

Creation of Pakistan and the Political Orientation of Bengali Muslims: 1940-47

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Abstract

Muslim Bengal played a key role in the freedom struggle of Pakistan. The idea of Pakistan got popular support and an unprecedented enthusiastic response from the Muslim masses of Bengal. The Muslim Bengal rendered great sacrifices for the larger interest of the Indian Muslim community. The present article investigates the political transformation that took place among the Muslims of the province during the eventful years between 1940 and 1947. The time period of the article is crucial because it witnessed a drastic paradigm shift in the political thought of the Muslims in the province from province-centric dynamics to integration within the larger Muslim community interest. During the process, Muslim Bengal took a leading role in the freedom struggle. Analysis would be made in this article to properly understand this paradigm shift with a proper historical perspective. The article will also explore how M.A Jinnah utilized the opportunity provided by the strategic weaknesses of the British Indian government and the Congress follies to make Muslim League a political force to be reckoned with in the provincial political landscape.

Historical background

‘I appeal’, observed Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1937, ‘to the Mussalmans of Bengal to organise and establish solidarity and unity amongst the Mussalmans of India as they represent more than one-third of the Mussalmans all over the country and it is up to them to give an earnest lead to the rest of the Mussalmans’.¹ The expectations of Jinnah proved to be true and the Muslim Bengal really gave a lead to the rest of the Muslims of the subcontinent in the freedom struggle of Pakistan.

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¹ This was observed by the Quaid in a letter to Maulana Shaukat Ali who was going to attend Bengal Muslim Conference. See M.A. Jinnah to Maulana Shaukat Ali, 21 September, 1937, *Quaid-i Azam Paper*, File No.25, p.11.

Since the present study mainly concerns with the Pakistan movement in Bengal, therefore, developments after 1940 seem to be worth evaluating. Some of the most important contributions of Muslim Bengal in the Pakistan movement are inter alia: the presentation of the Pakistan Resolution by *Sher-i-Bengal* (Tiger of Bengal) A.K. Fazlul Haq, tremendous success of Bengal Muslim League in the 1945- 46 elections, which were contested in the name of Pakistan, and more significantly Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy's successful proposal in the Legislators' Convention held at Delhi regarding a single state of Pakistan. All these developments had long historical background which deserves at least a passing review to construct a logical base of the present article.

In Bengal the British-cum-Hindu domination and exploitation lasted for one hundred and ninety years, i.e., from 1757 to 1947. Whereas the British rule over other parts of India lasted only ninety years, i.e., from 1857 to 1947. Before the British occupation Muslim rule in Bengal lasted for more than five hundred years (1203-1757 AD).² According to Muhammad Mohar Ali 'During the Muslim rule Bengal attained a degree of prosperity unknown before or since'.³ During the whole period of Muslim rule there was no instance of famine or food scarcity in Bengal.⁴ In the field of business, economic and intellectual contributions Muslims were on sound footings. The Chinese visitors who came mainly to the port-towns of Chittagong, Sunargaon⁵ and the capital city of Pandua in early fifteenth century, while commenting on the Muslims observed 'everyone of them was engaged in business'.⁶ But after about one hundred years of British rule the Muslim middle-class became very 'thin'.⁷ As far as employment under the British government was concerned the Muslims were the most deprived community. While narrating the Muslim employment situation, W.W. Hunter wrote:

It is not that they have ceased to retain the entire State patronage, but that they are gradually being excluded from it altogether. It is not that they must now take an equal chance with the Hindus in the race of life, but that, at least in Bengal, they have ceased to have a

² Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, Vol. N, Riyadh, 1985, p.971.

³ *Ibid.*, p.925.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.960.

⁵ Sunargaon or Sripur, which was a great city in the sixteenth century, situated at the junction of the Ganges and the Meghna, not far from modern Chandpur in modern Bangladesh.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.937.

⁷ W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, Lahore, 1968, p.178.

chance at all. In short, it is a people with great traditions and without a career.⁸

With the commencement of the British rule in Bengal, which relatively started earlier than the rest of India, Muslims were thrown away from their position of authority and prestige. It ushered an era of misfortune for the Bengali Muslims. W.W. Hunter's analysis of distribution of state patronage in Bengal in 1871 shows that

A hundred years ago, the Mussalmans monopolised all the important offices of State.... The proportion of Muhammadans to Hindus... is now less than one-seventh. The proportion of Hindus to Europeans is more than one-half; the proportion of Mussalmans to Europeans is less than one-fourteenth. The proportion of the race which a century ago had the monopoly of Government, has now fallen to less than one-twenty-third of the whole administrative body.... In the less conspicuous office establishments in the Presidency Town, the exclusion of Mussalmans is even more complete. In one extensive Department the other day it was not a single employee who could read the Mussalman dialect; and [in] fact, there is now scarcely a Government office in Calcutta in which a Muhammadan can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of ink-pots, and mender of pens.⁹

