate communal electorate in the Round Table Conferences in London. After rejoining the Muslim League (on 15 October 1937), Fazlul Huq went on tours to different Indian provinces, addressed public meetings and Muslim League Conferences where he delivered communal speeches to appease the Leaguers particularly Jinnah. By his unique oration, he infused communal sentiments at the Mohammad Ali Park in Calcutta (1938), at Satana near Lucknow (1938), at Patna and published a pamphlet called ‘*Muslim Sufferings Under Congress Rule*’ (1939) cataloguing the alleged injustices and oppressions meted out to the Muslims in the Congress-governed provinces’. As a ‘true’ Muslim, Fazlul Huq observed 22 December 1939 as the ‘Day of Deliverance and Thanksgiving’ as a mark of relief as the Congress governments of different provinces resigned in protest against the British Government’s unilateral declaration of the War against Germany. Above all, he moved the Lahore Resolution popularly known as the ‘Pakistan Resolution’ which stood in favour of the formation of ‘*Independent States*’ in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India where the Muslims were numerically in a majority. In his speech given at the Lahore session of the AIML (held on 22-24 March 1940), Fazlul Huq declared: “I am Muslim first and Bengali afterwards. I will take revenge on the Hindus of Bengal if Muslims are hurt in Congress-ruled provinces”.⁷⁸ This completely exposed his communal character and he used the ‘communal card’ whenever and wherever needed as a catalyst to get political

dividends, to add fuel to the Muslim sentiment in order to have their support in his favour in provincial vis-à-vis national levels, to establish himself at the all-India politics and above all, to win the confidence of the leaders of the BPML and the AIML and especially Jinnah. But everything did not go in his favour. Huq's endeavour to mark his footprint and establish himself in the national politics vis-à-vis in the League leadership, side by side, his movements, stances and course of action ultimately led him into a clash with the League Supremo who took very severe action against him and expelled him from the League (on 10 December 1941). It is quite clear that Fazlul Huq became a victim of intra-party politics and leadership rivalry and he was confronted with different cross-currents within the League. It was quite unexpected to him as few months earlier he was given a standing ovation at the Lahore session of the AIML (22-24 March 1940) where Jinnah was forced to stop his speech and resume his seat by saying: 'when the tiger appears, the lamb must give way'.⁷⁹ But the irony of fact was that just within a short period, there was complete reversal of their previous role and positions – the 'lamb' actually became the 'tiger' and the pioneer of the 'Pakistan' movement while the 'tiger of Bengal' (*Sher-e-Bangla*) who was the mover of the Lahore Resolution, fell prey to circumstances and almost turned into a 'lamb' and he was considered as 'useless' by the Leaguers. After his expulsion from the League, Fazlul Huq tried to reorganize the KPP but it was too late. Since his rejoining the League (in 1937), Mr. Huq devoted his whole-hearted effort to promote the League ideals throughout the country and did not spend much of his time in strengthening the KPP while he was in power. It obviously helped the League gradually to establish its strong foot-hold over Bengal and the KPP, on the other hand, failed to capitalize the situation. It not only suffered from splits but also gradually lost its support-base (as most of the Muslims became the supporters of 'Pakistan') which Mr. Huq later failed to retrieve. The KPP finally lost its momentum and faced a major setback in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1946. The election results completely proved that the KPP became a 'microscopic minority', a political signboard in Bengal. This probably prompted Huq to rejoin the League (in September 1946) and to make the last bid to retain his power and prestige. When Akram Khan, the existing President of the BPML tendered his resignation in early November 1946, Fazlul Huq became very ambitious to be in that post. But it did not materialize as Akram Khan (requested by Suhrawardy according to the instruction of Jinnah), decided to withdraw his resignation. A dejected and frustrated Fazlul Huq thereafter

decided strongly to raise his voice against the partition of India, to devote the rest of his life in restoring peace and communal harmony and rescue life in the riot-affected areas of Bengal.