The overall economic plight of the Muslims of Bengal is further illustrated by the same author. W.W. Hunter eloquently described the state of affairs that, 'A hundred and seventy years ago it was almost impossible for a well-born Mussalman in Bengal to become poor; at present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich'.¹⁰

One of the main reasons for this sort of pitiable condition of the Muslims in Bengal was their non-cooperation with the British despotism. On the other hand, the Hindus of Bengal extended full co-operation to the British. In fact, the downfall of the last Nawab, Siraj al-Daulah, in 1757 was the result of a conspiracy in which the Hindu aristocrats and *bania* played the main role.¹¹ The coming of the East India Company was perceived as only a change of master by most of them. Under the new dispensation, the Hindus continued their cooperation with the British to further gain political, social and economic benefits. On the

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.129.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.145.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.134.

¹¹ Muhammad Mohar Ali, *op.cit.*, p.977.

other hand, the Muslims of Bengal continued their non-cooperation with the British and consequently they became the victims of exploitation by the British. It is rightly observed by M.A.H. Ispahani that, 'Muslims in no part of India were crushed or made to suffer so much as were the Muslims of Bengal'.¹²

Looming challenge and heedful response

Despite the worst condition of the Muslims of Bengal they never compromised on the question of their separate identity. But, in fact, their separate identity got more strength as a result of the Hindu-British exploitation. That is why the modern concept of nationalism could not attract the Muslim mind of Bengal.¹³ The preservation of the Muslim identity resulted in a two-pronged struggle during the one hundred and ninety years of British occupation over Bengal. One was armed struggle and the other was constitutional. In both the forms of struggle Bengali Muslims played a pioneering role all over South Asia.

The religious leaders of Bengal, during the first half of the nineteenth century, on the one hand, launched campaign to purify the Muslim society and, on the other, waged *jihad* for the emancipation of the Muslims. In this regard J.N. Sarkar's observation seems to be significant:

During a period of political and economic decline of the Muslims, the reformers not only tried to revitalise Indian Islam in Bengal through stricter religious observances, prohibiting un-Islamic practices and emphasizing austerity in life but also to rouse the political consciousness of the Muslims by their call to *jihad* and to resist the zamindars and indigo planters. In many cases it was a protest against the British administration and economic exploitation of the masses of the Muslims. Thus religious reform became a many-sided affair, — social, economic, political and communal. The growing process of assimilation between the Hindus and the Muslims during nearly 650 years received a setback. All this encouraged the growth of a spirit of socio

¹² M.A.H. Ispahani, *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, As I Knew Him*, Karachi, 1976, p.12.

¹³ Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement: 1876-1940*, New York, 1974, p.156.

religious exclusiveness among the Muslims, which assumed a political colour in the next half century.¹⁴

In the constitutional field the Muslims of Bengal took the initiative, as early as in January 1856, when the Muhammadan Association was formed to deal with the multi-faceted problems faced by the Muslims.¹⁵ The second important organisation was the Muhammadan Literary Society which was established in Calcutta in 1863 by Nawab Abdul Latif. Despite its literary and cultural outlook, the society created significant political consciousness among the Muslims of Bengal at a time when the Hindu revivalist movement was going with full swing.¹⁶ It was Calcutta, in Bengal, where the first ever political organisation of the Indian Muslims, the National Muhammadan Association was founded in 1877. Perceiving the complete lack of political training among the Muslim inhabitants of India, and the immense advantage and preponderance the Hindu organisations gave to their community, Syed Ameer Ali founded this association. Among others, the objective of the association was to look after the Muslims of India, in general, and those of Bengal, in particular. In a short period, when the association succeeded in establishing thirty-four branches covering almost all the provinces of India, its name was changed to the Central National Muhammadan Association. Until the turn of the century it was the only *de facto* and *de jure* representative organisation of Muslim India and eventually the forerunner of the All-India Muslim League which was also founded in Bengal, in 1906.¹⁷

The partition of Bengal in 1905, by the British, played a very significant role in strengthening the Muslim identity, particularly, in Bengal and in India, in general. The creation of a new province comprising East Bengal and Assam, where the Muslims were in overwhelming majority, was not a step designed basically to ameliorate the conditions of the Muslim population; it was done for administrative reasons.¹⁸ Practically, however, it turned out to the advantage of the Muslims and, therefore, the Hindus who controlled almost all the affairs of Bengal from Calcutta launched a wide-spread campaign against the

¹⁴ J.N. Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal, Thirteenth to Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta, 1972, p.75.

¹⁵ Mahmud Ali, *Role of Muslim Bengal in the Creation of Pakistan*, Lahore, 1975, p.7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ K.K. Aziz, *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work*, Lahore, 1968, p.8.

¹⁸ M.D. Chughtai, 'Foundation of the Muslim League', I.H. Qureshi (ed.), *A Short History of Pakistan*, Book Four, Karachi, 1967, pp.168-69.

partition. During the agitation the Hindus adopted *Bande Mataram*¹⁹ (Hail Mother), which was basically an anti-Muslim poem, as their national song. The Hindus also launched the *Swadeshi* movement which aimed at boycotting British manufactures and using home-made goods. When the Hindu landlords tried to bring the Muslim tenants into the movement, there emerged a serious Hindu-Muslim conflict in Bengal. As a result of these and similar other developments, which offended Muslim feelings seriously, Hindu-Muslim riots erupted in Bengal.²⁰

Thus the revival process of Muslim identity went on in Bengal and it became still stronger when the British ultimately bowed down to the Hindu agitation and annulled the partition of Bengal in 1911. The annulment seriously alarmed the Muslim community all over India; the Bengali Muslims were, no doubt, the hardest hit by it.²¹ These and other similar kinds of political and social developments largely isolated Muslims population in the province. In fact, it created among them the feeling of being treated as ‘others’ by the Hindus being the larger community. Moreover, the policies of the British government instilled in their minds a sense of aloofness from the mainstream political scene.

The agitation for and against the partition of Bengal and the Simla deputation of 1 October 1906, resulted in the creation of the All-Indian Muslim League at Dhaka in December 1906. Mohsinul Mulk, the Secretary of Aligarh College, took the initiative for the Simla deputation and the situation of Bengal following the partition, figured prominently among the factors which led him to request William A.J. Archbold, Principal MAO College, to arrange for the reception of a Muslim deputation by the Viceroy. Mohsinul Mulk in his letter to Archbold wrote:

I find that Muhammadan feeling is very much changed, and I am constantly getting letters using emphatic language, and saying that Hindus have succeeded owing to their agitation, and the Muhammadans have suffered for their silence. The Muhammadans have generally begun to think of organizing a political association and forming themselves into political agitators.... The Mohammedans of Eastern Bengal have

¹⁹ The song was taken from the book *Ananda Math* (‘The Abbey of Bliss’) written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee which had the theme of Sanyasi rebellion against Muslim rule. The Muslim image was vigorously maligned by this book.

²⁰ Mohammad Wali Ullah, *Amader Mukti Shongram*, Dhaka, 1953, p.204.

²¹ Waheed-uz-Zaman, ‘The Khilafat Movement’, I.H. Qureshi (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.178.

received a severe shock. I have got a letter from Syed Nawab Ali Choudhary of Dacca who gives utterance to the extremely sorrowful feeling prevailing there.²²

The Muslim deputation waited upon the Viceroy on 1 October 1906, and the Viceroy assured the Muslims to safeguard their interests. The Viceroy's favourable attitude towards the deputation was based partly on the desire that 'there should be no Muslim agitation in Eastern Bengal and Assam'.²³

The Muslim frustration in Bengal continued to grow and it had a definite impact on the Muslims of other parts of India. The establishment of the Dhaka University in 1921, enabled the common Muslims of Eastern Bengal to get higher education and in due course of time, play a significant role in the Muslim politics in Bengal. When in 1937 provincial governments were to be formed through elections under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Bengal branch of the All-India Muslim League was almost non-existent. There were two recently organised political parties — the United Muslim Party organized by Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy in 1936 and the Nikhil Banga Proja Shamiti (All Bengal Peasants' Association) headed by A.K. Fazlul Haq in 1927. The Quaid-i-Azam went to Bengal and tried to bring both the parties under the umbrella of the Muslim League. After prolonged discussion, the United Muslim Party came into the fold of the Muslim League, but the Proja Shamiti chose to remain outside and contest the elections on its own.²⁴

In the Bengal Legislative Assembly out of the total 250 seats, 119 seats were reserved for the Muslims. In the general elections 40 seats went to the Muslim League and 38 to the Proja Shamiti. No party in the assembly was in a position to form an independent government. To start with, Proja Shamiti and Congress tried to form a coalition government but they did not succeed.²⁵ Then a meeting between the Muslim League Parliamentary Board and the Krishak Proja Shamiti's Executive Committee was held on 14-15 February 1937. It finalized the Proja-League agreement which was formally announced by the Nawab of Dhaka and Fazlul Haq on 26 February 1937.²⁶ Muslim League agreed to give chief ministership to A.K. Fazlul Haq and he formed a ministry of

²² Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, New Delhi, 1976, pp.37-38.

²³ M.D. Chughtai, *op.cit.*, p.172.

²⁴ M.A.H. Ispahani, *op.cit.*, pp.22-29.

²⁵ Abdul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajniteer Ponchash Bachloror*, Vol.I, Dhaka, 1988, pp.112-16.

²⁶ Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p.91.