In spite of all his shortcomings, Fazlul Huq who called himself 'the living history', undoubtedly secures an esteemed place in the history of Bengal by dint of his sheer ability, efficiency, sincerity, wisdom, eloquence, honesty, integrity, dedication, simplicity, his dynamic personality and above all, his love and affection for the hundreds and thousands of have-nots, the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants) and his struggle for their betterment. As he was human and humane, he extended his helping hand towards the distressed and downtrodden people of rural Bengal. It was for their cause Fazlul Huq led the Praja Movement and founded the Krishak Praja Party, demanded for the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and raised the slogan of *dal-bhat* (rice and pulse) for the common people which gave him political dividends in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937. Forming the first Coalition Ministry in 1937, Fazlul Huq dedicated his life to the service of the common people and took initiatives to improve the living conditions of the toiling masses. His Praja-League Ministry introduced several remarkable and progressive pro-peasant and pro-tenant legislations and economic reforms which placed his Ministry into a high pedestal. In this field, Fazlul Huq's greatest contribution was the formation of a number of *Rin Salishi* (Debt Reconciliation) Boards in different districts of Bengal which helped a large number of peasants to get back their lands from the hungry usurers. His Ministry not only protected the rights of the *krishaks* and *prajas* but also passed different Acts to provide benefits for the working class people and to prevent the employment of the child labours and their exploitation in factories and elsewhere. Not only that, going much ahead of his time, Fazlul Huq passed the Maternity Benefit Act (1939) to provide certain benefits to the women workers in the factories which is presently followed in India by both the Central and State Governments. Following the path of the nineteenth century social reformers, he came forward to introduce many social and educational reforms. Under his guidance, his Ministry placed the Bengal Marriage Dowry Prevention Bill (1940) in the House to put an end to the 'dowry system' at the time of marrying a girl. Though he failed to stop this obnoxious practice (which shamefully still exists in our society), at least he showed his intensity and goodwill to uproot this social evil which is quite commendable. Being the

Premier cum Education Minister of his Praja-League Coalition Ministry, Fazlul Huq brought revolutionary changes, introduced several reforms and sanctioned huge grants for the advancement of education in Bengal particularly among the Muslims. It was during his tenure, so many educational institutions (including technical) and hostels (for both Medical and Engineering) were built. But in this field his greatest contribution (like that of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Derozio, D.W. Bethune, Begum Rokeya and the like), was the promotion of female education particularly among the Muslims (who were quite conservative and reluctant at that time to send their girls to the schools and colleges to take education). Going against the conservative Muslims, Fazlul Huq came forward to establish many schools and colleges absolutely for the girls like the Wajid Memorial Girls' High School, the Lady Brabourne College (at Calcutta) and Eden Girls' College at Dacca which helped to bring significant changes in the existing Muslim society.

Fazlul Huq was a distinguished member of the Bengal Legislature, a top-notch politician, a whole-hearted anti-imperialist and a great patriot. Though he had many contradictions and ambiguities, he was the only person who showed his guts not only to raise his voice and criticize the autocratic attitude of the Quaid-e-Azam (Jinnah) towards the League members of the National Defence Council (who had been invited by the then Viceroy to join the Council not as members of the League but as Premiers of their respective provinces) but also to administer 'a mild warning' to his Governor (for the H.E.'s improper behaviour and indecent language which the Governor used in his letter to Huq when he was in the chair of the Premier). Leading from the front the two successive Coalition Ministries, Fazlul Huq showed his zeal and commitment to do something for the people of Bengal. It is true that he failed to meet up all the expectations of the people of Bengal and fulfill all his promises (published in the election *Manifesto*). We have to keep it in our mind (inspite of his contrasting, volatile and ambivalent character) that he worked within certain constraints and headed a coalition ministry and not a one-party government (as his KPP alone did not enjoy absolute majority in the House) and he had to depend largely on the support of his co-partners for running the government. It is very clear that Mr. Huq was under the compulsion of coalition politics and did not enjoy that absolute freedom to fulfill his or his KPP's commitments. It is a tragedy of his life that the world only recognizes Fazlul Huq as the mover of the Lahore Resolution (1940) or the *Pakistan Prastab*

(Pakistan Proposal) and shamefully it does not consider his opposition to the partition of India or does not recognize his earnest attempt and his appeal to the people of Barisal vis-à-vis Bengal to maintain brotherhood and communal harmony and restore peace immediately before the final partition of Bengal (1947) and above all, does not pay any heed to his remarkable contributions in socio-economic and educational fields. It was only because of him that the Bengali *krishaks* and *prajas*, men and women, to a great extent, got certain reliefs and they were freed from the feudal exploitation and social prejudices. Thus Fazlul Huq, inspite of all his limitations, will ever be remembered as one of the greatest sons of undivided Bengal for his untiring fight for the toiling masses, his constant effort for ameliorating their living conditions, his 'battle-cry' for having their basic needs i.e. *dal-bhat* (rice and pulse), his formation of a number of *Rin Salishi* (Debt Reconciliation) Boards to help the poor *krishaks* and *prajas* and the last but not the least, for his remarkable contribution in the field of education particularly for the establishment of many educational institutions, schools and colleges, hostels absolutely for the Muslim girls and for all these, his name will ever be written in golden letters in the history of undivided Bengal.

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