11 members which was accepted by the governor on 24 March 1937. Fazlul Haq formally joined the Muslim League in October 1937 during its historic Lucknow session.²⁷ The ministry took some very effective steps to solve the problems of the common men. According to Abdul Mansur Ahmad, ‘Two/three years of Haq ministry can be termed as the golden age for the Muslims of Bengal in general and for the peasants in particular’.²⁸ The ministry also consolidated the Muslim League’s power and influence in Bengal.²⁹

Lahore Resolution and the popular response

Such was the situation of Bengal when the 27th annual session of the All-India Muslim League was held in Lahore in 1940. About 400 delegates from Bengal, Muslim political workers and visitors attended the Lahore meeting.³⁰ Maximum credit for this representation from Bengal goes to H.S. Suhrawardy, the then Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.³¹ There could have been more representation from Bengal if the dates were made more suitable to the delegates. These dates did not suit Bengal mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the budget session of the Bengal Legislative Assembly coincided with the session and, therefore, it was difficult for the ministers and the assembly members to attend the meeting.³² Secondly, the Bengal Muslim League was fighting Calcutta Corporation’s election in the last week of March which was the most powerful self-governing local body. Hence, a number of important Muslim League leaders of Bengal asked Liaquat Ali Khan, the Honorary Secretary of the Muslim League, to postpone the session and to hold it in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.96. Sikandar Hayat is of the view that support of the provincial leaders were much significant for the strategy of Jinnah to transform All-India Muslim League into a mass organisation of the Muslim India. These leaders included among others Fazlul Haq of Bengal, Sikandar Hayat of Punjab and Saadullah Khan of Assam. All of them joined the League during the Lucknow session in 1937. See for more details Sikandar Hayat, *Aspects of the Pakistan Movement* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 2016).

²⁸ Abdul Mansur Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p.148.

²⁹ Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p.101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.125; also see Kamruddin Ahmad, *The Social History of East-Pakistan*, Dhaka, 1967, p.44.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Khwaja Nazimuddin to Liaquat All Khan (telegram), 5 January, 1940, see *Archives of Freedom Movement*, File No.199.

April 1940.³³ Despite such obstacles, Bengal's was one of the biggest contingents at the Lahore session.

In the absence of complete data it is not possible to clearly comment on the status and political career of the persons who attended the session. Before the annual session of the League, the Bengal Muslim League sent a list of 152 persons who were supposed to attend the meeting.³⁴ Among them there was one Khan Bahadur, three doctors, one pleader and two teachers. Thus out of 152 persons 145 were common Muslims and most of them came from the rural areas. The list of the ex-officio delegates which were sent by the Bengal Muslim League was not available. This list contained the names of the members of the legislature and the Council of the All-India Muslim League.³⁵ The list, however, might have been short due to the two main exigencies for the Bengal Muslim League which has been discussed before. Thus it can be concluded that most of the members of the 400 member Bengal contingent to the Lahore session, were derived from the masses mostly belonging to the rural areas.

Shila Sen has termed the selection of A.K. Fazlul Haq to present the main resolution of the All-India Muslim League as 'merely a tactical move on the part of Jinnah'.³⁶ But facts prove that it was not merely a tactical move, rather the situation led to his selection. Bengal's special significance in Indian Muslim politics, A.K. Fazlul Haq's importance and contributions in strengthening the Muslim League and the given circumstances all contributed to his selection for this purpose. As a matter of fact his presence in the annual session was deemed by the All-India Muslim League as 'absolutely necessary'. His telegram shows that due to indisposition he was not willing to undertake such a long journey and was ready to come only if his presence was deemed 'absolutely necessary'.³⁷ In reply Liaquat Ali Khan said, 'Presence necessary, do come please'.³⁸ Tragedy of firing on the Khaksars on 19 March 1940 in Lahore and consequent death of several Khaksars enhanced the importance of A.K. Fazlul Haq's presence in the session. This incident had earned bad name for Sir Sikandar Hayat who was then the premier of

³³ Maulana Akram Khan and others to Liaquat Ali Khan, date not readable, see *ibid.*

³⁴ Farmuzul Huq to Liaquat Ali Khan, 9 March, 1940, see *ibid.*, Vol.213.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Shila Sen., *op.cit.*, p.125.

³⁷ Fazlul Haq to the Secretary, All-India Muslim League (telegram), 20 March 1940; see *Archives of Freedom Movement*, Vol.213.

³⁸ Liaquat Ali Khan to Fazlul Haq (telegram), 20 March 1940, see *ibid.*

the Punjab and one of the leading Muslim leaders of India.³⁹ Foreseeing the probable opposition from the Khaksars, A.K. Fazlul Haq got himself ready to meet any situation. When he reached Lahore railway station on 22 March 1940,⁴⁰ a group of Khaksars protested against the Muslim League and chanted slogans like 'Go back Fazlul Haq'.⁴¹ To tackle the situation, he talked to the Khaksars and showed them the receipts of sizable donations he gave to the Khaksar funds and said he was also one of them and he had come to Lahore to seek a satisfactory reply from Sikandar Hayat. It so completely changed the charged atmosphere and satisfied the Khaksars that they began chanting slogans like '*Sher-i-Bengal Zindabad*' (Long live Sher-i-Bengal). Moreover, they accompanied the procession of A.K. Fazlul Haq up to the residence of Mian Abdul Aziz, a prominent leader of the League, where he was supposed to stay.⁴² Another incident, on the very first day of the session, also highlighted the importance of A.K. Fazlul Haq's presence. When Quaid-i-Azam, the President of the session, rose to make a speech, a number of people started severe hue and cry to protest against the Khaksar killings and consequently the Quaid had to stop his speech. Then, on the request of Sikandar Hayat, A.K. Fazlul Haq rose and made a short speech and as a result peace returned in the *pindal* and Quaid-i-Azam was able to complete his speech.⁴³ Such was the background and developments which led to the selection of A.K. Fazlul Haq for presenting the Lahore Resolution.

Reaction and implications

The Hindu reaction to the Lahore Resolution was very strong and they immediately got themselves prepared to oppose the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims. The first blow to the Hindu control over almost all the affairs of Bengal came in 1937, when the Muslim League-Proja Shamiti coalition ministry was formed in Bengal, and they

³⁹ Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan was the premier of Punjab and one of the founding leaders of the Unionist Party in the British Punjab. In 1937, he participated in the Lucknow session of All-India Muslim League and afterwards signed a pact with Jinnah which is called Jinnah-Sikandar Pact. See Iftikhar Hyder Malik, *Sikandar Hayat Khan (1892-1942): A Political Biography* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1985).

⁴⁰ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p.44.

⁴¹ Khondokar Abdul Khalique, *Eik Shotabdi*, A Biography of AK. Fazlul Haq, Dhaka, 1966, p.159.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.160-61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.61.

continuously tried to discredit the ministry. But the Lahore Resolution made them 'absolutely desperate because their vested interests in land and capital were diminishing'.⁴⁴ Generally, the Hindus, whether belonged to Congress, Hindu Mahasabha or any other political or religious organisation, had opposed the resolution in one voice. Gandhi termed it the vivisection of 'Mother India.' In his reaction to the resolution he wrote in the *Harijan* that 'I know of no non-violent method compelling the obedience of eight crores of Muslims to the will of the rest of India however powerful the majority of the rest may represent'.⁴⁵ Sikandar Hayat mentioned that, obviously, Gandhi viewed it that the right of self-determination of Muslims should be exercised within the bounds of India, within the Indian Union.⁴⁶

The Lahore Resolution was termed as the 'Pakistan Resolution' by the very powerful Calcutta Press which was mostly under the control of the Hindus.⁴⁷ The Congress-Hindu propaganda machine not only vigorously campaigned against the idea of a separate state for the Muslims, but also indulged in an unprecedented drive of character assassination against the Muslim League leaders including Quaid-i-Azam.⁴⁸ Similarly, the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha through its meetings started a wild campaign against the idea of Pakistan. Commenting on the resolution, Narandra Kumar Basu, the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha Conference (held at Krishnagar on 16 November 1940), said in his speech

At one time it was generally thought that it was too fantastic to be worth even ridicule. But recent events had shown that the move was a sinister one and that one does not know how far it is secretly blessed if not actually suggested by outside authority....⁴⁹

He termed the Pakistan movement as a 'satanic' movement and asked the Hindus to put forward all their 'strength in opposing it, and seeing that it is nipped in the bud'.⁵⁰ The Hindu leaders continued their threatening approach and made concerted efforts to organize 'a strong and virile Hindu movement.' 'Only this' observed Dr. Shyama Prashad Mukherjea in his presidential address in the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha

⁴⁴ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p.50.

⁴⁵ Sikandar Hayat, *op.cit.*, p.165.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.49.

⁴⁸ Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Ottit Diner Sriti*, Dhaka, 1968, p.195.

⁴⁹ *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.I, Calcutta, 1940, p.298.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Conference at Burdwan, on 29 November 1941, 'will make saner elements among the Muslims realise that a harmonious communal relationship is essential for the safety and welfare of Muslims themselves and it is not a matter which is the primary concern of Hindus'.⁵¹ Thus the Hindu leaders continued their vigorous efforts to resist the 'Pakistan proposal by all means' and warned that 'a civil war might arise in case this was brought into being'.⁵² Both Hindus of all walks of life and British government officials, in India and in Britain, opposed it. They termed it much detrimental for the most important objective i.e. to keep the political unity of India intact. Hindus and British officials failed to understand the essentials of the Muslims' demand for a separate homeland. Worst still, Gandhi continued tirade against the resolution and stated that the Muslims were Hindus at one time and that change of their religion does not change their nationality. In fact, to reduce the intensity of the Bengali Muslims' support and enthusiasm he argued that 'Bengali Muslims speaks the same tongue as a Bengali Hindu does, eats the same food, has the same amusement as his Hindu neighbour. They dress alike. His (Jinnah's) name could be that of any Hindu. When I first met him, I did not know he was a Muslim'.⁵³

This antagonistic attitude of the Hindus was mainly responsible for the outbreak of Hindu-Muslim riots during 1941-1946, particularly in Dhaka, the biggest city of Eastern Bengal. The general season of these riots during the aforementioned period generally extended from April to August, when the Muslim students used to come to Dhaka to get admission in the Dhaka University. 'The idea was to scare away the guardians so that they would not send their boys to Dacca,⁵⁴ thus preventing reinforcement to the student community which was the vanguard of the Pakistan movement'.⁵⁵ The Hindu opposition to the Pakistan idea continued from all the forums and even an All-Bengal Anti-Pakistan Committee was formed on 25 April, 1947, in Calcutta, with Sarat Chandra Bose as its President, to mobilize public opinion against Pakistan and the partition of Bengal.⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 1941, p.246.

⁵² This was observed by Khaparde, a Hindu leader, while moving resolution on Pakistan in the Bengal Hindu Sabha Conference held at Jalpaiguri from 24 to 25 February 1945. See *ibid.*, Vol. 1, 1945, p.299.

⁵³ Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah* Vol. I (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968), pp.221-13. Also see Sikandar Hayat, *op.cit.*, p.165.

⁵⁴ Dhaka was previously written as Dacca.

⁵⁵ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p.52.

⁵⁶ *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.I, Calcutta, 1947, p.60.

In the historical growth of the Muslim nationalism in Bengal and in its long drawn-out struggle for emancipation, from the doubly-riveted British-Hindu despotism, the Lahore Resolution was a turning point. The Muslims of Bengal who were searching for an identity throughout the ages finally found it. They were no more a community, rather a politically aware and conscious segment of Muslim nationalism with its own defined territory. The Lahore Resolution gave them a sense of nationhood. The Muslim younger generation, especially the student community of Bengal, welcomed it because until before its adoption they were confused.

The Muslim community of Bengal did not give ear to the unprecedented propaganda against the Pakistan idea and the Muslim leaders. Protesting against the false propaganda of the Congress, A. K. Fazlul Haq declared that, if his work was condemned through the propaganda of the Congress, then the Muslims should take it for granted that he was on the right path and when they praised him, it should be understood that he was on the wrong path.⁵⁷ The Hindu propaganda against the idea of Pakistan instead of distracting the Muslims, strengthened the Muslim national feeling *vis-à-vis* the Hindus.

After the passage of the Lahore Resolution, the Bengal Muslim League Conference was held at Sirajganj in February 1942. It endorsed and reiterated its whole-hearted faith in the ideal of Pakistan, and expressed the firm determination of Muslim Bengal 'to make every sacrifice necessary for its early attainment'.⁵⁸ Quaid-i Azam also attended this conference of the Bengal Muslim League. The common Bengali Muslims' enthusiasm for the Pakistan movement can be understood from the fact that on 12 February 1942, a crowd of about two hundred thousand Muslims gathered at the Howrah railway station to welcome Quaid-i-Azam. Several thousands of people came from far-flung areas like Dhaka and Mymensingh. Over three thousand members of the reception committee were decorated with 'P' badges, the emblem of Pakistan. The procession which was then taken out from Howrah was a 'mile long'.⁵⁹ Strong public support to the idea of Pakistan continued to be demonstrated on different occasions like Pakistan Day, or Quaid-i-Azam's birthday, etc. One example, from a small town like Barisal, would suffice here to illustrate common Muslims' support to the Pakistan idea. In Barisal, a large procession was arranged on the Pakistan Day in 1942. It passed through the principal streets of the town for about

⁵⁷ Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, p.195.

⁵⁸ *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.1, Calcutta, 1942, p.325.

⁵⁹ *Dawn* (Delhi), 22 February 1942.

three hours. To mark the occasion all Muslim houses, shops, carriages, rickshaws and boats were beautifully decorated with Pakistan flags. In the afternoon a large meeting was also held.

It may be mentioned here that all these functions were arranged by the local leaders⁶⁰ and the Muslim student community was always at the forefront of these activities. Students' devotion to the Pakistan movement can be judged from the fact that in Dhaka the students of Fazlul Haq Muslim Hall observed a day's fast, in early 1942, to contribute the sum thus saved to the Muslim League fund.⁶¹ On the literary scene, a book entitled *Pakistan* was written in Bengali by a well-known writer and a member of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, as early as January 1942. Commenting on the book the *Dawn* observed that it contained 'almost everything that is important' in connection with the Muslim League, Pakistan and Muslim politics in South Asia.⁶²

Referring to the importance of Bengal in the Pakistan movement, the *Dawn* paid glowing tribute to the region, in November 1941, when it wrote:

The Muslim League stands for Muslim solidarity and Pakistan which connotes 'Free Islam in Free India,' Bengal is to be the vortex of Eastern Pakistan, which ideal has moved not only the Muslim intelligentsia but also the Muslim masses, as no other ideal has done in the past.... The Quaid-i-Azam is perfectly right when he said that 'Bengal is a strong Leaguer.'⁶³

Organisation of the Bengal Muslim League

In Bengal the idea of a separate state for the Muslims had so strong effect on the Muslims that they abandoned their beloved leader A.K. Fazlul Haq who was expelled from the Muslim League by the end of 1941, but did not give up the Pakistan creed.⁶⁴ As a matter of fact, the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 March 1942.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 25 January 1942.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9 November 1942.

⁶⁴ When Fazlul Haq joined the National Defence Council of the Viceroy in 1941 without the approval of the Muslim League President, he was asked by Jinnah to resign. However, he defied the authority of Jinnah and did not care much of his instruction. He was then expelled from the League. It was the time when Muslim League emerged as one of the strongest and organised political parties in Bengal. He realized it later and wrote to Jinnah of his loyalty and attachment with the Muslims' cause. Even he was ready to abandon his party and the office of chief minister to be included back

incident gave 'great impetus to the activities of the League in Bengal'.⁶⁵ After the expulsion of A.K. Fazlul Haq from the Muslim League, in a statement, Suhrawardy said:

We shall now be able to build the Muslim League on more solid and sure foundations and include within its fold only those who believe in Muslim solidarity and unity and the universal brotherhood of Islam and the goal of Pakistan and are capable of making sacrifices in the cause of the community. We shall be able to achieve such real strength that not a single Muslim however highly placed he may be, will dare to defy the united will of the Muslim community.⁶⁶

The reorganization of Bengal Muslim League got momentum generally after the adoption of the Lahore Resolution. A.K. Fazlul Haq's popularity received the strongest blow when he assumed the leadership, in December 1941, of the Progressive Coalition Party which consisted of mostly Hindu members including the Hindu Mahasabha and the consequent formation of a coalition government.⁶⁷ A.K. Fazlul Haq's new ministry was often called, a 'Hindu Mahasabha Ministry' and when in January 1942, he was travelling from Calcutta to Barisal, he was greeted with black flags and protests at almost every station. He had to face strong protests even in his hometown, Barisal.⁶⁸

On the one hand, Fazlul Haq's popularity was decaying and, on the other, the Muslim League was becoming more and more popular. In January 1942, some important Muslim League leaders like Suhrawardy, Maulana Akram Khan, Nazimuddin, and Tamizuddin Khan undertook a fifteen days' tour of east and north Bengal. The delegation got unprecedented support everywhere. Even at a very small town like Feni in Noakhali, the delegation was given a rousing reception by a gathering of over 50,000 people.⁶⁹ The improvement continued and that led Quaid-

into the Muslim League party. See Sikandar Hayat, *Aspects of Pakistan Movement*, pp.190-91.

⁶⁵ All India Muslim League Annual Report for 1941. See *Dawn* (Delhi), 26 April 1942.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 January 1942.

⁶⁷ The Progressive Assembly Party was converted to Progressive Coalition Party on 28 November 1941. It included 47 members of the ministerial coalition, 19 members of the Krishak Proja Shamiti, 27 of the Forward Bloc, 12 independent scheduled caste members and 11 Hindu Mahasaba members. It also enjoyed the responsive co-operation of 28 members of the official Congress. See Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p.132.

⁶⁸ *Dawn* (Delhi), 25 January 1942.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

i-Azam to observe, on 24 April 1943, in his speech at the open session of the Muslim League at Delhi, that ‘Bengal has shown that there is no more room for duplicity. Bengal has set an example from which others may learn’.⁷⁰

Towards the end of 1943 Abul Hashim was elected the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.⁷¹ His organisational skill gave the Provincial Muslim League a new strength. In the year 1944 Bengal Muslim League enrolled five and a half lakh members and that exceeded the number ‘ever scored by any organisation in the province not excluding the Congress’.⁷² The process of reorganisation of the Bengal Muslim League continued in all the unions of Bengal. It is surprising to note that the All-India Muslim League, between 1942 and 1945, enrolled two million primary members, all over India, of which one million were from Bengal.⁷³ This helped the All-India Muslim League to put forward a very strong claim for Pakistan.⁷⁴

In 1945 and 1946, the central and provincial general elections were held on the Pakistan issue. Here also, Bengal took the lead. In the elections for central legislature, Bengal Muslim League was hundred per cent successful — it captured all the six Muslim seats in the central legislature.⁷⁵ In the provincial elections of 1946 as well, Muslim League’s success was tremendous. It captured 113 seats out of a total of 119 Muslim seats.⁷⁶ One of the main reasons for this unique success of

⁷⁰ *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.1, Calcutta, 1943, p.280.

⁷¹ In 1943 Bengal Muslim League came under the commanding leadership of Abul Hashim. He aimed at to build it up as a strong democratic force based on clarity of purpose and capable of fighting the liberation struggle to the very last. He had come with the strategy of imparting training to full-time workers which resulted in a rapid increase in League membership. Proper elections at all levels were arranged in the organisation. The power of the provincial president to nominate members to the AIML council and working committee was slashed. In the editorial of *Azad*, a paper own by the Khwaja faction of Muslim League in Bengal, Abul Hashim was dubbed as a communist. See Iqbal Leghari, *The Socialist Movement in Pakistan*, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Karachi, Karachi, p.28. Also see Khalid B. Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p.53.

⁷² Abul Hashim (Secretary Bengal provincial Muslim League) to the Quaid 25 November, 194 See Shamsul Hasan Collection, File No. Bengal, p.41.

⁷³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op.cit.*, pp.65-66.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.II, Calcutta, 1945, p.35.

⁷⁶ V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power*, New Delhi, 1979, p.231.

Muslim League in Bengal was its creed — ‘Pakistan’ which gave the common masses an idea of freedom from the domination of Hindus as well as the British. In a letter from Dhaka it was said about the importance of the 1945-46 election that,

It is a plebiscite of the Muslims’ demand for Pakistan and also a test to show the world that the Muslim League is the only political organization of Muslim India. In fact it is a life and death question with the Muslims of India.⁷⁷

Another very significant reason for the success of Muslim League was the creation of the Jami’at al-’Ulama-i-Islam at Calcutta, in October 1945.⁷⁸ It was the first ‘Ulama party which supported the Pakistan idea and held many Pakistan conferences in different parts of India. It removed the misgivings created by the Jami’at-i-Ulama Hind against the Muslim League and its Pakistan creed. Here also one can observe that Bengal took the lead because Maulana Raghīb Ahsan of Calcutta, the organiser, was assisted by Shaheed Suhrawardy.⁷⁹ Thus only two provinces — Bengal and Sindh — could form Muslim League ministries. The Bengal Muslim League ministry was formed on 24 April 1946, with Shaheed Suhrawardy as its Chief Minister.⁸⁰ The ministry was formed with the support of the independent members without going into coalition with any other party.⁸¹

The 1946 elections and formation of the Muslim League government were followed by the Muslim League Legislators’ Convention held in Delhi from 7 to 9 April 1946, which constitutes a landmark in the history of the struggle for Pakistan. The idea of Pakistan embodied in the Lahore Resolution of 1940 was further clarified and elaborated in concrete terms in the resolution passed in this Convention.⁸² Here again Bengal was at the forefront and its newly elected Chief Minister, Shaheed Suhrawardy, moved the following resolution on 9 April 1946:

That the zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the north-east and the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and

⁷⁷ Asadullah (Member, Council of the All India Muslim League and a pleader of Dhaka) to Liaquat Ali Khan, 17 September, 1945. See *Freedom Movement Archives*, Vol.42, Document No. 38.

⁷⁸ Rafique Afzal, *Political Parties in Pakistan, 1947-1958*, Vol.1, Islamabad, 1986, p.33.

⁷⁹ Shaheed Ashraf and A.K.M. Shahidul Haque, *Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy*, Comilla, 1964, p.22.

⁸⁰ *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.I, Calcutta, 1946, p.5.

⁸¹ I.H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Karachi, 1988, p.204.

⁸² Shaheed Ashraf and A.K.M. Shahidul Haque, *op.cit.*, p.23.

Balochistan in the north-west of India, namely, Pakistan zones, where the Muslim are a dominant majority, be constituted into a sovereign independent State and that an unequivocal undertaking be given to implement the establishment of Pakistan without delay.⁸³

Thus the confusion stemming from the Lahore Resolution, that there would be one or more Pakistans, was removed once and for all and as a result Pakistan came into being on 14 August 1947.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, it may be mentioned that the continuous struggle of Muslim Bengal against the British cum-Hindu domination, though became the main cause of their unprecedented sufferings, finally resulted in a tremendous success in the shape of Pakistan. Muslims of Bengal took the lead in the Muslim Freedom Movement in India as it was expected by Quaid-i-Azam in 1937. Muslim Bengal's tenure of suffering was more than double as compared to other parts of India; hence they could value the significance of freedom all the more. Their attachment with the Muslim case for self-determination was all the more very firm and relatively unyielding in political terms. In fact, Jinnah through his adroit political strategy won the support of Bengali Muslims. It was in 1937 that Muslim League firmly penetrated into the Bengali Muslims. In a short span of time it transformed itself as a mass organisation in the province.

It was not only the Muslims of Bengal who assumed their religious identity but the Hindus as well. They all forgot their linguistic, cultural and regional identities. When in 1905 Bengal was partitioned the popular slogan was 'Mother Bengal cannot be divided.' But again when the question of partition of Bengal arose in 1947, the Hindus themselves strongly and collectively demanded the division. The main reason was that this time united Bengal under Pakistan did not suit them and consequently they preferred to be with India by dividing Bengal into two parts.⁸⁴

⁸³ *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1946, p.195.

⁸⁴ Shyama Prasad Mookherjee, the Hindu Mahasabha leader of Bengal said on 22 April 1947, 'the principle of partition of Bengal must be accepted with least possible delay'. He further said that 'if Pakistan is not conceded Bengal Hindus would still demand the creation of a new province composed of the Hindu majority'.